

Witnessing an Unravelling World – Hobbs and Borton.

A multimedia myth, July 2024.

We live amongst a constant conversation, a dialogue between the sky and the earth, the universe and the stars, the push and pull of the moon tides, the seasons. We are not separate from nature, we are part of nature, and our series celebrates our interweaving and role in these dialogues. Heaven and earth, both mighty forces to be revered and respected, and symbols of life and death.



Collages and metallic acrylic progress works, 2023

We are inspired by the natural heritage that surrounds us, and a lineage of lichen, mosses, mushrooms and fungi, our ancestors. We are astounded by the fact that our entire food system is reliant on microorganisms, unseen biodiversity connected across swathes of soil, knitted together by mycelium, mosses and symbiosis. Our soil food web is the beating heart of food production and more, we are slowly coming to terms with the fact that we need to embrace our soil and nurture it to grow better food, be better humans and sustain ourselves for longer. We learn that the little things, the detritivores, slime and moulds that often make us exclaim; “gross”, are in fact vital parts of our eco-system. The millipeds, centipedes, wood lice, earth worms, slugs and snails are as important the slimy, mouldy, fungal decomposers in our soil food web. These small yet powerful creatures are responsible for cycling decaying matter back into our earth, transforming it into nutrient rich soil in which we grow the trees that help us breathe, plants for pollinators, root systems that knit the earth together and food for our bellies.

As we imagine tiny decomposers at work in our back gardens, along pavements, in forests, in community gardens and parks, it can feel a bit surreal, a bit like science fiction at work, and slightly confusing as we come to terms with how vital something almost invisible can be.

During a winter forest walk at the Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens (Johannesburg), we found almost invisible things that weave the earth together, like lichen and algae. Nature's patterns,

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systems of decay, symbiosis, and collaboration result in a sense of awe, they inspire and astound, ground, and still us.

Some images take on the form of creatures and magical entities that inhabit the forests and hide amongst the trees, river rocks and leaves.

The mushrooms and fungi with personalities that jump off the page are inspired by our photographic research trips to the National Fungi Archives at the Agricultural Research Institute in Roodeplaat, where we have had the privilege of visually studying mushrooms that are 100's of years old, beautifully preserved and annotated. We are in awe of the fungi archive and the memories and lesson it keeps safe.

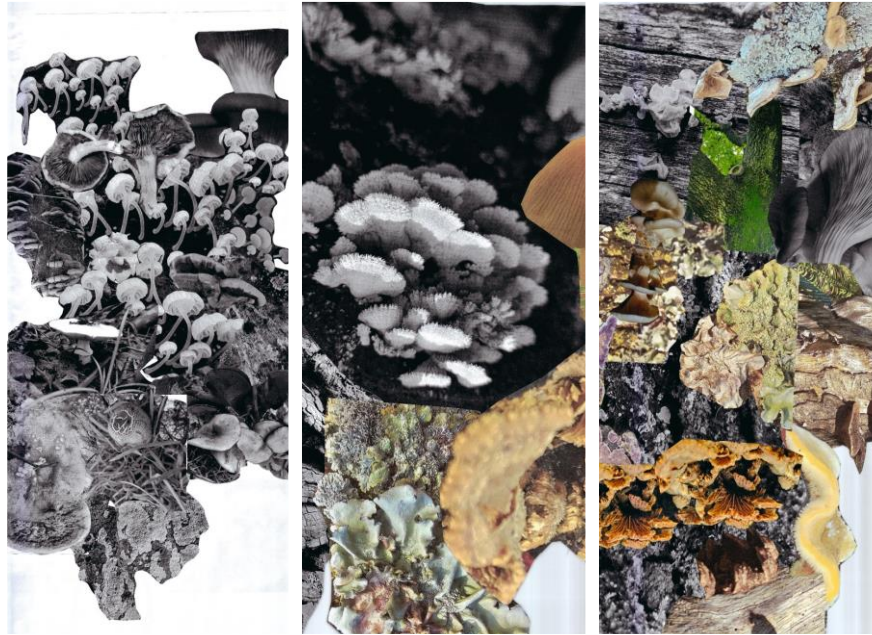
The fungal realm has immense power, without it the world would drown in its debris, fungi could kill or harm us, others feed us, save us or heal us. The little we do know about fungi is often overshadowed by our fear of the unknown, consider this image a waltz between human, earth and sky that defies this fear as the fungi descends from the sky to earth, as a heavenly being.



There's a call, a song if you will, from the mycelial networks that hold our earth together, to pay attention to the small things, to slow down and find the beauty in the present, so we can rise as a polyphony does, interwoven, interconnected, diverse and resilient.

We live in a city disconnected from nature, but with reverence we can reconnect with nature. If we listen to its song, we will see how diversity is the key to harmonious eco-systems, and collaboration is the only way forward to a healthier happier city.

This is a multimedia myth made up of mushrooms collected from walks in pandemic and post pandemic city parks, pavements, hills, and botanical gardens - connected by the Magaliesburg mountains that span Gauteng's natural history. Through the mediative process of collage and painting, we express a reverence for the mycelial networks and their fruiting bodies.



Fungi Collages, 2023



Collages, ink, marker and lino printing, progress works, 2023

These images are then transformed digitally into surreal scapes that show an experience of witnessing. Witnessing everything that makes up our eco-system, the magical qualities of mother earth, with awe we represent ourselves overshadowed by the orbs of fungi, lichen, moss and mycelium, our emotional connection to nature, a spiritual connection to a moment in time, with perfect clarity we know that we need to reconnect to each other. There needs not be a name for what we experience, there needs to be a shared story, representing a growing awareness of our connection to each other, and shared experiences related to the earth below our feet, the soil we grow our food in.

The curiosity and photographic research in this essay influenced our body of work further, we started exploring with the integration of previous works in progress, merging networks and multi-

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dimensional timelines. What is presented in this essay is how we feel in world where our daily lives are stranger than fiction, more surreal than the surrealist poem, more consuming, distressing and frightening than any moment written in history, as we globally experience the repercussion of a consumer culture, and we try to ground ourselves in the now, and reconnect with nature.

These are our timelines, our stories of where our food is from and what we need to protect and reconnect with to sustain our food production in the future.

The earth witnessed us consuming it for longer than many of us have been alive, and now it is our turn to witness it morphing, burning and adapting in the face of climate change so beyond our control, that the best we can do now, is learn together to be better humans as we move into an uncertain future.

It is also our turn to hear each other, witness each other's journey to a reconnection to mother nature, our shared journeys as we adopt more regenerative practices. Its time to share stories, listen, hear and embrace each person's personal expression of this experience. We are all students at this moment.

Here, today, there is glimmer of hope, a slow weaving of new ways as we step into the unknown vortex, hopefully a little bit humbler.



Ink, marker and lino printing, progress works, 2023





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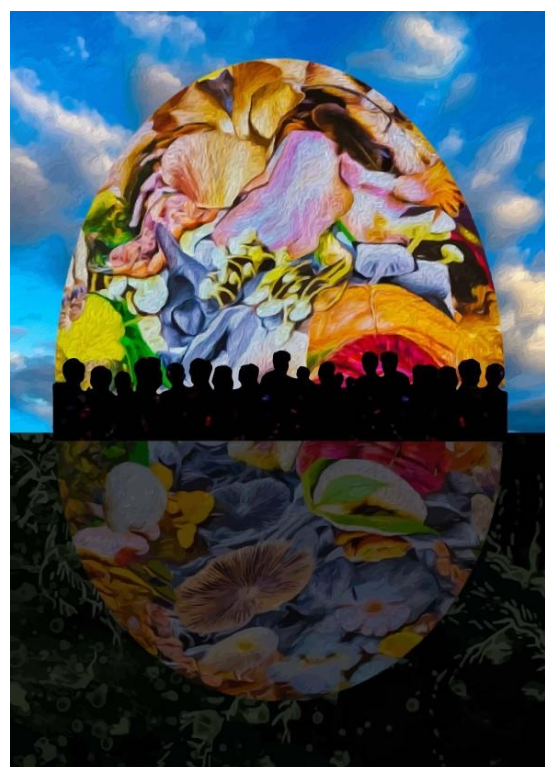


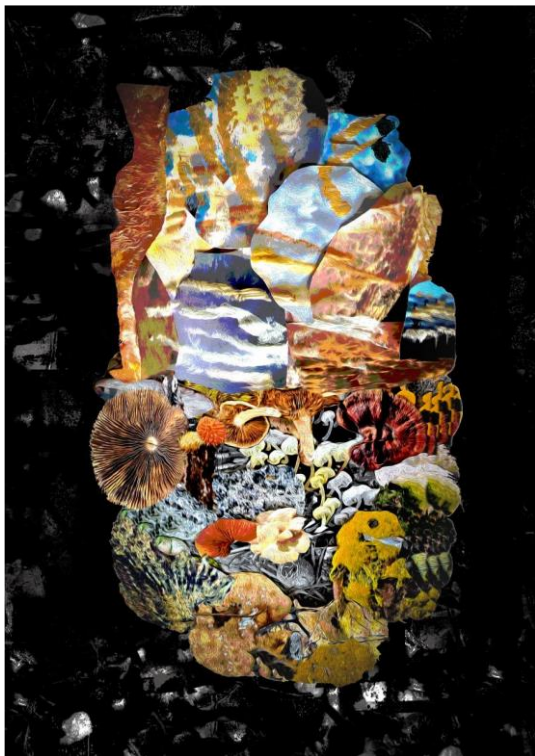


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Artists Name: Hobbs and Borton

Since 2021, Mike Hobbs and Pauline Borton have been workshopping together, investigating new methods of mark making and developing a visual language together.

In their personal capacities, Pauline has been exploring the intricate map of mycelial networks through photography, etching, and drawing; and Mike has been working primarily in photoshop to create abstract digital artworks that are sometimes delicate, sometimes filled with intensity - but always filled with movement and beauty, influenced by the magic of clouds, trees rustling in the wind, and the reflective surfaces of water.



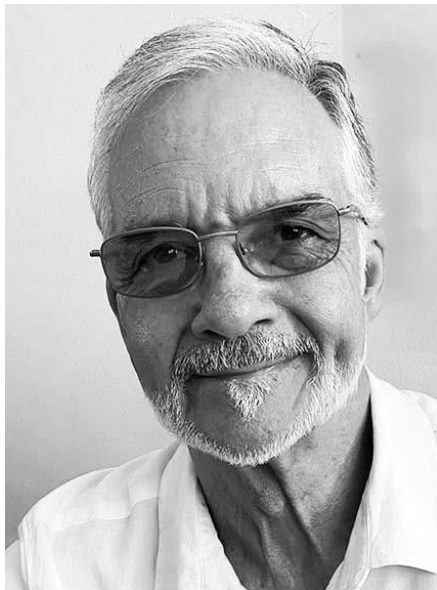
Through this collaborative process they have been working with ever-morphing, abstracted, images- both digital and handmade, and seeing how these can be further manipulated through layering and experimenting with various materials.

They embrace not being restricted by space, and having a space where mess is the process, and the mess is the outcome. They work with fluid, moving and melting materials; that merge, repel each other and make each other disappear – the experience is tactile and engages with the senses in real-time. Some of the materials combined produce reactions that mimic how dangerous they can be under certain circumstances. One has to move quickly when working with these art materials and really be present the moment of making.

Mike sums up the experience well saying that its really about “what is in your head and heart, being expressed on paper”. More than anything their process has no set outcomes, but rather a focus on materiality and process.

The result is an intense multi layered collection of work, always retaining a combination of natural symbols with man made pattern. These works have the potential to spill off the page, out of the computer screen and onto swathes of fabric that engulf a person, trying to capture the feeling of plunging into a copper version of a black hole, a swirling rainbow of colours and movement.

Mike Hobbs



Mike Hobbs has a decades long career in the advertising industry as an art director/conceptualiser, which has taken him between the UK, South Africa, and Italy. After years abroad, he returned to South Africa with his family and eventually started his own agency, which lasted for 18 years.

Since then, he has found the time to indulge his passion for drawing, painting, and photography which was developed during his years at art school in the UK, often under the tutorship of Pop Artist- Peter Blake. During these more recent years, he has re-worked many of his older artworks while developing completely new works, through the interplay of analogue and digital processes. These processes of digitising and manipulating images through editing software has completely captivated Mike, as old pieces become almost unrecognisable, and others retained their visual integrity but took on different meanings and associations.

Mike loves to watch an image grow, morph and transform at his fingertips and feels empowered by the process of digital image-making as the possibilities are literally endless. He has read copious amounts of literature about various movements and artists and the journey from modern art-making to contemporary art-making

This process has assisted Hobbs in achieving a more mature exploration of the abstract art genre. Presently, he has no set agenda or mission, but is rather focusing on his personal development across these various new media, while creating new works that are visually intriguing and accessible to wider audiences.

Pauline Borton



Pauline was born in 1985 and lives in Johannesburg. She obtained her Honours in Visual Arts from UNISA, with her research founded in concepts that explore construction of social space, including the role of the imagination in defining and affirming a sense of belonging and identity. She enjoys problem solving and developing creative strategies.

She feels that you cannot work in Joburg and not be open to working with diverse people. Pauline believes that creativity has the power to change the world, in that it's a different mode of communication that should be explored more as it breaks down barriers and boundaries.

Recently she has started courses in Community Arts Counselling and Biomimicry and is exploring the ways in which art and growing have the potential to overlap and serve as safe spaces for nurturing, and collective care.

Given her background in connecting people and spaces, and her new research into growing and greening; her recent artworks focus on fungi and mycelial networks, and how these become metaphors for social, and often hidden, connections between people and all living things. There are very practical reasons to develop a reverence for mycelia & mushrooms which include their place in our ecosystem, in the soil food web, as powerful natural forces that can create conditions for decay, decomposition, dissolving and regeneration, which are vital actions for all life.

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