

36 views of Table Mountain

Thomas Cartwright

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This second edition contains my original 36 views of Table Mountain, plus an additional ten that I painted after the fact as an ongoing homage to Hokusai, whose own 36 views of Mt Fuji portfolio was so successful that he made an additional ten prints to be included in that portfolio; his *36 views* actually consists of 46 prints. This edition also features a new essay, written by Tim Leibbrandt, that contextualises the paintings in terms of Cape Town – its history, its present and its future.

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Preface

Pippa Skotnes

When I was a child my parents took me up Table Mountain in the cable car. I remember being very disappointed to discover that the top of the mountain was not flat, as a table should be. Instead it was rocky and uneven. Now that I have lived in the city for over 40 years the mountain is as familiar to me as my own street, and its tableness is the least of its ever-manifest being.

People who live in a city with a mountain seem to develop a deeply personal relationship with it. When I was in Naples, the locals spoke of Vesuvius as an unpredictable woman, and as a presence to whom morning petitions were regularly muttered. “What would you do if the mountain started to erupt?” I

once asked a taxi driver. “I would say my farewells,” he said, “and wait for her to take me.” In the parts of the city nearest Mt Etna, people claim to hear the mountain groaning, creaking, puffing and booming, and they are alert to its moods as if living with a volatile, cantankerous neighbour.

In Cape Town, Table Mountain is, by contrast, less vocal and unpredictable, haunted at its loveliest by the winter mists; resolutely, implacably radiating heat in the summer, or creating dramatic cloud formations in the windy season. It divides the city into those contained within its embrace and those behind it or distant from it, and there is barely a place where it escapes one’s field of vision. The mountain is everywhere a presence.

It is the view from some point in Table Bay that best characterises the public, or national, face of the mountain. This view places the long table-topped edifice of the mountain central, with Devil's Peak and Lion's Head flanking it as two immovable chairs. It is a view that favours a certain kind of symmetry, suggests a distant approach, an arrival, a signal of the port city, a colonial and then a tourist destination. But this is not the mountain of those of us who live within the city. A friend of mine once said he could never live in Cape Town, because the mountain blocks the view, and this, indeed, is true. For Capetonians it is not a distant backdrop to the city, but its most visible, original occupant. It is less an object in the city than the subject with whom we, each of us, have become familiar from our multiple viewpoints.

The degree to which this is true is beautifully realised in Thomas Cartwright's *36 views of Table Mountain*. Inspired by Hokusai's *36* (and also *100*)

views of Mt Fuji, Cartwright's challenge has been less to represent Fuji-as-object – an unchanging background to multiple points of viewing – than to show the shifting mutable shape and scale of the mountain in relationship to different parts of the peninsula. Unlike Fuji, recognisable from any view as a cone-shaped volcanic peak with characteristic crater-summit, Table Mountain's characteristic edifice is almost nowhere to be seen within the city: instead its many sides rise and tumble along tree-lined slopes and craggy gradients that fragment and shift their shapes as the sun and shadows and the viewers' positions re-form its visible identity. In addition, where Fuji is a distant presence for Hokusai, Table Mountain is an active subject in the changing life of Cape Town. In this Cartwright offers us juxtapositions that reveal the construction of the city as an act of composition in which the mountain is a constant feature. These juxtapositions are of rock and

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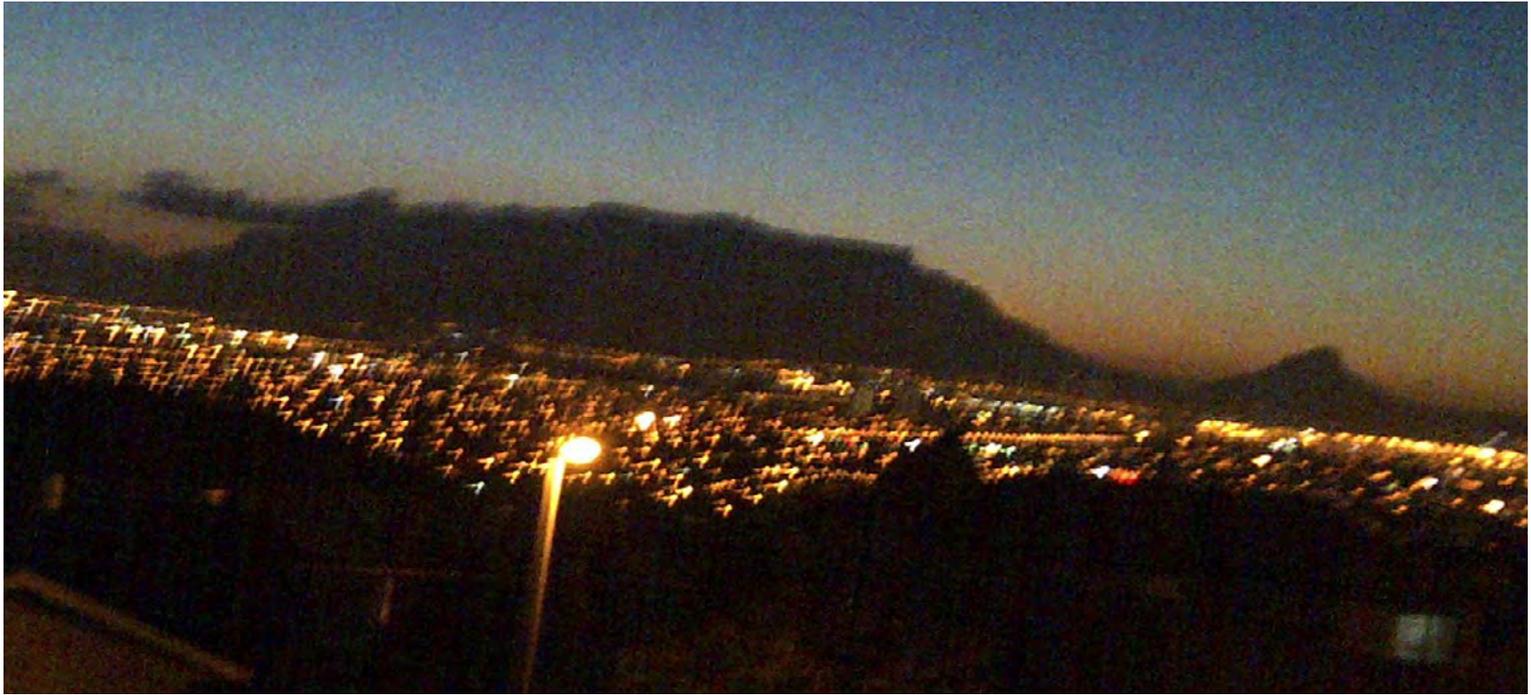


light, mist and shadow, flat rooftop and mountaintop and big sky, the quotidian and the sublime.

It is perhaps no chance that Cartwright's beautiful paintings have found their form in the chimeric character of Table Mountain, for Cartwright himself is a man of countless parts. Like many artists, his path to full creative productivity has been paved with the labour of a number of other temporary occupations. Born in Toronto, Thomas first moved to Cape Town with his father when he was nine years old, returning frequently until he finally settled here in 1997. For five years he worked in the kitchen at La Colombe (he is now, as I can attest, as accomplished as any grand chef) and before that laboured as a bartender, waiter, carpenter's apprentice, plumber's apprentice, dry-walling apprentice, customer service representative for MNet and, in addition, conducted telephone market research surveys. Finally he found his way to the University of Cape Town and

completed his BAFA degree before working with me at the Centre for Curating the Archive for several years on various research and curatorial projects. Few have been so lucky as I to have toiled alongside one so determined to take pleasure in life, so willing to dismiss obstacles, so untiring in refusing the insidious creep of stress and frustration that often accompanies university work. And it is this resolute sense of well-being in the world, this curious attention to the details that will render a new view of things, that is one of the ingredients with which Cartwright has created this new body of paintings. This is not to say, however, that each of these represents a joyful view of the peninsula. In some there is a feeling of foreboding, in others a bereft quality of things flung into an almost hostile relief lacking in texture and detail, in others an uncertain quality of dusk as less a time of day than a time of life or state of being. Yet in each there is the challenge and pleasure of rendering

something on a keenly burnished surface into the colours and substance of paint and brushstroke, and calling into being the relationships each of us has with the mountain, from our differing places in the city. This is the materialising work of the painter.



Portrait of a city

Natasha Norman

Thomas Cartwright's 46 views of Table Mountain

Table Mountain is the defining subject of Thomas Cartwright's exhibition. In Cape Town its status as a spectacle can hardly be overlooked. It continuously draws attention to itself as a feature of the urban layout, a moot point on the value of a property in a suburb, a unique definer of weather (which can vary wildly from one side of the relief rain system to the other) and an international icon as a world heritage site – proudly the only terrestrial land mass to have a constellation named after it by a French astronomer, Nicholas de Lacaille, in the 18th century.¹ To every Capetonian it is the unmistakable symbol of “coming home” upon arrival by sea, port, railway or road. It is also a site of division, marking the economic and racial

divides legislated by the apartheid government's Group Areas Act, when in 1957 the entire mountain range was declared a White Group Area.²

While Table Mountain remains the subject of Cartwright's investigation, its historical and cultural significance as an object of social history begins to make visible a unique portrait of the city that surrounds its slopes. Cartwright's chosen views of this mountain reflect his way of challenging a passive contemplation of its image, particularly in the tourist industry. He draws on the historical precedent of Hokusai's 46 views of Mount Fuji as his reference for a personal exploration of both painting and perspective with regard to this great spectacle of his chosen home city.

Hokusai's Mount Fuji

Cartwright's choice of Hokusai's initial *36 views of Mount Fuji* as the template for his exhibition might at first appear a fairly simplistic formal comparison, but the decision to draw on Hokusai's project is more complex in its subtlety. Hokusai later did an additional ten views of Mount Fuji owing to the success of his initial series, and Cartwright too increased his views of Table Mountain to the final series of 46 paintings presented here.

Katsushika Hokusai (the more famous of his 30 name changes) was born in 1760 in Edo (present-day Tokyo), then the capital of the Shogun Empire, which saw a return to traditional Japanese values and a strong censoring of Western influences.³ Limited trading with Dutch and Chinese merchants from the port of Nagasaki introduced the notion of Western linear perspective in the form of Dutch engravings⁴ and the bright blue hue Berliner Blau (better known today as

Prussian Blue).⁵ The import of both these technologies had a profound affect on Hokusai's work. The use of linear perspective in Japanese art became increasingly common from the 17th century onwards. Kadar and Effken (2008) argue in their analysis of Hokusai's views of Mount Fuji that the artist demonstrates a particularly unique experimentation with both Chinese and linear perspective in this series.⁶ This experimentation saw him develop a style that is such



a mixture of Western and Japanese trends that he was considered a non-Japanese artist in Japan, but a Japanese artist according to European sensibilities.⁷

Hokusai's experimentation with both Chinese and linear perspective within a single image was used as a means of generating a tension in the "natural" depiction of his subject such that the symbolic (i.e. attached to a cultural understanding) could be communicated. A Taoist dualism of earthly and spiritual is communicated in the compositions throughout the *36 views* series, where Mount Fuji is usually depicted on a different horizon to the other elements in the image. The Chinese tradition of multiple horizons is used to affect a separate horizon for Fuji that echoes the Japanese cultural understanding of Fuji as having a unique spiritual reality.⁸ Hokusai communicates a subtle complexity in that Fuji's spiritual reality shares the same pictorial space as the more pragmatic linear perspective. The viewer is forced to engage with the

composition actively, not in a traditional, contemplative way – by both entering the scene along the logic of the linear perspective, but also by considering the symbolic implications of the mountain in the composition.

Hokusai's series has been described as a "powerful empathy" with nature.⁹ His spiritual reverence for the mountain has often been acknowledged and his consolidated 46 views afford a wide range of perspectives that include the leisure, work and weather endured by the Edo people. Human endeavour is continuously contrasted with the harmony and perfection of Fuji as symbolic of both the natural and spiritual landscape.

My impression of Fuji during an artist residency I attended in 2014 in Japan was very much in line with Hokusai's insistence on it as a spiritual peak. I noticed how often Fuji was shrouded in cloud, so that my memory is one of the mountain continuously disappearing and emerging. The peak would often



appear to hover above a lower bank of cloud or be in a slow dance of reveal as a cloud mass dissolved up its slopes. As such, my observations as a visitor to Japan do much to support Hokusai's Taoist perspectives of Fuji as both a part of the world and spiritually operating on a different plane. This is not, however, my daily experience of Table Mountain in the heart of the city of Cape Town. To look to its clouds is to determine the weather for the day – or even for the next day – in a very pragmatic way, as directional clouds denote an oncoming storm, sunny spell or wind that directly affects my human affairs.

Cartwright's mountain, like Hokusai's mountain, sits at the centre of a question about perspective, as Table Mountain's presence permeates all the activities and expectations of its city. Curator Nicolaas Vergunst's insightful exhibition *Hoerikwaggo: Images of Table Mountain* (2000) was fundamentally an exploration of the mountain's many perspectives in

history, culture and politics.

Every Capetonian has a unique interaction with Table Mountain depending on their daily activities, their social and cultural history and where they live in relation to it. Vergunst (2000) notes that the Table Bay view of the mountain has become symbolic of colonial arrival and occupation.¹⁰ At the same time, the view of the mountain from Robben Island has recently been reviewed as a site of democratic freedom. As such, Table Mountain is more a site of projection – a cultural, social and political landmark that becomes a portrait of the person looking, rather than of a universal objective, symbolic “truth”.¹¹

Cartwright's mountain is not a spiritual mountain in the sense that Hokusai's mountain is spiritual. It has developed a particular commercial symbolism associated with tourism. Cartwright teases this particular function of the mountain out by choosing to represent it at times as incidental to the main



composition of his painting. This is very like the way Hokusai's mountain peeps into the Ukiyo-e views of domestic life. The way Hokusai seemed "to be playing a sort of hide-and-seek with Mt Fuji".¹² Fuji is not always the largest, most dominating feature of Hokusai's compositions, but it is always somehow at the centre of his depictions: a fundamental part of his investigations between linear and Chinese perspective.

Similarly, in Cartwright's images Table Mountain determines his compositions, but the mountain's formal appearance sometimes seems incidental. In some cases the sighting is from a unique distance, framed by outlying farmer's fields, 1950s highways or a bend in the coastal road. The visual game for a Capetonian is one of recognition: a game of view finding and placing. In other images the mountain is so close to the viewer that all we see are rocky crags, the sky cropped by an architectural lintel or cableway machinery. But in both types of image the mountain remains ungraspable: too

close for us to comprehend its form or too far away for us to make out its detail or natural context. It is perhaps this sense of the ungraspable in the works that leads me to discuss the mountain as "incidental" in the images.

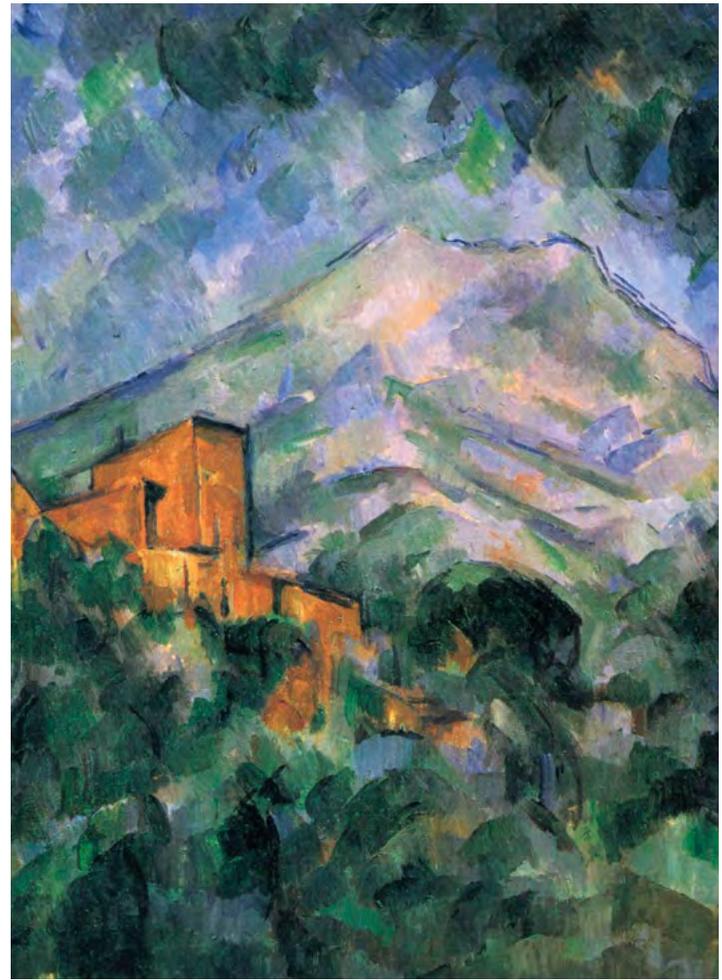
Cézanne and Mont Sainte-Victoire

Hokusai may have provided the formal inspiration for Cartwright's project, but I can't help thinking that Cartwright's relationship to his mountain is perhaps more like that of Impressionist Paul Cézanne's interest in painting Mont Sainte-Victoire. This is not to say that Cartwright has exclusively pursued a project of naïve painting, but rather that, like Cézanne, he has turned to a particular landmark of his landscape in order to interrogate the practice of painting itself.¹³

Sainte-Victoire remains in Cézanne's paintings a symbol of Provence. His challenge in painting it was one that tackled both its formal and symbolic

qualities¹⁴ such that the artist attempted to see the mountain anew, beyond the painting conventions of his time. As a result he tirelessly painted it *en plein air* and shifted his perspectives, using flatter facets of colour to grasp at the immediacy of his looking. He was driven to attain a “real” or “authentic” experience. Despite his project being an attempt to realise sensation, it remained also a “slow and consciously cerebral act”,¹⁵ sentiments echoed in Cartwright’s process. Despite attempting an often obscure or fleeting view of the mountain, Cartwright’s process is incredibly methodical. A sourced image is carefully catalogued, mapped and translated onto the primed board surface. The chosen palette may be mixed for hours before painting starts. Undercolours dry and, slowly, thin layers of paint are built up on the surface.

Cartwright, like Cézanne, has chosen a mountain heavily symbolic of a hybrid cultural history. Table Mountain was first named Hoerikwaggo (“place of



sweet waters”) by the native men and women who lived along its slopes.¹⁶ Later colonial arrivals by sea afforded a different view of the mountain as they journeyed from Europe to seek a trade route to the east. The mountain’s symbolism has subsequently been translated into a contemporary consumption, driven to a large extent by the gaze of the tourist: a form of commodified culture wherein the symbolic, historical and cultural is recoded for consumption in an economy of travel.¹⁷

Translating the photograph into paint

Cartwright’s source material is derived from photographs taken by himself and friends and acquaintances in order to get a “snapshot” view of the mountain. I use the term “snapshot” specifically, as his source images are often not especially carefully composed. Despite being a startling collection of

photographs, many of the originals are blurred, unconventionally cropped and always taken from a handheld perspective. Cartwright further crops this found view into a more specific investigation of the aspect of the mountain that he wishes to interrogate through paint.

The photographs remain a source, a particular relic of vision that Cartwright translates into painting through thin layers of oil on board. The edges of his forms retain their photographic crispness, but the colour, atmosphere and composition become fractured in his play of scumbling, dry brush, flat colour planes and thin or thicker layered surfaces. It is in these marks of the painter that Cartwright’s perspective of his mountain emerges through the re-visioned compositions of other photographers.

Towards the middle of the series Cartwright began limiting his primary hues to three per image in order to exploit the versatility of painting. His earlier



works in the series are characterised by a loyal and crisp painted field that slowly evolves into a faceting of chiaroscuro in later works. Like Hokusai, perhaps Cartwright's tensions in the "natural" depiction of the mountain expose a symbolic notion about the mountain: a conscious interrogation of the means by which the mountain is perceived. While he may not employ formal shifts in his work like that of Hokusai's dual perspective or Cézanne's faceted pictorial planes, his methodical choices of source material and painting process reflect his own unique engagement with an active view of Table Mountain. He, like Cézanne and Hokusai before him, challenges the passive spectacle of his milieu.

Van Gogh wrote passionately about his impressions of Japanese art to his brother Theo in the late 1800s. He wrote that "If you study Japanese art, then you discover a man who is without doubt wise, philosophical and intelligent." A man who spends

his time studying a blade of grass in order to better understand the plant, then the seasons, then the landscape, then the animals, then the human figure.¹⁸

Cartwright recognises that every depiction of a landscape is a subjective act without objective truth.¹⁹ His 46 views reflect a particular viewing of the mountain as something more than a world heritage site, the face of tourism or the logo for a municipality. Cartwright's mountain is remarkable, shifting, elegant, architectural, grand and intimate. It is also a portrait of the way this artist interrogates his world.

Endnotes:

1. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1964 [1948]. 'Cézanne's doubt'. In Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (trans. Maurice Merleau-Ponty). *Sense and non-sense*, 3rd ed. Paris: The Northwestern University Press. 18.

1. The constellation Mensa, meaning 'table,' can be sighted around midnight in mid-July in the southern hemisphere, below the better-known Orion constellation.

2. Vergunst, Nicolaas. 2001. *Hoerikwaggo: Images of Table Mountain*. Cape Town: South African National Gallery. 28.

3. Asian Art Museum. 2010. *Hokusai and Hiroshige* [podcast]. Texts derived from the Hokusai and Hiroshige exhibition catalogue by Yoko Woodson and Yokohama Prints teacher workshop by Molly Schardt. Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture. Available online: [https://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/](https://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/hokusai-hiroshige/id381382725?mt=10)

[hokusai-hiroshige/id381382725?mt=10](https://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/hokusai-hiroshige/id381382725?mt=10).

4. Kadar, Endre and Effken, Judith. 2008. 'Paintings as architectural space: "Guided tours" by Cezanne and Hokusai' in *Ecological psychology* 20:4, 299-327. 310.

5. Smith II, Henry D. 2005. 'Hokusai and the Blue Revolution in Edo Prints'. In John T. Carpenter, ed., *Hokusai and his age: Ukiyo-e painting, printmaking, and book illustration in late Edo Japan*. Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing. 234-69.

6. Kadar, Endre and Effken, Judith. Ibid: 311.

7. Ibid: 310.

8. Ibid: 314.

9. Calza, Gian Carlo. 2003. *Hokusai*. London and New York: Phaidon. 230.

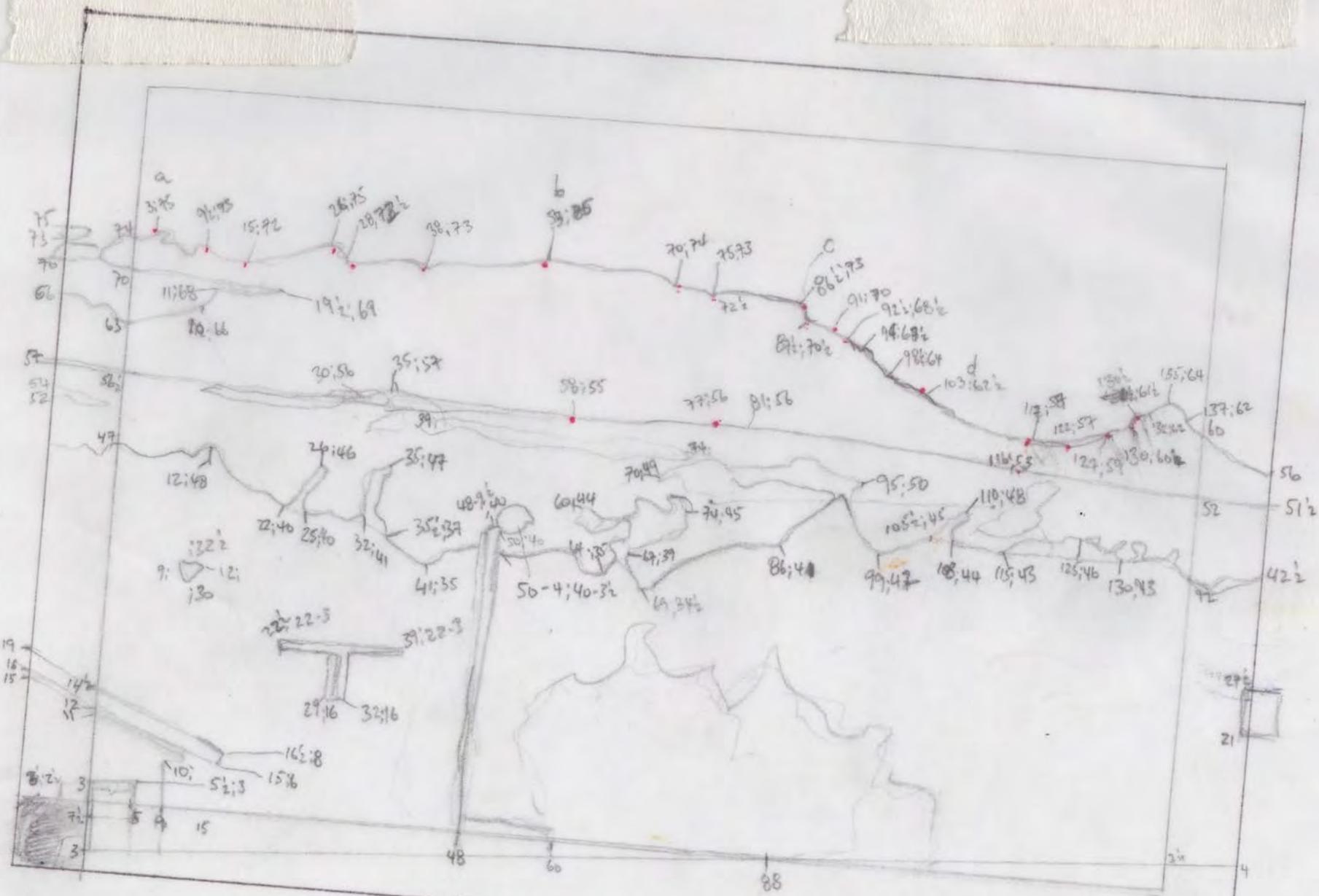
10. Vergunst, *Hoerikwaggo*: 20.

11. Fuller (1999: 26) cited in Vergunst, *Hoerikwaggo*: 20.

12. Clark, T. *Hokusai's great wave*. 2011. London: British Museum Press. 17.

13. Winchell, Kaleigh 2009. 'Cezanne and the practice

- of painting'. Honours Thesis, University of Michigan: p36. Available online: http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/63946/winchell_kaleigh_2009.pdf?sequence=1. Accessed 19 November 2014.
14. Matsumoto, Kaoru. 1993. 'Cezanne and Hokusai: The image of the mountain'. Thesis for Masters in Art at McGill University, Quebec, Canada: 55.
15. Winchell, 'Cezanne and the practice of painting: 16.
16. Vergunst, Hoerikwaggo: 16.
17. Interestingly, Hokusai was also capitalising on the culture of travel that emerged during the Edo period. His *36 views of Mount Fuji* is arguably a part of the Meisho-e "pictures of famous places" tradition where prints of landscapes were purchased as souvenirs or to satisfy the curiosity of places not yet seen by the buyer.
18. Calza, *Hokusai*: 402.
19. Fuller (1999: 26) in Vergunst, *Hoerikwaggo*: 20.



The Capetonian Sublime: Apathy, inequality and views from Table Mountain

Tim Leibbrandt

*Every breath you take
Every move you make
Every bond you break
Every step you take
I'll be watching you.
[...]
Every move you make
Every vow you break
Every smile you fake
Every claim you stake
I'll be watching you.*

-Extracts from *Every Breath You Take* by The Police (1983)¹

The unmistakable figure of Table Mountain encompasses a variety of personifications for different people from different contexts. These range from nautical travel landmark to enduring symbol of freedom for Robben Island inmates, to source of local pride and bearer of the title of a New7Wonder of Nature. For painter Thomas Cartwright the omnipresent, pervasive monolith serves the dual role of muse on the one hand and ever-present watcher on the other (much like Sting's lyrics quoted beside this text).

In the case of muse, Cartwright actively pursues the mountain in a Sophie Calle-esque gesture of private investigative stalking. As with Calle's projects (such as *Suite Vénitienne* and *The shadow*), the figure of

the mountain is captured as if in secret by a stealthy detective, recurring through a number of candid snapshots and angles, which, rather than bringing a clear portrait into view, instead assert the impossibility and incongruity of an all-encompassing portrayal.² Although represented from 46 different viewpoints, the essence of Table Mountain remains an elusive and slippery critter.

In the latter watcher role it serves as a sort of inescapable, all-pervading lurker, somewhere between a panopticon, a sentinel and the multi-eyed Argus Panoptes of Greek mythology. No matter where one might move across the Cape Peninsula, be it from *Benning Drive*, *Kommetjie*, or *From the coastal road near Llandudno* perhaps, or even *On the N7 near Philadelphia*; the moment you turn the corner *From the top of Sir Lowry's Pass* it will be watching you.

Latching on to this second reading, Table Mountain is a decidedly passive observer with no

evident desire to meddle in the goings-on at its foot. Along these lines, Nicolaas Vergunst includes “Watcher of the South and Guardian of the City” alongside “the Old Grey Father of colonialism and the Silent Witness of apartheid” in a lengthy list of different titles that the mountain has held.³ For all its irrefutable beauty Table Mountain is a figure of inaction, bearing witness to segregation, oppression, exploitation, quick-fix political recklessness and perpetually deferred catastrophe.

If we flip the gaze of Cartwright's project from views *of* Table Mountain to views *from* Table Mountain,⁴ we are momentarily afforded the opportunity to empathetically consider the city of Cape Town from the mountain's perspective. (We are of course heavily anthropomorphising our dear cliff in the process.) Observing Cape Town from this elevated viewpoint, the Mountain's perceived inaction becomes fathomable at the least, as the lived reality of the

Cape peninsula is translated into landscape/cityscape, abstracted into disparate pockets of urban sprawl and spooned by a cobalt green mass of ocean. Barring the somehow pervasive noise of motorcycles (Damn them!) and the occasional siren, the sounds of the city are eschewed for the solitude of elevated escapism.⁵

Inevitably, when talking about fine views from great heights, the Romantic notion of the sublime comes to mind. Traditionally, the sublime riffed on the aesthetic pleasure derived from artistic depictions of experiences of terror, danger and awe, exemplifying humanity's insignificance when dwarfed by the insurmountable power of nature. In *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*, Immanuel Kant identified a few variations on the theme, notably the noble sublime (defined by a sense of admiration) and the terrifying sublime ("accompanied by the sensation of shuddering"⁶).

While the height at the top of Table Mountain is

certainly vertigo-inducing (i.e. the terrifying sublime), the ease with which the view slides into painterly landscape tropes brings it into the realm of both Kant's noble sublime and William Gilpin's notion of the picturesque (defined as something that sits somewhere between the contained/controlled orderliness of the beautiful and the overwhelming wildness of the sublime). There is height, scale and expanse, but this also leads to a perception of neutrality, order and composition.

In essence, the view from Table Mountain is a disconnected one, a higher level "chunking" of the lived reality below into depersonalised clusters of urban sprawl, informal settlements and vacant land. Both sublime and picturesque readings serve to detach, abstract and conceal the struggles of what goes on down below. As John Berger observed near the beginning of *A fortunate man*, "Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of

its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place.”⁷ In this sense, Table Mountain is the personification of a sort of Capetonian apathy *par excellence*. The prevalence of the mountain in Cartwright’s paintings serves to metaphorically embed this throughout the entire series.

This curtain of apathy (which we shall refer to as the Capetonian sublime) also persists in the lived experience of being down in the trenches – so to speak – and looking back at the mountain; the gesture enacted in Cartwright’s *Views of Table Mountain* series. While Cartwright’s paintings are unquestionably scenic, beautiful and idyllic (Cape Town is not repeatedly voted the “Best City in the World”⁸ for nothing), they are also quiet ... too quiet. Barring the presence of city lights in night scenes such as *From the top of the NI near Welgemoed* and *From GrandWest Casino, Goodwood*, Cartwright’s views are devoid of

traces of life. They are desolate, uninhabited and, in a sense, post-apocalyptic. The absence of people hangs over these spaces like a spectre and creates a sense of unease.

It is here that the work of Luc Tuymans comes to mind; a painter with whom Cartwright’s works certainly share a *je ne sais quoi* if not an outright resemblance.⁹ What is key in both artists’ works is a subliminal sense of the uncanny, an impression of something amiss and bubbling underneath the surface.

Defining “terror” (via terminology in Stephen King’s non-fiction ode to the horror genre *Danse macabre*¹⁰) as where “nothing is *shown* to be wrong, but an atmosphere of fear is created that is impalpable and omnipresent”, Lawrence Rinder asserts that “terror is what Tuymans does best”.¹¹ Developing this in terms of the inherent representational minimalism of Tuymans’ paintings, Rinder goes on to suggest that “Tuymans’s best works veer between innocence and

panic, tightly coiled yet never sprung. Restraint itself becomes almost unbearable.”

At this stage it is important to stress that when we speak of “terror” here, we are talking about a highly sophisticated aesthetic quality rather than tacky grotesqueries. It directly correlates with the idea of terror as a defining quality of the aesthetic experience of the sublime, one which channels an overwhelming and seemingly insurmountable horror within the safe space of a work of art; experienced simultaneously as a sort of exhilaration and source of fear.

In the case of both Cartwright and Tuymans, titling plays an important role in creating this unsettling atmosphere. The obvious example in Tuymans’s case is a work like *Gas chamber*, which, while not being particularly disconcerting visually, shifts its reading dramatically when the title is factored in. In fact, according to Tuymans a German collector once offered to purchase the work until the title was

revealed.¹²

Cartwright’s inclusion in his titles of the specific location from where a view was derived, like a Google Maps pin, serves to conjure and embed the entire history of those locations – past, present, and future – within the works. In so doing he anchors the paintings within the terrifying sublime that underlies Cape Town as Most Beautiful City in the World™.

By way of example, the somewhat acidic, lemony skies and winding highway of Cartwright’s *On the M3 flyover near Ndabeni* are reasonably innocuous until one takes into account the specific history of the location; at which point the meaning and tone shift dramatically. Ndabeni has the dubious distinction of being the first legislatively supported, racially segregated township in South Africa, marking the beginning of formalised removal of the non-white populace from the Cape Town urban centre.

In a nutshell, the bubonic plague reached Cape

Town in 1900 during the Anglo-Boer War,¹³ courtesy of rats and fleas carrying plague bacillus, which arrived alongside forage imported for the British army.¹⁴ Inevitably, dockworkers were the first to be affected, prompting local authorities to manufacture unwarranted fear around “Cape coloured and African dockworkers” in order to justify the mass removal of Cape Town’s black population from urban centres, “even though the number of Africans contracting the plague was less than either whites or coloureds”.¹⁵ As Maynard W. Swanson points out, “It was the merest step of logic to proceed from the isolation of plague victims to the creation of a permanent location for the black labouring class”.¹⁶ In March 1901, six or seven thousand Africans were moved to Uitvlugt, which was later known as Ndabeni, resulting in the establishment of South Africa’s first racially-segregated suburb.¹⁷ While this information doesn’t alter anything visually in the paintings themselves, it does bestow a sense of

significance to the location, which in turn shifts how the viewer responds to it.

Over the next 115-odd years, this segregation was concretised and reinforced in various guises. It was accelerated by the apartheid government through acts such as the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923, the Group Areas Acts of 1950, 1957 and 1966 and – in Cape Town specifically – the forced removals of over 60,000 inhabitants of District Six during the 1970s (among many other examples).

Alarmingly, since transitioning into democracy in 1994 the City of Cape Town has failed to initiate or construct a single low-cost housing initiative aimed at redressing the legacy of spatial inequalities in close proximity to the CBD.¹⁸ What new public housing has been implemented has been constructed on existing sites of spatial segregation, resulting in crippling transport costs that further stretch the budgets of working class families.¹⁹

Add to this the progressive gentrification of historically low-income areas such as Woodstock and Salt River (which has consistently resulted in the eviction and forced relocation of poor and black working-class tenant families who have lived there for years), and that the rate of growth of Cape Town's property prices is currently the third highest in the world,²⁰ and one gets a sense of the kinds of tensions that scratch below the surface of the locations in Cartwright's views of Table Mountain.

With this in mind we return to Berger's idea that certain ways of seeing form a curtain that obscure the lived reality of the inhabitants behind it. The view of Cape Town as postcard image, as a tourist haven and as a city that "works for you" (to quote the official city motto) is clearly a front that seeks to obscure the reality that underlies these perceptions. It exacts a similar sort of simplification to the mountaintop view, which removes the existence of those whom the

system has failed. As such, while Table Mountain is indeed the quintessential icon and signifier of Cape Town, it is also the personification of its apathy.

Writing in 2010 about social and environmental sustainability in Cape Town, Edgar Pieterse frankly stated his stark conclusion that:

*Cape Town is heading for disaster and is already in deep crisis if one cares to look close enough [...] Cape Town's grim future is born out of the confluence of the globalised economic and ecological collapse that is fast becoming the defining feature of the twenty-first century.*²¹

Pieterse's intent with this chapter (which forms the introduction to *Counter-currents: Experiments in sustainability in the Cape Town region*, which he also edited) is not to resort to doom-spouting pessimism, but merely to present a realistic assessment of the

projected trajectory of the city's policies regarding environment and social concerns – should they continue as is. He concludes the chapter by expressing hope that with “robust and sustained public engagement, adaptive leadership, mutual partnerships and a collective determination to fulfil the city's potential [...] Cape Town can save itself and lead others.”²² Sadly, in the seven years since *Counter-currents* was published, Pieterse's message has not seen cause to change much, and in fact many of his concerns have escalated, particularly with regards to segregation and inequality.

To suggest that these issues are implied rather than explicit in Cartwright's paintings is not to infer that he has intentionally obscured or erased these aspects from his work. It is precisely because of how he has painted them that this perception emerges. As with Tuymans, the unfathomable terror of the Capetonian sublime can be located in Cartwright's paintings through

minimalism and restraint. The dearth of inhabitants, the complete absence of traffic, the deafening silence, their wraithlike quality and the dominance of empty space in their cropping all contribute to this impression of Cartwright's work as post-apocalyptic.

A peopled scene perpetuates a sense of social normalcy; Cartwright's abandoned scenes play with the idea of Cape Town often seeming to be a city not intended for people to live in. It destabilises the naturalness of the scene and provides the punctum that suggests all is not necessarily as it seems. In juxtaposing empty cityscapes with expansive mountainous landscapes, Cartwright implements (with the intent of critiquing it) a possessing gaze that looks upon both sets of terrain with equal longing. There is a sense of both land- and cityscape as being similarly “up for grabs”, which subtly gets to the core of the Capetonian sublime: financial inequality and spatial politics.

Nowhere do these tensions between wealth

and space come closer to boiling point in his work than in the trio of V&A Waterfront paintings: *V&A Waterfront with Christmas tree and Ferris wheel*, *From a pedestrian bridge at the V&A Waterfront*, and *From the V&A Waterfront by the old grain silos*. Set in the heavily commercial, tourist-centric utopia of the V&A Waterfront, all three of these scenes have a strong sense of discomfort due to the cropping, which cuts out most of the defining features of the particular locations, while creating a claustrophobic sense of sides-closing-in through the traces of towering structures at the edges. Dominating the compositions, the sky feels overbearing, as though it is ready to collapse under its own weight and cave in. Frozen in suspended animation, the titular Ferris wheel threatens to roll off on its own. Meanwhile, Table Mountain lurks in the background, not particularly bothered.

This is of course merely *one* way of reading the paintings, and I'm certainly not trying to force an

explicit metanarrative of political critique onto them. The point is simply that while Cartwright's paintings undoubtedly capture the distinctive and undeniable wonder of Cape Town and Table Mountain, he is also aware of the underlying dimensions of lived reality that renders the experience of Cape Town far less than idyllic for many of its inhabitants.

The seductive beauty of these views is more than up to the task of creating a consensual hallucination of paradise with spectacular form and demonstrably patchy function, and in many ways Table Mountain functions as a vessel for this. It simultaneously forms the pictographic representation of Cape Town (the official logo of the City of Cape Town incorporates concentric circles made up of its silhouette) and, as we have suggested, the ideographic representation of the apathetic Capetonian trend of intentionally disregarding the inconvenience of looming crises. Through the recurrence of its image in a diversity of

settings, Cartwright metaphorically renders these concerns as something that looms over the entirety of Cape Town as a homogenous whole.

For its part, Table Mountain is content to continue doing what it does best: hitting a perpetual Netflix binge of the long-running soap opera, *Cape Town: The bold and the beautiful* (sporting high viewership ratings but on the cusp of being cancelled due to on-set politics), and humming along to a choice cut from The Police's 1983 album, *Synchronicity*.

1. The Police. 1983. *Synchronicity* [Compact Disc]. Santa Monica: A&M.
2. Lawrence Rinder's suggestion, in his essay 'Sophie Calle and the practice of doubt', that what we see in Calle's work "is not the object in closer view but the measure of the distance in between" comes to mind. In Rinder, L. 2005. *Art life*. New York: Gregory Miller & Co. 13.
3. Vergunst, N. 2000. *Hoerikwaggo: Images of Table Mountain*. Cape Town: South African National Gallery. 16.
4. Something Cartwright in fact does in a work such as *The upper cable car station with Robben Island in the distance*.
5. Precisely the appeal of taking to the mountain for a good hike.
6. Kant, I. 2011. *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and the sublime and other writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 17.
7. Berger, J. 1997. *A fortunate man*. New York: Vintage. 13.
8. For a list of Cape Town's awards from 2014 onwards, see: Cape Town Tourism. 2017. Cape Town accolades and awards. Available online: <http://www.capetown.travel/trade-media/tm-news/cape-town-accolades/cape-town-accolades-and-awards>.
9. Cartwright's mountainous landscapes tend more towards Giorgio Morandi than Tuymans, in my books.
10. In this non-fiction reflection on the horror genre, King provides three categories of horror: Revulsion (the lowest, produced by gruesome imagery), Horror (leaves more to the imagination, but still presents evidence of something amiss) and Terror (the highest level of sophistication, see description above). See: King, S. 1981. *Danse macabre*. New York: Everest House.
11. Rinder, L. 1997. 'Tuymans' Terror'. In Morley, S. (ed.). 2010. *The Sublime*. London: Whitechapel Gallery; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. 182–187.
12. Aliaga, J. 1996. 'Interview with Luc Tuymans'. In

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13. Pollitzer, R. 1954. Plague. Cited in Swanson, W. 1977. "The sanitation syndrome". In Beinart, W. and Dubow, S. (eds). *Segregation and apartheid in twentieth century South Africa*. London, New York: Routledge. 29.
14. Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome'. 29.
15. Ibid: 30.
16. Ibid: 30.
17. Frescura, F. 2013. 'Ndabeni location'. South African History Online. Available online: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/places/ndabeni-location>.
18. Sendin, J. 2016. 'City land sale will deepen class and race divide'. Available online: <http://www.groundup.org.za/article/city-land-sale-will-deepen-class-and-race-divide/>.
19. Pieterse, E. 2016. 'Africa's urban imperatives'. In Provoost, M (ed.). 2016. *Cape Town: densification as a cure for a segregated city*. Rotterdam: nai1010. 21.
20. Anderson, A. 2016. 'Cape Town's property price growth "third highest in the world"'. Available online: <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/companies/2016-08-26-cape-towns-property-price-growth-third-highest-in-the-world/>.
21. Pieterse, E. 2010. 'Introduction'. In Pieterse, E. 2010. *Counter-currents: Experiments in sustainability in the Cape Town region*. Auckland Park: Jacana Media. 13.
22. Ibid: 23.



Table Mountain: a close-up view

John Cartwright

A mountain in a city. A layered sea-bed uplifted by intercontinental mashups. Rock-climbers' heaven. A death-trap for the casual or disrespectful. A smorgasbord of weathers and micro-ecologies. A mythic sentinel at the tip of Africa. The docile subject of a thousand postcards. Where a sign says "This is not an easy way down". The remnant stub of a huger decayed mountain. Occasionally an island, as the climate changes. A place to find yourself. A place to get lost in.

As we tackle the north-facing slopes and cliffs, the city hums and bleeps below, unaware of our surveying eyes. We climb, traversing millions of years in minutes: slithery decaying granite, sharp-edged

broken shale, dark mudstone, grey sandstone blotched with lichen. On top, we are in a kingdom of rock and air. As a sudden cloud surrounds us, we find that we are in the wild.

Back in the city, we smell buchu on our hands

We have squeezed the leopards and the baboons off the mountain and – for the time being? – there are no dassies, but there is again a pair of klipspringers, bounding with their tiny precise hooves from ledge to ledge. We still have company, despite our immature ignorance of the world whose air we breathe together. Boubou shrikes call and respond in the shade of the kloofs, swifts wheel whistling across the cliffs; yellow-

woods crouch in the cracks, disas blaze, black ground-beetles scurry across white-sand footpaths, and agama lizards slip into crevices.

We look at the mountain from many places and at many times and distances, seeing it and not seeing it. To paint is to look, and to cause others to look. What do we see?

Rock

The oldest – and lowest lying – rock layers are of shale, deposited as muddy sediment under water some 550 million years ago – the upper boundary of this layer cuts across Signal Hill and above most of the “city bowl”, along the lower slopes of Devil’s Peak and continues (buried under sand) across the western edge of the Cape Flats to False Bay.

Then hot magma rose up, intruding into the shale and in places overlaying it. A period of massive intercontinental collision uplifted the shale and

granite (whose rounded grey shapes, embedded with crystals, may be seen on the Atlantic slopes of Lion’s Head). And then, “on top of this eroded, flat surface ... that cuts across Malmesbury shale and granite bedrock rests an enormous pile of sand. Over 7 km thick, this pile of sand (which also includes intervals of mud) was deposited between 510 and 340 million years ago. It is the lowermost portion of this pile of sand that is exposed in the 600m high sandstone cliffs of Table Mountain.”¹

So what we see today is the lowest, eroded and weathered remnant of a mountain massif that was once about seven times as high and stretched across the present Cape Flats and continued in the “Cape Fold Belt Mountains” from Stellenbosch onward.

In the course of the last few million years since that last major upheaval, the underlying structure has changed little, but the climate has swung back and forth – at times, Table Mountain has been an island

30 kilometres from the mainland; at others, one could have walked dry-shod across False Bay from Fish Hoek to Rooi Els.

Water

Where there is a mountain standing in the way of moisture-laden off-sea winds, there is likely to be rainfall, and where there is rainfall there will be freshwater streams, and so it is here. However, as the soil on the upper slopes, ledges and tops of Table Mountain and the Cape Peninsula mountain chain is thin and sandy, with relatively little in the way of deep humus-rich soils or retentive bogs and sponges, much of the rainwater passes quickly through and away to the sea, with only the strongest streams continuing to run throughout the dry and windy summers.

Among the strongest perennial streams flowing off Table Mountain, and certainly the most easily accessible, is the one running from Platteklip

Gorge, the great crack in the northern cliff-face (conventionally regarded as the “front”) of the mountain, and on down into what we now know as Table Bay.

Without that stream, and therefore without Table Mountain, Cape Town in its present form would not exist.

Early European sailors, on the way south and around the Cape in the direction of the fabled East, soon noted that Saldanha – up the west coast from Cape Town – provided a much better and safer harbour than Table Bay, but had no reliable source of fresh water, which was their chiefest need on the long voyage.

This perennial stream, and the seasonal pasturage on the gentle slopes around its lower reaches, had been known to the local people for unnumbered generations. To them this was Camissa, the place of sweet waters. These pastoralist Khoi groups, primarily the Gorachoqua and the Goringhaiqua, needed reliable

pasture for their sheep and goats and, as the local vegetation provided little sustenance for their flocks, were obliged to engage in “transhumance”: moving in a regular cycle from one grazing area to another as the seasons changed.

To European sailors, Table Mountain was therefore not only a striking visual beacon, but a signal of the reliable presence of fresh water, and several Portuguese, English and Dutch ships dropped anchor in Table Bay for rest and refreshment before Jan van Riebeeck arrived in 1652 with instructions from the Dutch East India Company “to found a fort and garden there”.

Today our water comes pumped through huge pipes from other mountains on the far side of the Cape Flats, but on the western slopes of Table Mountain are still the decaying but impressive remnants of an engineering scheme initiated in the 1880s, when the growth of Cape Town and

the consequent dire shortage of water forced the city authorities to stop tinkering with small local reservoirs and make serious plans.

Five stone-built dams were constructed on the “Back Table”, with materials and supplies being hauled up by a pulley system from the slopes above Camps Bay and then transported to the sites on a specially laid rail-track. Down below, the Pipe Track still runs along the slopes from Kloof Nek to Slangolie Ravine, where the pipes dive into the buttress.

Even this grand investment of planning and effort could not keep up with the growth of the city, and the massive black iron pipe-line – at times barely buried under the path, at others crossing small ravines on stone pillars – is now a curiosity. The sober brick building of the Kloof Nek water treatment plant, however, with its gleaming and whooshing interior, continues to demonstrate (at least for now) the simple virtues of 20th-century municipal engineering.

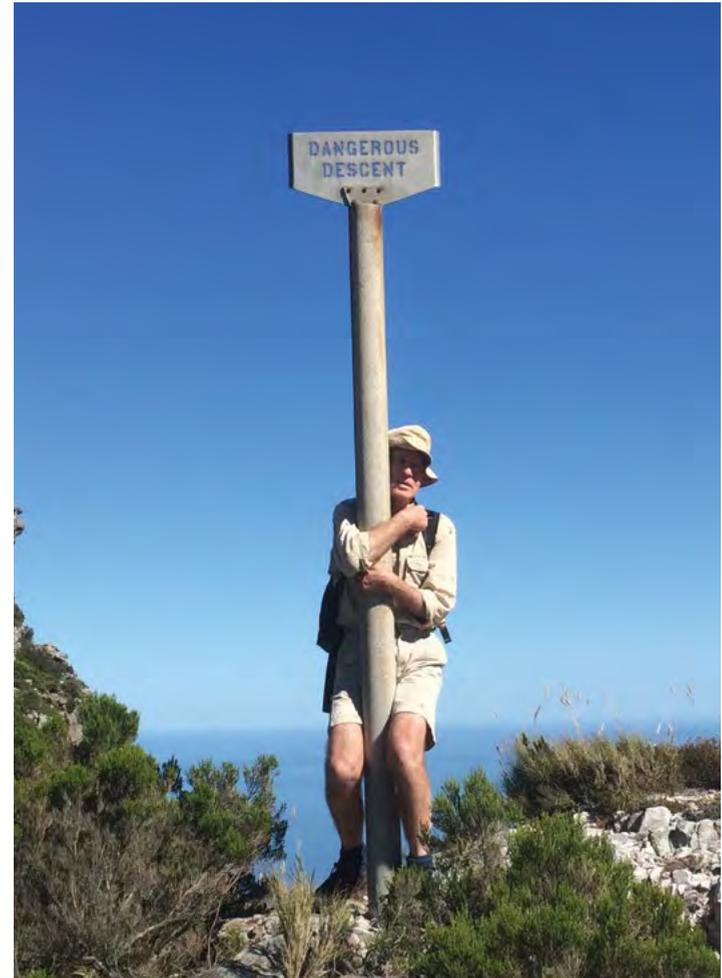
Table Mountain is made of rock and carved by water and air. Add fire (from time to time) and you get microbes and bacteria, plants, insects, birds, animals and us, a constantly changing *mix masala* of consciousnesses and cultures, with all the regular pains and joys of such creatures, and a few local variations.

The mountain also changes in its own time, grain by rolling grain and rock by falling rock.

In the mean time, see the big sky, drink the water, feel the wind, smell the fynbos, hear the sunbirds and the ravens and the many distant sounds of a city going about its business. You are here.

Endnotes

1. Compton, John S. 2004. *The rocks and mountains of Cape Town*. Cape Town: Juta and co. 57.





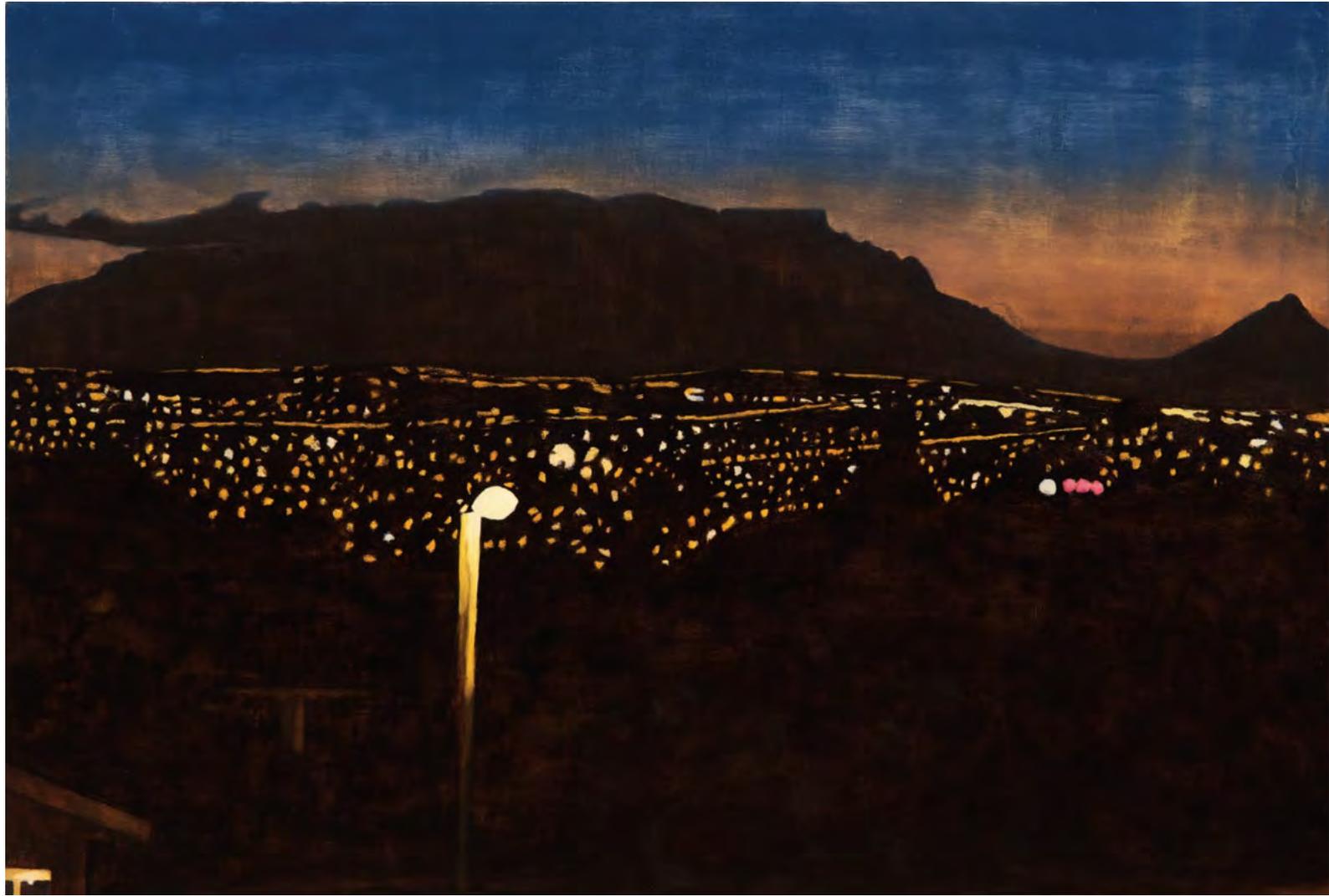
The Good Hope Centre, foreshore



Cape Town train station



Footpath 'To Trek' off Kloofnek Road, Tamboerskloof



From the top of the N1 near Welgemoed



Benning Drive, Kommetjie



From the V&A Waterfront by the old grain silos



The upper cable car station with Robben Island in the distance



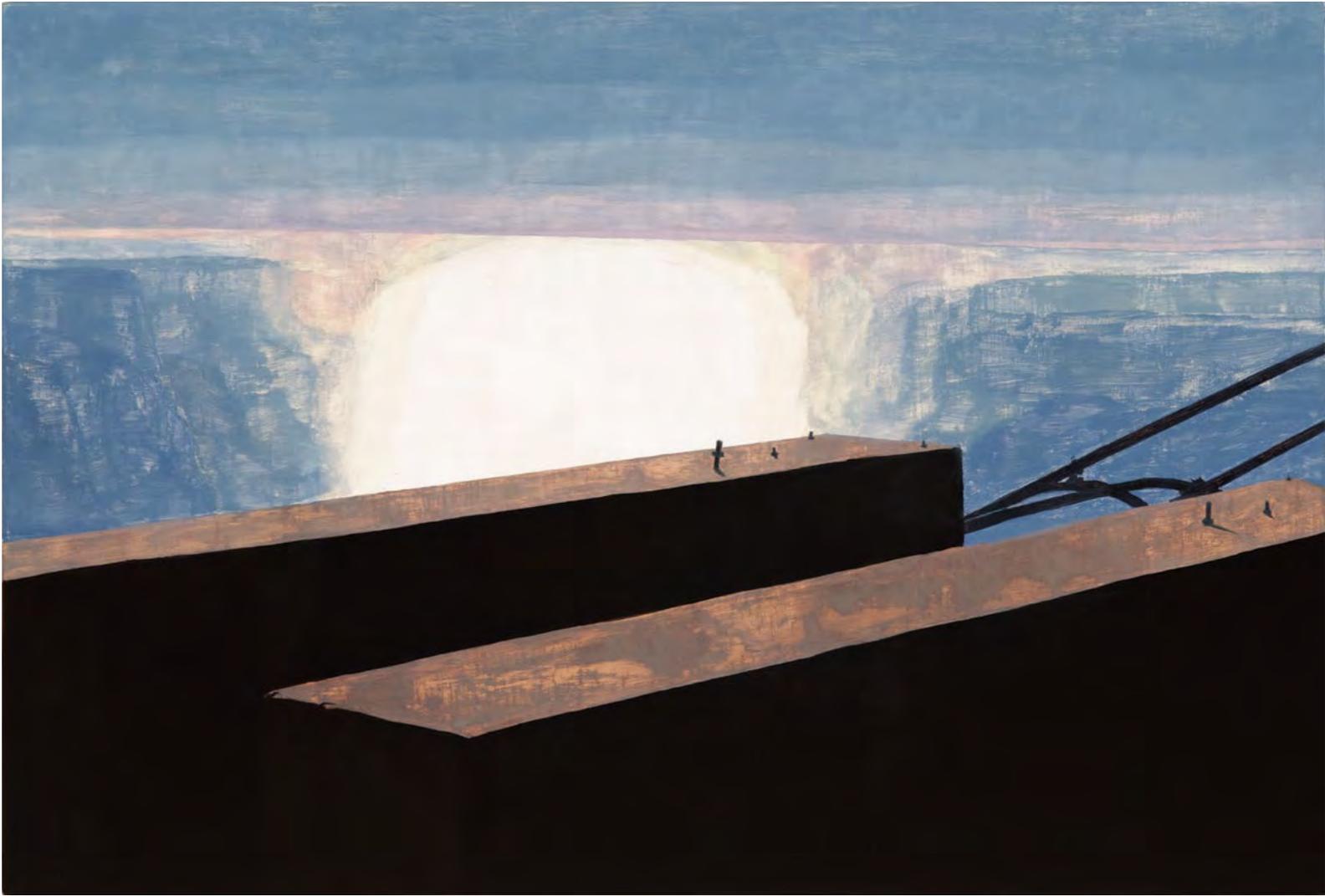
From the coastal road near Llandudno



On the N7 near Philadelphia



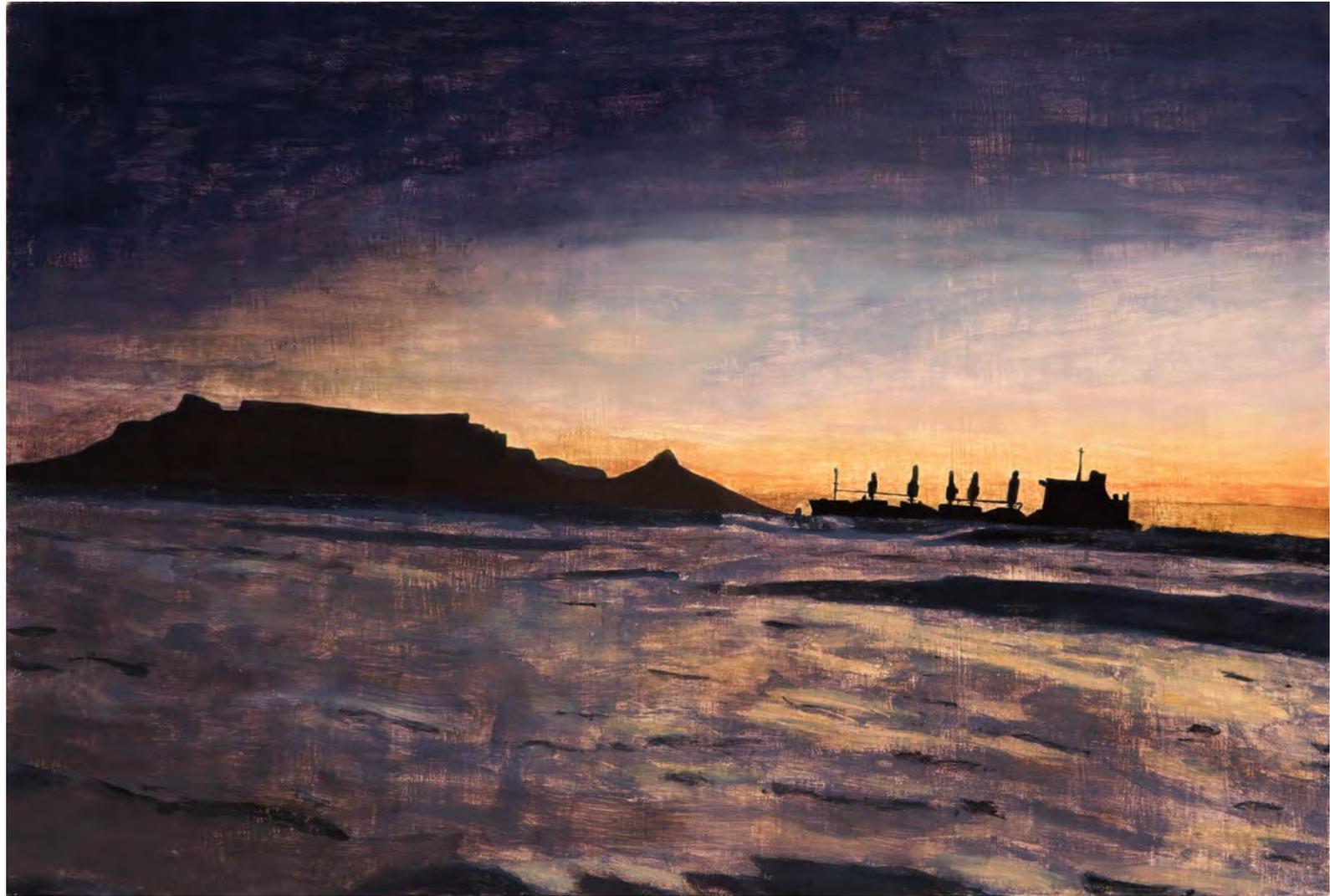
Bottom cable car station, Table Mountain Road



Upper cable car station



Off the False Bay coast



Wreck of the Seli 1, Bloubergstrand



View from the Spur, Big Bay, Bloubergstrand





From the bottom cable car station



Beach Road, Camps Bay



Hilldene Road, Tamboerskloof



Thelema Mountain Vineyards, Helshoogte



Disembarking at Cape Town International Airport



Upper contour path between Platteklip Gorge and Kloof Corner



From Lion's Head



V&A Waterfront with Christmas tree



Outside The Assembly, Harrington Street



From the top of Kloofnek Drive





From a pedestrian bridge at the V&A Waterfront



From Tygerberg



Baden Powell Drive near the N2, Khayelitsha



From Tygerberg with signal cannon and cell phone tower



From the water off Clifton





On the M3 flyover near Ndabeni



From Kasteelspoort, by the Old Cable Car Station



A great wave off Kommetjie



The limestone quarry on Robben Island



From the airport flyover onto the N2

1 1 1



From the Baden Powell Drive flyover





Outside Cape Town Stadium



From GrandWest Casino, Goodwood



From Karbonkelberg

1 2 1



Washington Street, Langa

1 2 3



Off the old Durbanville road near Philadelphia



Coming down Red Hill towards Simon's Town



From the top of Sir Lowry's Pass

Acknowledgements

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Pippa Skotnes has provided sound advice, generosity with her time and resources and generally been a brick over the last 15 years. Thanks, doll.

My father has supported all the life choices I’ve made that I can remember, no matter how hare-brained; he has also, of course, operated a 24-hour banking service throughout my life. I hope to start paying some of that back soon. My mother once

advised me that the greatest waste is to have a talent and not to use it, so I've had that in my head for about twenty years, wondering what my talent is. I hope that I've found it.

Thanks to the Paint in Progress group for their comradely support, advice and criticism – Katherine Bull, Virginia MacKenny, Lauren Palte, Zara-Moon Arthur, Katherine Spindler, Gretchen van der Byl and Nina Liebenberg. Thanks also to the friends and family who provided me with images and/or accompanied me on drives and mountain walks in search of unusual perspectives of Table Mountain: Pa, Julz, kr!5, Niek, Jarid, Maya, Jeremy, Rob Keith, Delene van Dyk, Mark Antonello, George Joubert, Simon Wall, Ant Fox, Barry Donnelly, André Rademeyer, Rob McCulloch, Tim Brink and Thelema Mountain Vineyards.

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Images

All photographs by, or licensed to, the artist unless otherwise specified.

The paintings were photographed by Michael Hall.

p7. Hokusai, K. c. 1830-4. 'Fuji seen through the Mannen bridge at Fukagawa, Edo'. Colour woodblock print. 38.5 x 26.2cm.

p9. Mount Fuji photographed by Natasha Norman.

p13. Cézanne, P. c. 1905. 'Montagne Sainte-Victoire and the Black Chateau' (detail). Oil on canvas. 65.6 x 81cm. Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan.



Juxtaposing this natural wonder of the world and the urban infrastructures of Cape Town, Cartwright references this omnipresent feature of the Mother City, rendering 36 unique moments, in a homage to Hokusai's 18th century *36 views of Mount Fuji*.

From far-away viewpoints to close up, within the city centre and out into the more obscure outskirts of the peninsula, none of the paintings are the perfect postcard image we have come to expect of this beautiful city. Instead, the artist investigates angles and toys with perspectives from the rooftops of the more affluent suburbs through to the gritty motorways.

Born in Toronto in 1971, Thomas first moved to Cape Town when he was nine years old, returning frequently until he finally settled here in 1997.