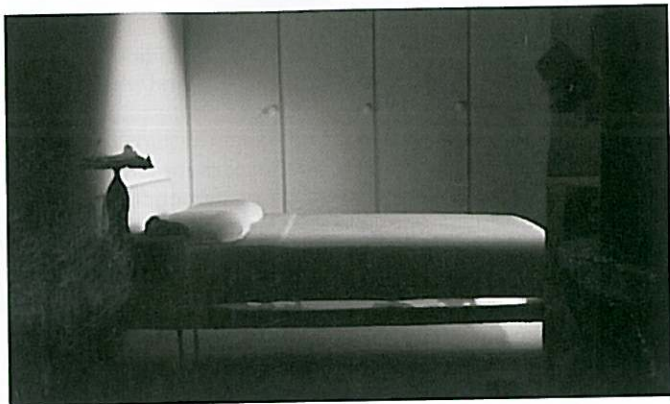


JONAS DAHLBERG by Jacquelyn Davis

Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm SWEDEN April 4 · May 11, 2008



Riding in on the artist's growing reputation across Scandinavia, Jonas Dahlberg's three-screen video installation *Three Rooms* (2008) banished all thought of budding spring this year. Depicting three rooms in an average home—bedroom, living and dining rooms—which over the course of 27 minutes dissolve into aberrant nothingness, along with the objects and furniture they contain, one is slowly dragged into everyday, brooding decay. So staged as to entice the viewer to move from screen to screen as if from room to room in a house, initially one is convinced that nothing remarkable is happening in these rooms, that indeed they

are static video stills of ordinary residences. But as these impeccable rooms begin to disappear, chairs gracefully collapsing, lampshades wilting like dying flowers, the suspicion soon arises that this installation is less about objective or social disappearance than the disappearance of the viewer herself.

In a recent artist talk he gave at Stockholm's Konstfack Svarta Havet auditorium, Dahlberg noted that it is much more difficult to bring off these complex intimate scenarios—among which can be included *Weightless Space* (2004)—than his more public undertakings, such as his controversial video surveillance piece *W.C. Safe Zones No. 9* (2004) or *Invisible Cities* (2004-05). For instance, in order to get the furniture in *Three Rooms* to dissolve without leaving a cloudy residue, Dahlberg experimented at great lengths before discovering that ordinary glycerol worked the best, being barely discernible to the camera lens, though its presence is occasionally given away by the rare air bubble drifting around in the aquarium-like screens.

What *Three Rooms* ultimately enacts is a labyrinthine personal adventure, a rhizomatic segue between Lewis Carroll and Bachelardian phenomenology. Here one can easily identify with what Aaron Kunin writes in his notebook, *Secret Architecture* (2006): "At a certain point the word 'between' disappears. First the quotation marks disappear." Dahlberg likewise expands and contracts such integers of time and perception, to the point where the distance between a space and its viewer no longer exists, or opens a portal to some other, more fractured state of being. This installation poses alternative odysseys, options of personal inquiry into privacy and safety beyond the pale.

ZWELETHU MTHETHWA by Jacquelyn Davis

Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Stockholm SWEDEN April 3 · May 11, 2008

Based in Cape Town, South Africa, Zwelethu Mthethwa began his now considerable career as a traditional painter, but soon turned to those large-scale confrontational photographic portraits of everyday African scenes for which he is best known today. Mthethwa is something of a paradox, who despite being collected in many international museums for his emotionally charged and even heartbreaking images, only wishes to express his pride in his homeland, while managing to show his audience a continent still ravaged by postcolonial aftershock.

The show at Andréhn-Schiptjenko is culled from Mthethwa's 2007 *Contemporary Gladiators* series, depicting the young boys who inhabit trash heaps in Mozambique. The eye-to-eye contact established by the photographer frames these denizens of dumpsites against our mixed emotions at seeing children consume the waste they now happen to be. Taken over a long period of time, the images add up to more than stock photojournalist snapshots of kids scrambling pathetically over the stinking piles of junk and commercial litter: they are instead classically heroic shots of them proudly holding fort over their precious domains—doubly abjected but defiant nonetheless.

Situated only 15 kilometers from the exclusive Phemba Beach Hotel in northeastern Mozambique, with its imposing Arabian-influenced colonnades, turrets, and archways, these dumps are virtually invisible to the international tourists whose daily detritus feeds their very existence, masking the unsettling downside to marketing exotica

without counting the social and economic cost to the local people. Mthethwa's *Contemporary Gladiators* series also points to the devastation this wanton disregard has caused the indigenous family structure, casting children to the winds of a still imperial system of commerce.

Mthethwa's previous projects, including his *Maidens* (2006) series, have tracked this same process in seemingly more benign circumstances, such as the annual bussing of thousands of young Zulu girls to the Reed Dance in Kwanongoma, Zimbabwe. Representing opposite but similar ends of the postcolonial spectrum, *Maidens, Fotografie Nr. 45* documents two modern Zulu girls, both clad in contemporary casual gear, while *Nr. 24* shows a cropped cluster of adolescents scantily dressed in traditional beaded garb, looking for all the world like a *National Geographic* spread if not for the jarring presence of a pair of smart spectacles on the only girl we can completely see. From an even earlier series, *Ticket to the other side, Nr. 2* (2003) depicts a black domestic worker (perhaps a nanny) moving out of frame, leaving the white baby she is carrying as the only focus of attention, as if launching a privileged life off this unseen woman's back. Among trash bunnies, Zulu mods, or the offspring of the ignoble past, all that's left to be kept is the distance Mthethwa in some sense restores.



(TOP TO BOTTOM) JONAS DAHLBERG, *THREE ROOMS*, 2008, FILM STILL OF BEDROOM. COURTESY THE ARTIST/GALERIE NORDENHAKE, STOCKHOLM. ZWELETHU MTHETHWA, *UNTITLED (FROM CONTEMPORARY GLADIATORS SERIES)*, 2008, C-PRINT, 150 X 193 CM. COURTESY ANDRÉHN-SCHIPTJENKO, STOCKHOLM.