

Haunted by the past

Diepsloot, 15 August 2009. Goldblatt charts the architectural and social patterns of our society from the air.

In his latest exhibition David Goldblatt subtly suggests that the present is inextricably connected to the past, writes Mary Corrigan

Title: TJ: Some Things Old, Some Things New, And Some Much the Same
Artist: David Goldblatt

GOLDBLATT has been juxtaposing South Africa's past and present for some time now. This is not unexpected, given that he has been closely observing our society for over 50 years, accumulating a vast data-bank of memories that linger at the edges of his mind's eye.

In *Intersections Intersected*, which showed at the Michael Stevenson gallery in 2008, and *Joburg*, a Goodman Gallery show held in the same year, dated photographs were displayed alongside some of Goldblatt's more recent images.

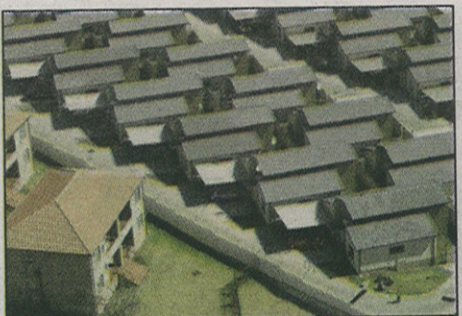
In these exhibitions the dialogue between the images – between the past and the present – was quite obvious, particularly in *Intersections Intersected*, where images speaking to similar themes or of the same locale were paired, plotting the similarities between the past and the present and thus the failures of our democratic government.

As always, Goldblatt is like our social conscience, ensuring we don't forget what came before and thus reminding us that little has changed.

The title of this exhibition implies a similar tack, but the link between the past and present is not so obviously realised. These bodies of work are displayed in separate areas and don't appear to have any direct relationship.

There might be commercial benefits to persistently displaying Goldblatt's older oeuvre – his dated images are presumably more collectable – but there is another compulsion at work. Goldblatt appears to be challenging this tendency to mark off everything that occurred before 1994 as history and everything after as the present – as if the first democratic elections cordoned off suffering and malevolence.

Goldblatt doesn't view South African



In *A family picnic in the north-west*, 15 August 2009, the picnickers in the foreground seem absurd

experience in this segmented way. He sees it as a continuous narrative, perhaps punctuated by different – albeit both corrupt – political authorities. In this way, conditions that mark the present are inextricably interconnected to the past.

For example, a photograph of Maponya Mall in Soweto isn't just a characteristic of present day South Africa, its significance is linked to everything that came before.

An image of a woman trading from a makeshift mobile shop dubbed Café-Move-One, Croesus, taken in 1964, doesn't just provide historical context but, like photographs of an upmarket townhouse development in Hyde Park or the grey, textured trunks of tall buildings in Hillbrow, it documents the outward, the visual, manifestations of a particular society.

In other words, the shifts and character of a society are traceable through the architectural phenomena that defines it. It's not the aesthetics of architecture that capture Goldblatt's attention; only in so far as they are employed by people to distinguish themselves from others.

Take a 1975 photograph of a supposed UFO sculpture which adorns a property in Fairwood, Johannesburg. The large metal monstrosity that sits in the small front garden almost completely obscures the façade of the home. And while it might be an eyesore, it was obviously conceived to differentiate the owner's home from others.

This photograph is more than just a record of suburban quirkiness in the

1970s. It articulates a resistance against the norm – a battle that was apparently unsuccessful. According to the caption, neighbours took the owner to court and he was compelled to remove the makeshift UFO. This has all kinds of political subtext: the collective crushing the will of the individual. It is the friction between these positions that defines our political history.

This condition plays out in an interesting manner in a series of photographs that juxtaposes townships with complex developments. Goldblatt uses aerial views to capture the repetitive patterns of these housing developments.

The most compelling image is titled *A family picnic in the north-west*. The title obliges one to try and discover where this picnic might be taking place. This is tricky given that the photograph is dominated by compact, uniform complexes.

In the foreground of the image, on a small corner of grass, one can make out a group of people trying to indulge in this ordinary family activity. In this context, it appears as an absurdity. High-density living arrangements impinge on basic relationship-building exercises. In this way architectural patterns not only define relationships but come to operate as metaphors for social behavioural patterns.

This discreet narrative also sheds light on another interesting feature of complex or townhouse living: these uniform and compact structures are not too different to the homogenous housing the apartheid government constructed in townships. There also appears to be little difference between apartheid housing and RDP housing.

These striking and unnerving similarities substantiate how past conditions are repeated in the present. Though Goldblatt is interested in how the past impacts on the present, one senses he would like to be able to draw a line between them – his inability to do so is a source of frustration and disillusionment.

TJ: Some Things Old, Some Things New, And Some Much the Same is showing at the Goodman Gallery in Parkwood, Johannesburg until November 6

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WHY DID I GET MARRIED TOO?
Mon-Sat: 10:00, 12:15, 14:45, 17:00, 19:45, 22:30
Sun: 9:05, 11:40, 14:15, 17:00, 19:45, 22:30

THE OTHER GUYS
Mon-Sat: 9:45, 12:00, 14:45, 18:00, 20:30, 22:50
Sun: 9:45, 12:00, 14:45, 18:00, 20:30

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Sun: 9:45, 12:00, 15:00, 17:45, 20:15, 22:30

THE SWITCH
Mon-Sat: 9:15, 11:30, 14:15, 17:00, 19:45, 22:15
Sun: 9:15, 11:30, 14:15, 17:00, 19:45

CENTURION
Mon-Sat: 10:15, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:15, 22:45
Sun: 10:15, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:15

EAT PRAY LOVE
Fri-Tue: 11:30, 14:20, 17:10, 20:00
Wed: 11:30, 14:20, 17:10, 20:00

WHY DID I GET MARRIED TOO?
Mon-Sat: 9:10, 11:45, 14:25, 17:05, 19:45, 22:30
Sun: 11:45, 14:25, 17:05, 19:45

THE OTHER GUYS
Fri, Sat: 9:30, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:30, 22:50
Mon, Tue: 9:30, 11:45, 14:30, 17:15, 19:30, 22:15
Wed, Thu: 9:30, 11:45, 14:30, 17:15, 19:30, 22:15
Thu: 8:00, 20:30, 22:50

WALL STREET: MONEY NEVER SLEEPS
Fri, Sat: 9:05, 11:45, 14:30, 17:15, 20:00, 22:45
Sun: 9:05, 11:45, 14:30, 17:15, 20:00
Mon, Tue: 9:05, 11:45, 14:30, 17:15, 20:00, 22:45
Tue, Thu: 9:05, 11:45, 14:30, 17:15, 20:00, 22:45
Wed: 17:20, 20:05, 22:50

THE KARATE KID
Fri-Sun: 9:15, 12:00, 14:50, 17:40, 20:30
Mon-Thu: 17:40, 20:30

SALT
Fri, Sat: 9:30, 11:45, 14:30, 17:15, 19:30, 22:15
Sun: 11:45, 14:30, 17:15, 19:30
Mon, Tue: 9:30, 11:45, 14:30, 17:15, 19:30, 22:15
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Tue: 9:30, 12:00, 14:45, 17:15, 19:45, 22:30

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO
English Subtitles...
Daily: 11:30, 14:20, 17:30, 20:35

EAT PRAY LOVE
Daily: 11:30, 14:20, 17:10, 20:00

ONDINE
Fri, Sat: 9:15, 11:30, 14:15, 17:00, 19:30, 22:30
Sun: 9:15, 11:30, 14:15, 17:00, 19:30
Mon, Wed, Thu: 9:15, 11:30, 14:15, 17:00, 19:30
Tue: 9:15, 11:30, 14:15, 17:00, 19:30, 22:30

THE OTHER MAN
Fri, Sat: 10:00, 12:15, 15:00, 19:30, 22:15
Sun: 12:15, 17:00, 19:30
Mon, Wed, Thu: 10:00, 12:15, 17:00, 19:30
Tue: 10:00, 12:15, 17:00, 19:30, 22:15

LONG STREET
Fri, Sat: 9:45, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:15, 22:30
Sun: 10:15, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:30, 23:00
Tue: 9:45, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:30, 23:00

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Mon, Wed, Thu: 10:15, 12:30, 15:15, 18:00, 20:30
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Mon, Wed, Thu: 9:10, 11:45, 14:30, 17:10, 19:50
Tue: 9:10, 11:45, 14:30, 17:10, 19:50, 22:30

CHLOE
Fri, Sat: 10:00, 12:15, 15:00, 17:45, 20:00, 22:15
Sun: 10:00, 12:15, 15:00, 17:45, 20:00
Mon, Wed, Thu: 10:00, 12:15, 15:00, 17:45, 20:00
Tue: 10:00, 12:15, 15:00, 17:45, 20:00, 22:15

MAO'S LAST DANCER
Fri, Sat: 9:15, 11:45, 15:00, 17:45, 20:15, 22:45
Sun: 9:15, 11:45, 15:00, 17:45, 20:15
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