

Lucas Thuso SEAGE

born November 2, 1956, Newclare, Johannesburg; died November 3, 2009.

For the last two years I have asked everyone I could think of, "Where is Lucas Seage? Has anybody seen him, heard from him or anything about him?" I asked artists, dealers, bookstore owners, academics and investigators – all the wrong people. Someone said he was now a businessman living in Soweto; they had seen him in a suit with a briefcase. Another surmised he was overseas, perhaps in Germany. In 1981 Lucas won first prize in The Haenggi Foundation National Art Competition, which enabled him to take up a two year Konrad-Adenauer Foundation Bursary to study at the Düsseldorf Academy under Joseph Beuys and Klaus Rinker. Perhaps he was there.

It is shocking how easy it is to disappear from the art world.

In my youth Lucas Seage was a key inspiration. His wild energy, urban punk attitude and unpredictable emotion could be a little scary. Lucas burned with the rage of the generation of 1976. The schoolbook with a throwing stone is an image I always associated with him. His use of found trash was always seductively aesthetic. His work revealed an edgy balance of the visceral and the intellectual. It aimed for the gut.

In 1980, poet Oswald Mtshali interviewed Seage ahead of a solo show at his teacher Bill Ainslie's studio. Mtshali described Lucas as an "avowed ecologist and conservationist" recycling the world's debris. Seage boldly stated his rejection of black consciousness: "I do not recognize any culture or tradition. I do not regard myself as a black artist. I am just an artist. Period. It is not that I deny the existence of African culture. I just find it not relevant to my life, because I have been influenced by people like Breton and Salvador Dali, whose philosophy I admire because they do not care for the categorization of life. Instead they seek the art that is based on the fundamentals of life. The reason why I reject black consciousness is because a person's power comes from his sub-conscious, not the other way around. That is where my force of creativity comes from for my sculpture and painting." (The Star Johannesburg, May 5, 1980)

Death was a central concern in Seage's work. "I'm fearful of my own death and I always think of it," he told Mtshali. He gave the theme precedence in his seminal debut show (Internal Affairs) (Market Gallery, Johannesburg 1980). Critic Joyce Ozinski described the show as "a sincere and carefully meditated statement". Over the next few years Seage led a path expressing the harsh conditions and anxiety of the South African condition in gritty assemblage pieces that prefigured the work of Willie Bester, Wayne Barker and Billy Mandindi.

A decade after his solo debut, Seage exhibited a suite of pastel drawings at a Rosebank gallery under the title "Metamorphosis". Kendell Geers criticized the drawings as "formulaic, courteous, consumable products" (The Star Johannesburg, May 9, 1990). Seage was frank about his need to earn; with a young child, his economic circumstances were serious. Sadly, he never recovered from the review, which fondly recalled the "provocative, demanding works he originally became notorious for". Seage turned his back on the art world.

According to his son, Herman Obusitswe Seage, Lucas left Johannesburg about six years ago and

began training as an herbalist with sangomas in Durban, and other spiritual healers in Zululand. Since 2007 he had been living in a small town close to the Botswana border, making expeditionary trips to spiritual healers in different parts of Botswana. He died from complications associated with a diabetic condition acquired in recent years. Hamba Gaghle, Khotso Boetie. — Roger van Wyk

Obituary published in "Art South Africa" March 2010 - <http://artsouthafrica.com/>

Archives: The Haenggi Foundation Inc., Postfach 1539, CH-4001 BASEL