



THE VOCABULARY OF AMBIGUITY

ARTIST: JACKI MCINNES (38)

Over 10 years ago, Jacki McInnes worked as a radiotherapist at Groote Schuur hospital where lead was a useful protection from potentially harmful radiation. Today, she bends strips of the soft grey metal over a piece of drainpipe to weave together a sculpture in her Woodstock studio.

McInnes took a more winding route to her vocation. She studied Fine Art through Unisa while working in the medical field and in her second year began experimenting with salt and lead, which have become her trademark. McInnes enjoys their powerful visual and ambiguous metaphorical associations. "Salt has impurities, which create pigments ... and it has both healing and corrosive properties," she says. This synergy between medicine and art also developed thematically. Disease recurs in her work and issues like abortion have fueled much creative output. Her visually compelling art is not made to pretty up the lounge.

McInnes derives great pleasure from creating labour-intensive pieces and rarely outsources production. She will work on various projects at once, gestating ideas and drawing inspiration from around her. Somewhat surprisingly, sculpture was a hurdle rather than an obvious first choice in the early Unisa years. But clearly an affinity developed over time. She says: "I create an image using an object as opposed to using a line."

McInnes acquired an MA from Michaelis in 2003, followed by an acclaimed solo show a year later (Bell-Roberts Gallery, 2004). Her work certainly intersects well with an international aesthetic but she thinks South African contemporary art has compelling prospects.

McInnes, who recently returned from a residency in Switzerland, admires the creative grappling that leaves visible traces of human intervention. She says: "A lot of American and western European art seems quite clinical with very modern technical processes. My perception of South African work is that it's taken from a lot of different sources and put together in a uniquely South African way."

■ Kim Gurney

Jacki McInnes,
Swell II, 2004,
detail, woven lead
strips