

SAYING NO!

NAVIGATING APARTHEID MILITARISMS

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

The “SAYING NO!” project will articulate, curate and interrogate white apartheid-era militarisms in a contested present by creative means, drawing on creative disciplines, including art, literature, music and photography from the past and present, by means of a unique exhibition. This will allow for an unprecedented public and academic record of an oft-hidden archive, with the intention of encouraging open conversations relating to the hidden and oft silenced histories of militarised white South Africans.

Exploring issues of masculinity, whiteness and militarised pasts, specifically the conscription of white males, in apartheid South Africa, via creative avenues, such as art and literary means, proposes new vantage points within the framework of visual studies and literature. The “SAYING NO!” project will act as an alternative articulation in terms of knowledge production. Dally et al (2004) cite Marshall and Newton (2000: 2), who suggest that “parameters of research” should be expanded “to embrace other forms of understanding and engagement”, including “scholarship” that embraces “academic research beyond common scientific enquiry”. In this sense, The “SAYING NO!” project will strive to serve as a provocative and creative exploration that journeys beyond “rational-logical, empiricist models of research that are defined as legitimate” (2).

The “SAYING NO!” project will involve curating artworks and archives related to apartheid-era militarisms, requesting permission to use artworks, literature and photography from practitioners. The project will be a collaborative exercise between archivist and photographer, Paul Weinberg, and poet, designer and post-doctoral researcher, Stephen Symons. The result will be an unprecedented culmination of creative replies to the militarised pasts of white South Africans. The design of the exhibition will rely on a body of curated work, including personal artworks and the photographic archive of Paul Weinberg and Stephen Symons, among the work of other creative practitioners; including writers, poets, artists, photographers, graphic designers, playwrights and musicians. It will also serve as a guiding post to a broader understanding of what ‘resistance’ to apartheid means and a broader sense of South Africaness.

The “SAYING NO!” project, will continue to “live” and “resonate” within the digital domain, by means of a website and a catalogue. The virtual environment of the website will continue to act as a forum for continued reflection, restoration and meditation, encouraging the exploration of inter-disciplinary methodologies aimed at traversing and mapping other silenced narratives of South Africans. It is hoped that the “SAYING NO!” project will contribute to further alternative methods of scholarly research that ultimately humanises the past and contributes to peaceful and productive co-existence and acknowledgement. This research project will draw attention to the importance of legitimising multi-methodological means within the academy, and emphasise the importance of the creative arts as a legitimate means of research.

As author and academic Svetlana Boym (2007:18) rightly notes, “Home, after all, is not a gated community”, and it, therefore, hoped that the “SAYING NO!” project will encourage on-going conversations related to the archive via multi-disciplinary means.

Stephen Symons & Paul Weinberg

Cape Town, September 2019

THE “SAYING NO!” PROJECT’S WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE WILL LAUNCH IN EARLY 2020