

GIDEON MENDEL
40 YEARS 40 PHOTOGRAPHS



Intro

Gideon Mendel is a world-renowned photographer, artist and activist. His forty years of socially engaged photographic practice amount to a profound act of witnessing. His partisan projects are made with the intention to be of use, to both record the world we live in, and also to change it.

With compassion and visual ingenuity he has captured the human experience behind some of the most significant issues facing his generation; from the struggle against apartheid in South Africa to the tragedy and hope of HIV/AIDS through to our global climate emergency.

For the last fifteen years, capturing the human experience and physical impacts of the climate emergency has been his focus, with the acclaimed Drowning World and Burning World projects weaving complex narrative threads to depict it. Showing catastrophic floods and the aftermath of wildfires Mendel takes us into the lives of the affected individuals as they navigate the devastation in their wake, and comprehend a profoundly altered landscape.

Tracking his creative journey we see that he began his career as a traditional documentary photographer, but driven by the imperatives of the subjects he confronts his work has consistently evolved. The transition from black and white to colour, along with the incorporation of conceptual and collaborative elements were all informed by his consistent endeavor to make images that work as visual activism.

He has never been content to stay wedded to one photographic genre; throughout his career he has been pushing at the limits of photographic practice, challenging himself and his audience to breach boundaries and expectations.

In Mendel's later practice, his engagement with climate issues, portraiture has become his central narrative device. Engaging with his subjects in flooded or burnt landscapes they are not disempowered victims in the photographic encounter. His camera records their dignity and resilience, despite the personal catastrophe that they face. Their direct and sometimes unsettling gaze is a challenge to the viewer, questioning our communal culpability for their plight.

“Mendel approaches his subjects with an underlying assumption of their essential democratic equality; and in what must be the most heart-breaking of moments, they respond in kind by announcing their pride and defiance” (Dr Conohar Scott).

His climate change portraits are complimented by works that mine the surrounding details: the flood lines, the floating detritus and the scorched objects that are dislodged from their origin stories – damaged, warped and melted, then isolated and reconstituted, again through Mendel's photographic attention.

In recent years he has increasingly taken on the role of an archivist, building collections of objects, from refugee detritus and flood-damaged snapshots through to objects marked by wildfires. These are forensically photographed as if they are significant archaeological items. He has also innovatively reengaged with his own archive of negatives and prints from his early years as a ‘struggle photographer’ South Africa. Mirroring his practice as a whole, the material objects of his photographic journey are constantly reconsidered and transformed.

The Struggle



Police attack demonstrators with sjamboks (short leather whips) as thousands of marchers attempt to set off from different points in Cape Town to Pollsmoor prison to demand the release of Nelson Mandela. All attempts gather were violently disrupted by police. Nine protestors were killed that day and by the end of the week the death toll had risen to twenty-eight, (with an average age of seventeen).

August 1985.

I began my career documenting the intense conflict and political upheavals of the 1980s in South Africa. This was a crucial period in the struggle against apartheid and I was part of a young generation of 'struggle photographers' committed to documenting the political mobilisation of the time. Although I was officially a member of the press my images were fiercely partisan, framed by the immense suffering of black South Africans under apartheid. I documented the vibrant energy of the nationwide uprising of township youth, along with its brutal suppression. I photographed far too many funerals of young activists who were using stones to combat guns.

Looking back now, I see that as a young and inexperienced photographer I was trying to make sense of this turbulent period with no idea that political change was so imminent. This work was made at a time when the moral and ethical fault lines in South Africa were very clear, and the experience has strongly influenced my approach to photography since.

The Struggle



Trade unionist Moses Mayekiso is violently accosted while leading a protest march in Johannesburg. He was arrested on numerous occasions in the 1980s, enduring a long period of solitary confinement and the charge of high treason. During the first free elections he became a member of parliament but resigned two years later in frustration at the government's lack of grassroots engagement.

March 1985.

The Struggle



The son of Chief Ampie Mayisela leads his father's funeral procession in Leandra. His father, who was active in a local campaign against forced removals, was killed by a group of right-wing vigilantes who had been encouraged by the police. Shortly after the funeral, one of the vigilantes was attacked and killed in retaliation.

January 1986.

The Struggle



The mass funeral held at Kwanobuhle Stadium for twenty-eight victims of the Uitenhage Massacre. Two young girls dressed as brides stand amidst the coffins. The massacre took place when police opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators, who were themselves trying to observe the 25th anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre of 1960.

April 1985.

Living in Yeoville



The playground in Yeoville Park where at this juncture of South African history the grassy areas of the park were open to all races, while the tennis courts and recreation centre were reserved for whites only.

July 1986.

This project, depicting the inner city Johannesburg neighbourhood where I lived in the 1980s, began as a visual ‘safety valve’, a way of helping me deal with the violent and disturbing political events I was documenting in black townships at the time, and the deep levels of stress they induced. I instinctively needed to earth myself by making images within a landscape that included me, where I could be playful as a photographer and connect to a world that was more familiar.

When the government declared a State of Emergency in 1986, under which any photography of political protest or violence was outlawed, my work in Yeoville took on an added urgency. I redoubled my efforts to explore the everyday encounters of black and white people that took place in public spaces. I was searching for the small, often intimate moments that reflected the contradictions of apartheid.

Living in Yeoville



Watu Kobese, a young chess prodigy from Soweto takes part in a tournament between the Soweto and Yeoville chess clubs. For this event to happen, an intricate bureaucratic process was necessary as the Yeoville recreation centre was legally reserved for whites only, so special permission had to be obtained. Watu Kobese went on to become an international chess master.

August 1986.

Living in Yeoville



A bus stop on the corner of Cavendish and Rocky Street where the momentary encounters of apartheid South Africa were played out.

January 1987.

Waiting For Rain



In a drought ravaged Matibi district of Zimbabwe a mother works at a traditional mud-brick kiln. She was busy placing mud over the kiln to retain heat.

June 1992.

In the early 1990s, I made several trips to Zimbabwe to document rural life and some of the development challenges that were being faced there. During this time I photographed the 1992 drought, which was then regarded as the worst drought in living memory. The drought transformed Zimbabwe from a position of food surplus into a net food importer within the space of a year.

The experience of photographing life under such extreme conditions brought home to me how deeply vulnerable Africa is to environmental degradation and climatic events.

The San People



Old Kaece was one of the few San people to retain traditional hunting skills. Here he carries a springhare back to his village.

November 1997.

Across southern Africa the traditional lifestyle of hunter-gatherers, known as San people (or 'Bushmen'), is on the edge of extinction. A few communities, however, continue their attempts to be self-sufficient, supplementing whatever the land yields with a little cattle farming. I photographed in Makuri village, Namibia, where some connection to traditional practices has been retained.

This group are one of the fourteen known "ancestral population clusters" from which all modern humans descend. For the majority of these communities today, problems of discrimination and alcoholism are rife as they try to find ways to exist within the modern societies that have engulfed them.

The San People



A child rejoices in the arrival of the long-awaited summer rains. They came after a long drought and were the heaviest in the region for twenty years.

November 1997.

Troubled Waters



Fishing boats head out to sea during a daily fishing excursion from Kayar. The two boats work together dragging a net between them.

May 1995.

Kayar is one of the many fishing hubs that pepper the coastline of seafaring Senegal. At the time, there was increasing concern that growing numbers of international fishing trawlers in the area were jeopardising fish stocks and with them, the livelihoods of local fishermen. While Senegal's traditional fishing practices limit catch volumes to protect fish stocks, the indiscriminate capture of large fish volumes by European and Asian trawlers was leading to a widespread decline in overall fish numbers. To raise awareness about this issue, I wanted to document the traditional fishing practices of this area.

I went out to sea with the fishermen in their handcrafted boats and also spent time in the fish smoking fields, photographing the ways that the fish was caught, processed and then distributed within the community. Every part of a fish that was caught by these fishermen was used: fish were eaten fresh, smoked or dried, while the heads and skin were used as chicken feed.

Today, Senegal's fish stocks are in a highly depleted state and the long-term prospects for the country's artisanal fishermen look bleak.

The Ward



John and his partner embrace and kiss in his hospital bed. The acceptance and even encouragement of such intimacy was one of the more unusual aspects of life on this ward.

April 1993.

In 1993, I spent a number of weeks photographing the Broderip ward in London's Middlesex Hospital. This was the era before antiretroviral medications had become available, a very distinct and tragic time. All of the patients on the wards, many of whom were young, gay men, were facing the terrifying prospect of an early and painful death. These were some of the few dedicated AIDS wards that existed in London, even more unusual for their decision to open themselves to being photographed. Considering the high levels of stigma and fear that existed at the time, the decision of these four patients to allow themselves, alongside their families, lovers and friends to be photographed was an act of considerable bravery.

Treatment was not a passive process, but rather an active engagement on the part of the patients, who were often extremely knowledgeable about their condition. The staff, too, became far more attached to their patients than was commonplace in hospitals at the time.

All of the patients in these photographs died soon after the pictures were taken. They were the unlucky ones, who became sick just before treatment became available. This was my first encounter with HIV/AIDS, one that greatly impacted the course of my life and subsequent photographic journey.

The Ward



Steven is embraced and comforted by his friend Chris in the visitor's room.

April 1993.

The Ward



While André was in the ward for a routine treatment, he suddenly became critically ill. With his parent's alongside, he seemed to be about to die. In this instance he did actually pull through.

May 1993.

A Broken Landscape



In the early morning Dorika Gabriel carries her 33-year-old son Joseph out of their home in Bugarika village, near Mwanza in Tanzania, to sit in the shade.

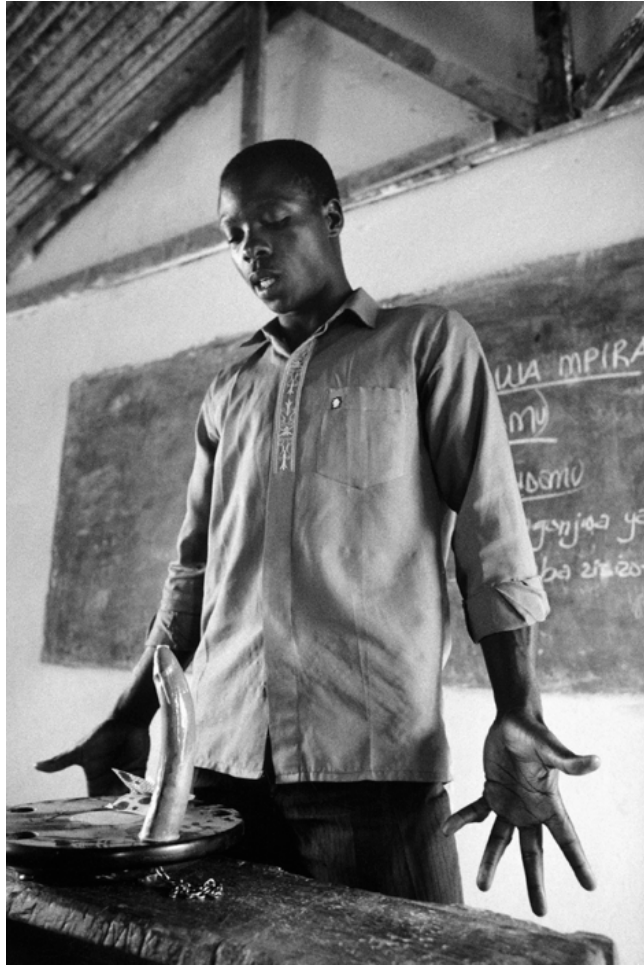
July 1997.

I began documenting the impacts of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa in the early 1990s when three quarters of the world's thirty-six million people living with HIV/AIDS were in the continent. It was a slow burning tragedy on a monumental scale; one that was quietly decimating some of the poorest nations on Earth.

What seemed most important was to bring the human face of this disease to the fore. To do so, I tried to get as close as possible to the people and communities I was documenting. The work reflects the darkness of a time drenched in fear and stigma for those affected.

Today, thirty years on, a great number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Africa are able to access medication. However, many still face conditions similar to those documented here.

A Broken Landscape



A member of a church youth group demonstrates the correct way to use a condom to avoid contracting HIV from sexual intercourse during a peer educator training session near Bukoba.

July 1997.

A Broken Landscape



Ignacious Ngulu and Gibson Mufwayo build a child's coffin. They were members of the Kamitondo Youth Coffin-Making Cooperative in Kitwe, in the Copperbelt region of Zambia. With more than twenty percent of pregnant women in this area testing HIV-positive, they were constantly being called upon to provide coffins for children and babies who had died from AIDS-related infections.

September 2000.

A Broken Landscape



A Zulu woman carries groceries back to her village in the Hlabisa District of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, after walking more than 7km. This area has huge social problems and one of the world's highest levels of HIV in its population. In 1992, when this picture was taken, 13 percent of pregnant women in the area tested positive for HIV. By 2004, prevalence among pregnant women in this part of South Africa had climbed to 40.7 percent.

September 1992.

Battle of Claremont Road



A summer street scene on Claremont Road, where the atmosphere was usually tolerant and welcoming to various elements who supported the protest. There was occasional tension between hardcore more political barricaders and the “lunch out” elements, attracted by free communal catering and Claremont’s easy-going atmosphere.

August 1994.

This creative occupation of a suburban East London street was part of the ongoing anti-roads movement in the UK during the 1990s. The houses of Claremont Road, which were due to be demolished to make way for the M11 link road, were squatted by an army of brightly coloured hippies, travellers and activists. This alternative community of protest survived for a few months before being evicted, and their anarchic spirit made it a wonderful place to photograph.

The demonstrations, which were described as an inspirational model of creative resistance, were characterised by many fundamental principles of peaceful protest: physical occupation, passive resistance, artistic improvisation and, of course, parties. Protesters put themselves into positions in which they could not be moved: tying themselves to trees, erecting precarious nets across the road, and locking themselves to building machinery, rooftops and many other structures that were earmarked for demolition.

Having photographed many brutal and violent conflicts elsewhere in the world, I was charmed by the peaceful nature of this environmental protest and the restraint that made itself visible on both sides. This was also the beginning of my engagement with environmental issues.

Battle of Claremont Road



With the threat of final eviction from Claremont Road becoming imminent, many supporters had spent a tense and uncomfortable night on the rooftops. As dawn broke demolition crews arrived and began to clear the street.

November 1994.

Framing AIDS



Anonymous was a university student at Maputo University in Mozambique. Due to the extreme stigma associated with his status, he chose to not include any of his clothes in the photograph in case they might identify him.

September 2001.

This project was born out of the intense struggle for access to lifesaving HIV/AIDS treatment that took place in South Africa in the early 2000s. Until this point I had been a concerned photojournalist, working in black and white. However, with this project I became a visual activist, keen to create images that might impact the struggle more directly. I began to work in colour, to make images that were more accessible and positive.

Together with the Treatment Action Campaign, I developed a visual installation at the National Gallery in Cape Town. Central to the installation was this “frame series”: an improvised frame, made from black tape on a wall, which had become a conceptual tool for engagement with these issues.

The inside of the frame provided a space through which subjects could make their own statements about HIV/AIDS, through their gesture or gaze. Some strongly wanted to challenge stigma and show their faces, while others did not wish to be identified and instead used objects or parts of their bodies to express themselves. In each case, their words formed a crucial element of the piece.

This process of relinquishing some of my own control over the photograph empowered the HIV-positive activists who filled the frames, and they became collaborators.

We Are Living Here



Nomphilo Mazuza, 27, a mother of two boys, had a CD4 count of just seven when she began her antiretroviral treatment. She was close to death and her body was heavily emaciated in a manner typical of the final stages of AIDS. She was painfully thin, very weak and was also struggling with multidrug-resistant TB. However she was determined to survive to care for her children and over time, her weight returned to normal and she recovered her health. Three years after beginning treatment, she was able to look after her sons as she wished to, and had dreams of becoming a nurse.

September 2004.

This image is from a body of work made with the Siyaphila La treatment project in Lusikisiki, a rural part of the Eastern Cape province in South Africa. Through the stories of a few individuals we were trying to demonstrate the effect that widespread access to lifesaving antiretroviral treatment could have on poor, rural communities struggling with HIV. The project challenged the social stigma associated with HIV/AIDS by changing the outcomes of infection through treatment. Instead of dreading the disease as a killer—something to be denied rather than faced—the people of Lusikisiki began to see it as a manageable chronic illness.

My aim was to explore, at a very personal level, the meaning of access to treatment through its impact on Lusikisiki's inhabitants over time. While this project began as a National Geographic assignment, I continued beyond that, making a series of four visits to the community over a period of three years.

The stories of each of the individuals began at the start of their treatment and then followed the changes that took place in their lives over the following years. Each had taken the brave decision to share their experiences publicly, to help fight the disease and to prevent others from being infected.

Dzhangal



Eighty-four Toothbrushes

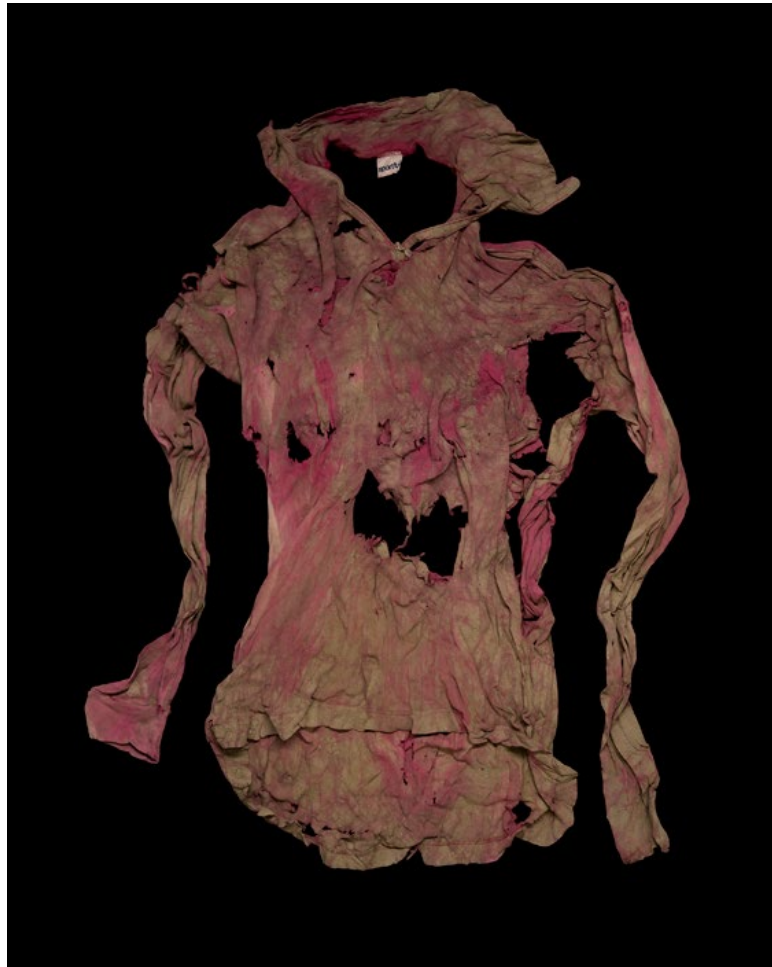
Collected May, September and October 2016.

I travelled to the “Jungle” refugee and migrant camp in Calais several times before its demolition in October 2016. I was tasked with teaching photography to some camp residents as part of a collaborative documentary project. I discovered that many refugees were hostile towards the camera, fearing that being identified could undermine their asylum claims and lead to deportation. They were sceptical that photography would ameliorate their situation, and I came to share their reservations, feeling that photography was failing in the face of the enormity of the refugee crisis, and that excessive photographic coverage was potentially more exploitative than helpful.

My response was to turn my attention to lost, discarded and damaged objects on the ground, collecting them and trying to understand the patterns that emerged. Back at my home in London I set about forensically photographing these found objects as if they were precious archaeological artefacts that might help us make sense of the complex relationships and politics of the place.

The encampment’s contentious name was derived from the Pashtun word *dzhangal*, meaning “this is the forest.” The “Jungle” was home to between 7,000 and 10,000 people living in squalid conditions. Most of them hoped to cross the English Channel illegally and claim asylum in Britain.

Dzhangal



Sportful Fleece

Collected September 2016.

Drowning World; Submerged Portraits



João Pereira de Araújo
Taquari District
Rio Branco
Brazil

March 2015.

Drowning World is my attempt to explore the effects of climate change in an intimate and systematic way, to show that the effects of climate change ignore all delineations of wealth, class, race and geography.

A sequence of ‘*Submerged Portraits*’ is the heart of the project. My subjects have taken the time – in a situation of great distress – to engage the camera, looking out at us from their inundated homes and devastated environments. They are not disempowered victims in this exchange: they show agency amidst the calamity that has befallen them.

I began this work in 2007 when I photographed two floods that occurred within weeks of each other, one in the UK and the other in India. I was struck by the contrasting impacts of these floods, and the linked vulnerability that seemed to unite my subjects. Since then I have endeavoured to visit flood zones around the world. In total I have made twenty-two flood response trips to thirteen different counties.

This project includes some of the poorest and wealthiest communities on this planet, all exposed to the floodwater that envelops them. In this circumstance the floods are a levelling factor: the lives and fates of these individuals become linked and they are brought together in visual solidarity.

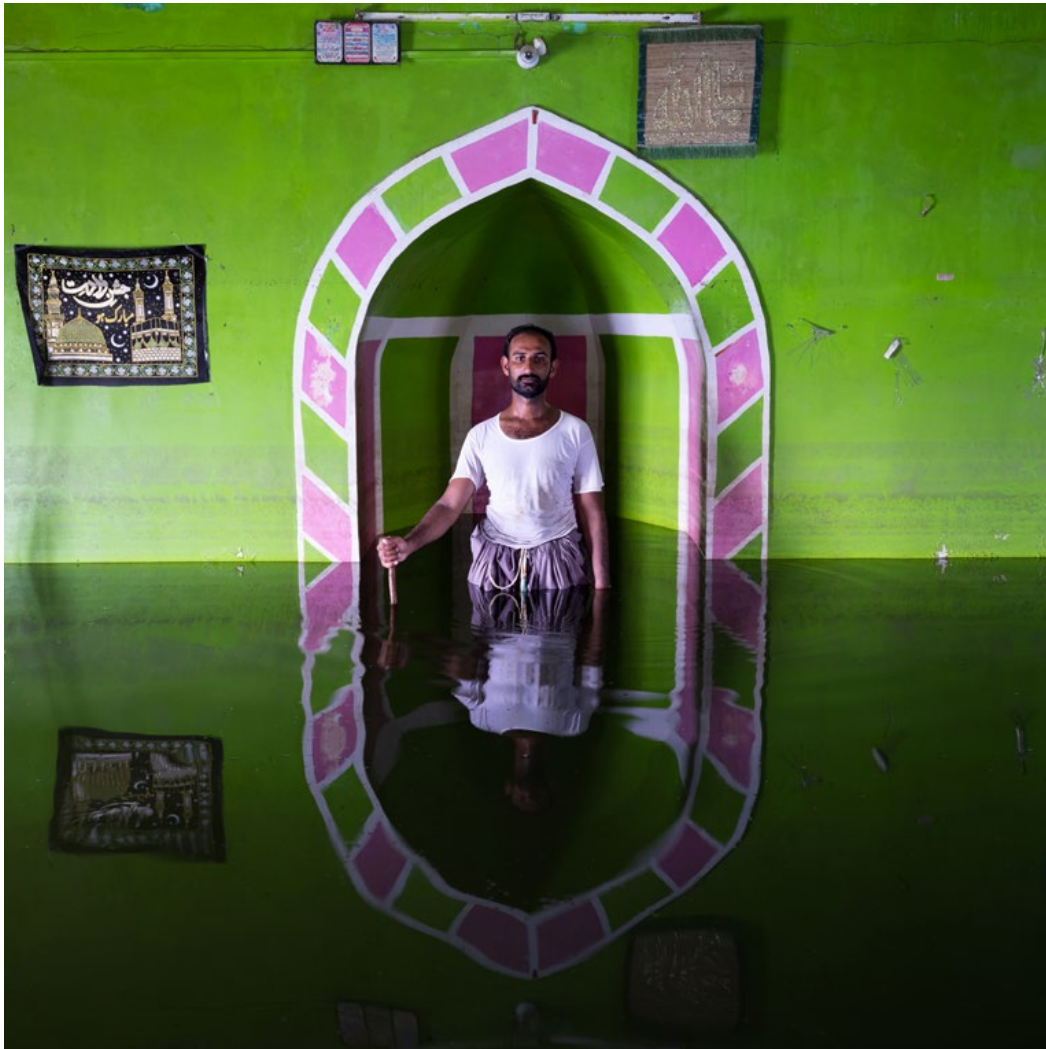
Drowning World; Submerged Portraits



*Eruabai Ase
Otuaba
Ogbia Municipality
Bayelsa State
Nigeria*

November 2022.

Drowning World; Submerged Portraits



*Amjad Ali Laghari
Goth Bawal Khan Village
Sindh Province
Pakistan*

September 2022.

Drowning World; Submerged Portraits



*Florence Abraham
Igbogene
Bayelsa Stte
Nigeria*

November 2012.

Drowning World; Submerged Portraits



*Jeff and Tracey Waters
Staines-Upon-Thames
Surrey
UK*

February 2014.

Drowning World; Floodlines



*The Home of John Jackson
Toll Bar Village
South Yorkshire
UK*

June 2007.

In a flooded landscape, reality can seem inverted and normality seems suspended. Surreal reflections appear in unlikely situations. This series records the invasive presence of water by following the *Floodline* it creates as it moves through intimate living quarters and public spaces. Within this liquid landscape I find myself drawn to making images with a precise symmetry, using the repeated line to bisect the photographic frame. Through creating this tense paradox of visual calm within the chaos of our climate crisis, my intent is to challenge our sense of stability in the world.

I have often been challenged for making images of traumatic situations that are so aesthetically pleasing and precisely composed. But that is the intention. Through making beautiful images, we can draw people to really look at and consider these lives, gravely disrupted as they are by our global climate crisis.

Over the years of making this work the global geopolitical situation in relation to our climate emergency has become increasingly urgent. As we experience extreme weather events, driven by climate change, we also see ever-more aggressive denialism (often espoused by populist leaders); a global political system incapable of taking meaningful action; and petro-carbon corporations that are resistant to adopting the most minor measure to reduce carbon emissions. In the face of this, I feel a personal responsibility to make this project speak as loudly as possible.

Drowning World; Floodlines



*Greater Evangelical World Crusade Church
Otuoke
Ogbia Municipality
Bayelsa State
Nigeria*

November 2022.

Burning World; Portraits in Ashes



*Jenni Bruce
Upper Brogo
New South Wales
Australia*

January 2020.

As global temperatures rise, this work is my response to the unprecedented increase in the extremity of wildfires around the world. Since the start of 2020 I have travelled to Australia, Greece, Canada and the USA to document the aftermath of fires that had destroyed homes, killed numerous people and burnt millions acres of land. All these areas had experienced some of their highest temperatures ever recorded, precipitating these infernos. One of my subjects described fleeing from a “fire breathing monster, spitting flames everywhere.”

I choose not to document the burning flames, but rather to seek out their aftermath, the traces left behind on lives and landscapes.

The *Portraits in Ashes* series is the central narrative thread in this body of work. Framed by the skeletons of their burnt homes my subjects pause and engage the camera inviting us to engage with the devastated world that surrounds them. To quote Sharyn Wotton, who I photographed in Australia: “We’ve pissed Mother Nature off big time, and she’s paying us back.”

Burning World; Portraits in Ashes



*Rhonda Rossbach, Derek Briemand and Autumn Briemand
Killiney Beach
British Columbia
Canada*

October 2021.

Burning World; Portraits in Ashes



*Uncle Noel Butler and Trish Butler
Nura Gonyu Indigenous Education Centre
New South Wales
Australia*

February 2020.

Burning World; Scorched Topographies



*Olive Groves
Agia Anna Region Evia Island Greece*

August 2021.

These are some of the natural and urban landscapes I have encountered that have been devastated by extreme 'mega-fires' as temperatures rise around the world. With ghostly charred remains we get a visceral sense of the impact of our global climate emergency.

Bushfires are not unusual and are frequently part of a natural ecological cycle as many of these forests evolved alongside fire. But, fuelled by warmer, drier conditions and an overabundance of parched vegetation there is an increasing frequency of firestorms which burn more ferociously consuming nearly everything in their path. The intensity and size of the conflagration leads to the creation of its own weather system which trapping heat and generating strong winds, fireballs and lightning strikes becomes unstoppable.

In these high severity burns, shrubs and stumps are reduced to ash, the soil itself changes and even beneath the ground tree roots are burned. The resulting 'moonscapes' can take many years to regenerate. Climate change is the main culprit in increasing the intensity of fires but it has not acted alone. A long history of ignoring the advice of indigenous communities and suppressing natural fire, the kind needed to keep forests healthy, has only made the problem worse.

Burning World; Scorched Topographies



*Tea-tree forest
Mallacoota
New South Wales Australia*

March 2020.

Burning World; Climate Artefacts



*Nikon Cameras
From the home of Terry Murphy
Sunflower Street
Louisville
Colorado*

Collected in March 2022.

The *Climate Artefacts* series presents a physical archive of fire-damaged objects that I have collected, most of them gifted to me by the individuals I photographed at their burnt homes. A crucial part of this collection is a set of Nikon cameras from the home of Terry Murphy, a collector whose home in Colorado was one of the 1,080 homes destroyed by the Marshall Fire on the last day of 2021. I chose to bring this collection into a still life studio to photograph forensically with no visible background.

These cameras present an extreme irony; items that were designed to record the world on film have instead come to bear the marks of climate change in their physically incinerated materiality. My intention is for these images to function as both evidence and metaphor.

As we start to experience the heat of the world's climate emergency right here and right now, these objects pose the question of how archaeologists of the future might struggle to understand the self-destructive behaviour that is threatening our life and future on this planet.

Freedom or Death; Damage



*A rally welcoming the SWAPO Party of Namibia's leader Sam Nujoma on his return to Namibia after thirty years in exile.
Original image: 1989*

Found, scanned and reframed: 2018.

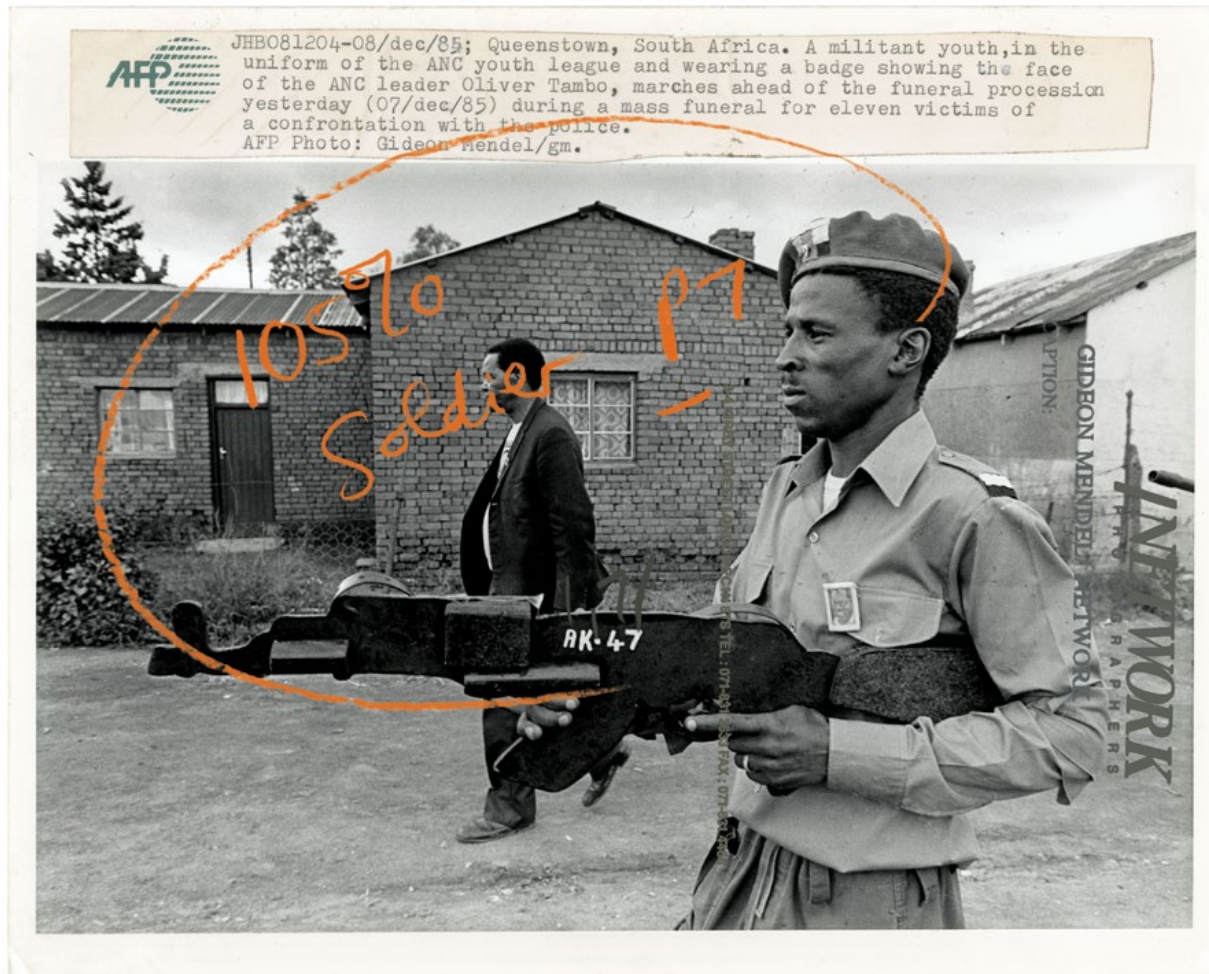
In the 1980s I was part of a young generation of 'struggle photographers' in South Africa, documenting the fight against apartheid. It was a moment where the hegemony and power of the apartheid state seemed insurmountable in all its brutality, yet I documented such heroic idealism and bravery as the townships became 'ungovernable'.

In 1990 I left a box of negatives in storage in Johannesburg, and subsequently forget about them. A few years ago they were returned to me and I discovered that at some point in their many years of neglect, the box had been rained on, and the top layers had been affected by both moisture and mould.

I was struck by the fact that the interventions that overlay my original photographs are happenstance, completely random impacts of time and water. The images still carry the power of those scenes I documented all those years ago, yet their corruption and damage seem to magnify that energy.

At the start of my lifelong photographic journey I witnessed many intense and traumatic events, but chose not to take the time to 'process' them psychologically. Like these negatives, I left them packed away. I feel that they are now striking physical objects, their distortion speaking to a deeper truth beyond their original documentary format.

Freedom or Death; Merged



Original image: 1985.

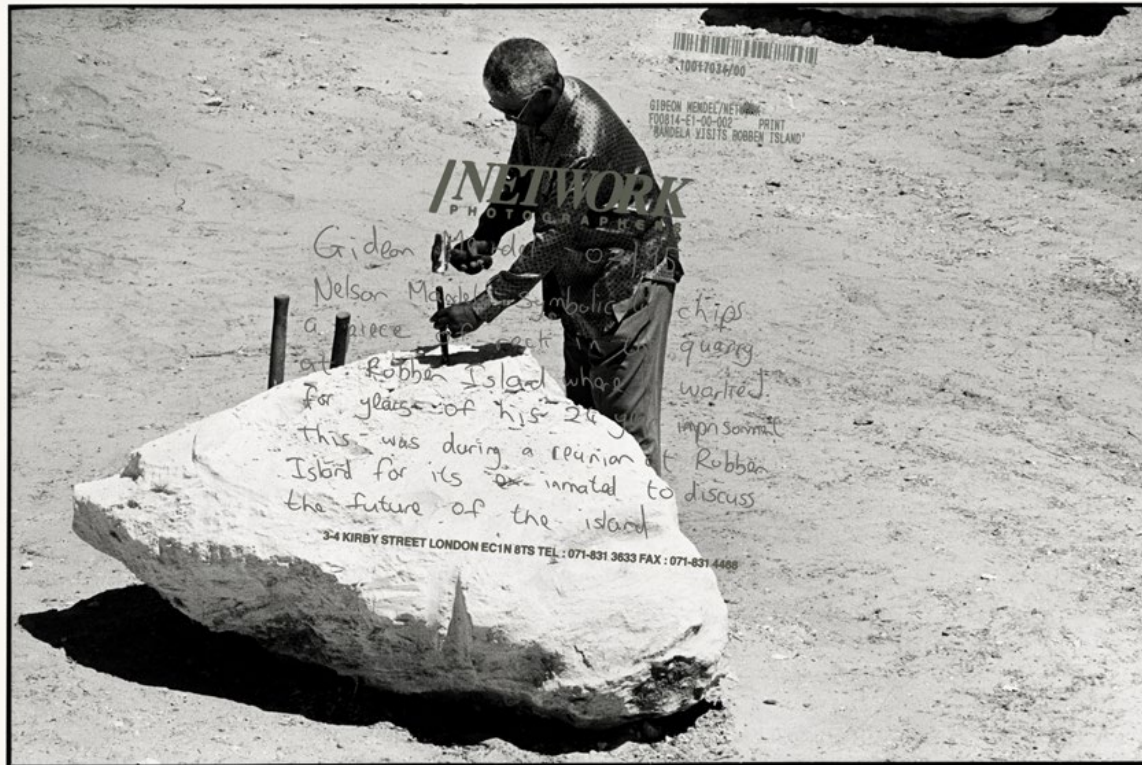
Merged: 2018.

These images are derived from my archive of vintage press prints from my time as a news photographer in South Africa in the 1980s. For this intervention in my archive I chose to precisely digitally merge the front and reverse of the physical prints to create a superimposed combination of image, word and marking.

Several of the images were made for news wire transmission in the pre-internet era when caption information was pasted onto the front of the prints. Many of these photographs were also published in the left-wing Weekly Mail newspaper, the original prints showing a variety of crop marks on their reverse sides. Some have my hand written captions. Others have agency copyright labels. All this visual clutter, normally hidden on the back, is now in full view and becomes part of the image.

These merged images show how at the time these prints were commodities; objects that were made and used at a particular and uniquely charged moment in South African history.

Freedom or Death; Merged



Original image: 1992.

Merged: 2018.

Artist Statement

I began working as a photographer in South Africa in 1984, during some of the darkest days of apartheid. This experience defined my lifelong approach to photography and inspired me to seek out ways to engage creatively with social issues. I maintain the belief that photography can be both a beautiful art form and a tool for positive impact in the world.

Developing my projects over long periods of time, I have established an approach that is personal and deeply political, positioned somewhere between documentary, photojournalism, art and activism. My intention has always been to challenge viewers by pushing boundaries, translating issues of global concern into work that might evoke both an emotional response and practical action.

Looking back at my forty years as a photographer I am proud that my images have been seen in a huge variety of contexts; from newspaper and magazine pages to gallery installations to large-scale billboards and protest banners.

I am now in the position that a new generation is discovering my work, which I see as a huge responsibility. With the passing of time, many photographs have taken on additional meaning and renewed relevance, the likes of which I could never have predicted at the moment of making.

I have a strong sense of what I need to achieve in the next few years while I can still operate at full capacity while undertaking physically demanding work. I feel an urgent imperative to continue documenting our global climate emergency. This could involve more work in response to fires and flood, but I hope to move my photography into a new area and document drought, another impact of climate change that is devastating millions of people around the world.

In contrast to this I am also in the early stages of developing a major new project, possibly my most difficult to date that turns my gaze inward, exploring the complexity of family history, memory and trauma. This has been driven by the gradual uncovering of a vast personal family archive of albums, documents and letters that reflect many generations of German Jewish life and the violence enacted upon my family in the 20th century. My parents were both German Jews who escaped to South Africa shortly before the onset of the Second World War. My grandfather perished in the trenches of the First World War (fighting for Germany) and my grandmother was murdered at Treblinka Concentration Camp.

I am coming to understand the links between my drive as a photographer to document pain in the contemporary world and the pain that is evident in this archive. The legacy of emotional damage that has been passed on paradoxically has enabled me repeatedly to represent the trauma of others. My parents tried so hard to isolate their family from any feeling, which I have discovered was a common reaction amongst those who narrowly escaped the Holocaust. Perhaps this is why I am drawn to document scenes of intense emotion. What I cannot allow myself to feel in my inner world draws me towards documenting distress in the wider world.

The immigration to South Africa is a crucial part of my family story and I am acutely aware of the irony that I grew up with all the benefits of being white under apartheid in a racist South African society while also being the child of refugees from the Holocaust. In this archive we see the shifting identities of my parents from 'good assimilated Germans', to 'bad disposable Jews' and finally secure white South Africans, complicit in apartheid but uncomfortable with it, having been repositioned within a racial hierarchy not unlike the one they had fled.

My engagement with such an intensely personal archive is not a departure from my on-going work as a photographer. Without me being consciously aware of it, archival practice has been a growing element in my work so engaging with a family archive makes complete sense in the arc of my own creative development, a destiny of sorts.

In recent years I have also begun the difficult process of interrogating my own practice and archive, through the lens of power and white privilege. In my early South African work I was able to place myself extremely close to shocking instances of brutality using a wide-angle lens, giving the images an unsettling intimacy. A black photographer would never have been allowed to get so close, and might justifiably have been fearful of doing so. My 'whiteness' and my assumption of a right to be wherever I wanted to be was undoubtedly a factor in making this work. I am also acutely aware that I am one of a long line of white, usually male photographers who have depicted black lives and black bodies in Africa, from the outside, looking in.

In my new engagement with my archive I anticipate a dialogue where I will be examining the vectors of history and power that go into emerge from my sometimes contested collection of photographs.

BIOGRAPHY

Gideon Mendel's intimate approach to image-making and long-term commitment to socially engaged projects has earned international recognition. Born in Johannesburg in 1959, Mendel began his career as a news and 'struggle' photographer documenting the final years of apartheid. This experience marked him deeply, and much of his subsequent work has been engaged with the key issues facing his generation. In 1991 he moved to London, and continued to respond to global concerns, especially HIV/ AIDS.

Since 2007, using stills and video, Mendel has been working on *Drowning World*; an art and advocacy project about flooding that is his personal response to our climate crisis. His work has been widely published in magazines and newspapers including *National Geographic*, *Geo* and the *Guardian Weekend*. His images have been used in climate protests while his photographs; installations and video pieces are increasingly shown in gallery and museum contexts.

Mendel has received the inaugural Jackson Pollock Prize for Creativity and the Greenpeace Photo Award. Shortlisted for the Prix Pictet in 2015 and 2019, he has also received the Eugene Smith Award for Humanistic Photography, the Amnesty International Media Award, and six World Press Awards.

Mendel has in recent years extended his work on global warming to include the element of fire with his *Burning World* project. In his ongoing practice he continues, where possible, to make work in situations of climate disaster, such as the Pakistan floods of 2022 along with a new engagement with his personal family archive reflecting the trauma of his parents escape from Nazi Germany.

CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL DETAILS

Born on 31 August, 1959 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts from the University of Cape Town with Majors in African Economic History and Psychology.

AWARDS

2022	Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant
2021	Head On Portrait Award
2019	Shortlist for Prix Pictet 2019 (Hope)
2016	Greenpeace Photo Award 2016 (Jury Prize) Jackson Pollock Award for Creativity
2015	Shortlist for Prix Pictet 2015 (Disorder) Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant
2002	Amnesty International Media Award for Photojournalism

2000	World Press Photo: Honorable Mention, Daily Life
1998	World Press Photo: 2 nd Prize, Arts and Entertainment
1997	World Press Photo: 1 st Prize, General News Stories World Press Photo: 1 st Prize, Nature Stories Nikon Press Award: 1 st Prize, Stories
1996	W. Eugene Smith Award for Humanistic Photography
1995	World Press Photo: 2 nd Prize, Nature Stories
1994	Pictures of the Year: 1 st Prize, Photo Essay
1993	World Press Photo: 1 st Prize, Sports Stories
1991	World Press Photo: 2 nd Prize, People in the News stories

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2023	<i>The Ward Revisited</i> (a video installation) at The Fitzrovia Chapel, London, UK.
2022	<i>Fire / Flood</i> at the Soho Photographers Quarter, part of The Photographers Gallery, London, UK. <i>Burning World</i> at Festival Internazionale Di Fotogiornalismo, Padua, Italy.
2021	<i>Drowning World</i> at the Journalism Festival, Innsbruck, Austria. <i>Drowning World</i> at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, Philadelphia, USA. <i>Submerged Portraits</i> at the Ballarat International Photo Biennale, Australia. <i>Drowning World</i> at the Riapertura Photo Festival, Ferrara, Italy. <i>By Fire and by Flood</i> at Merignac Photo 2021.
2020	<i>Freedom or Death</i> at ARTCO Gallery, Cape Town. <i>Fire and Flood</i> at ARTCO Gallery, Berlin. <i>2METRES</i> at Cortona on the Move Festival.
2019	<i>Damage</i> at The Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg. <i>Drowning World</i> at Zone-I Gallery, France. <i>Drowning World</i> at Festival du Regard, France. <i>Drowning World</i> at Cortona on the Move, Italy. <i>Drowning World</i> at Intime Literary Festival, Belgium. <i>Deluge</i> at the Solidarités Music Festival, Belgium.
2018	<i>Drowning World</i> at the Kyotographie Festival, Japan. <i>Drowning World</i> at MOMA Jacksonville. <i>Drowning World</i> at PhotoFest Gallery, Houston. <i>Drowning World</i> at the Ray Triennial, Frankfurt. <i>Drowning World</i> at Horizonte Zingst, Germany. <i>Drowning World</i> at the Institute of Humanities Gallery, UMich. <i>Drownin World</i> at the Landskrona Festival, Sweden.
2017	<i>Drowning World</i> at Les Rencontres de la Photographie, Arles. <i>Drowning World</i> at WAM (Wits Art Museum), Johannesburg. <i>Drowning World</i> at Kaunas Photo, Lithuania. <i>Drowning World</i> at JI, Marseilles, France. <i>Dzhangal</i> at Autograph ABP, London. <i>The Ward</i> at the Fitzrovia Chapel, London.
2016	<i>Drowning World</i> at 'Points of Departure', part of the Estuary Festival. <i>Drowning World</i> at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at MSU.

Drowning World at LagosPhoto 2016.
Drowning World at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul.
Drowning World at the Jaipur Photo 2016.
 2015 *Drowning World* at Lianzhou Festival, China.
Drowning World billboard exhibition in Paris prior to COP21
Drowning World-UK, Plymouth Arts Centre, Plymouth.
Drowning World, PhotoFestival Naarden, The Netherlands.
 2014 *Drowning World*, Queen's Park station (Contacting Toronto Festival),
Living in Yeoville Revisited, Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg.
Drowning World 'Picture Windows' installation. ICP, New York.
 2013 *Drowning World*, Tiwani Contemporary. London.
Drowning World. 'After Photography' festival in Montevideo.
 2012 *Drowning World*, Somerset House East Wing Gallery.
 2009 *Kingsmead Eyes* with Kingsmead School, V&A Museum of Childhood.
 2001 *A Broken Landscape* and *Facing AIDS*, Museum Africa.
A Broken Landscape and *Facing AIDS*, SANG
 2000 *A Broken Landscape* HIV and AIDS in Africa, Oxo Tower, London.
 1998 *A Broken Landscape. HIV and AIDS in Africa*, The Spitalfields Gallery.
 1997 *A Broken Landscape. HIV/AIDS in Africa*. Perpignan Photo Festival
 1993 *Waiting for Rain: Drought in Zimbabwe*. Perpignan Photo Festival
 1989 *Belooofde Land (Promised Land)* Market Photo Gallery, Johannesburg.
 1988 *Living in Yeoville*, Market Photo Gallery, Johannesburg.
 1986 *The Struggle*, Market Photo Gallery, Johannesburg.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023 *The Future, Agency in a Globalised World* at the Villa Rot, Burgrieden, Germany.
Consolation: In the Footsteps of Human Need at the Muecum of Sepulchral Culture, Kassel, Germany.
 2022 *Cartographies of Becoming* at The Sylt Foundation Gallery, Sylt, Germany.
Coal and Ice at the Kennedy Centre, Washington, USA
 2021 *Raining Embers* at the Ballarat International Photo Biennale, Australia.
The Horizon is Moving Nearer at The Portuguese Centre for Photography, Porto.
 2019 *50 Years Collection* at Les Rencontres de la Photographie, Arles
 Prix Pictet, *Hope*, at the V&A, London and touring.
 2018 *The World to Come* at the Harn Museum of Art, Florida.
Coal and Ice at Fort Mason, San Francisco.
 2017 *Through Positive Eyes*. Durban Art Gallery and touring.
 2016 *Drowning World* at The Edge of the Earth: Climate Change in Photography and Video. Ryerson Image Center, Toronto.
The Water Chapters at 'Weather or Not' (The art of Climate Change) at the MU Gallery in Eindhoven, Holland.
Drowning World at 'What Next-Picture Tomorrow' 38CC Gallery Delft
Through Positive Eyes Collaboration Durban Art Gallery.
 2015 Prix Pictet, *Disorder*, Musée d'Art Moderne Paris and touring.
 2014 *Lost World (video art)* The Freer and Sackler Gallery, Washington DC
Forecast Anderson Gallery at VCU.

2013 *Times of Struggle* (UK and South Africa) Double Negative Galery, ICP Triennial, *A Different Kind of Order*
 2012 ICP, Haus der Kunst and touring, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid The ART Show*, The Museum Africa and touring in South Africa.
The ART Show Smithsonian Folklife Festival, The National Mall.
 2010 *Not Alone*, The Castle, Iziko Museum of Cape Town.
 2009 Lucy Florence Art Gallery, Los Angeles, *13 Love Stories*
 2008 *Make Art Stop AIDS* The Fowler Museum in LA and touring.
Historias Positivas Cento Banimex, Mexico City.
 2006 *The Body at Risk* ICP, New York.
 1993 *Positive Lives*. Photographers Gallery, London.

MONOGRAPHS

2017 *The Ward* published by Trolley Books
 2017 *Dzhangal* published by GOST
 2001 *A Broken Landscape: HIV and AIDS in Africa* (edited by Chris Boot)

VIDEO/FILM

2018 The *Deluge* five channel video installation part of *Drowning World* exhibitions at Kyotographie, MOCA Jacksonville, PhotoFest Gallery and the Institute of Humanities Galley, UMICH.
 2017 *Water Chapters* film part of the *Drowning World* exhibition in Arles.
 2016 *Water Chapters* film part of *Drowning World* exhibition at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at MSU.
 2015 *Water, Chapters 10 and 11* shown at the Plymouth Arts Centre
Drowning World-UK show.
 Two-channel projection of *Water, Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 facing Water, Chapters 10, 11 and 12* at the Lianzhou Festival, China.
 2014 *Water, Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9* shown at the Freer and Sackler Gallery in Washington.
 2013 *Water, Chapters 6 and 7* shown at the ICP Triennial in New York and at Tiwani Contemporary in London.
 2012 Curator Okwui Ewenzor commissioned *Living in Yeoville* for the Rise and Fall of Apartheid exhibition.
Through Positive Eyes, a short film is shown as part of the opening plenary session of the 2012 Global HIV/AIDS Conference in Washington.
 2011 *Kingsmead Eyes Speak*, a film made with pupils from Kingsmead Primary School shown at the Open Cities Documentary Festival and the East End Film Festival in London.
Living with Floodwaters, a short video about flooding in Bangkok was shown on MSNBC and is voted a 'staff pic' on Vimeo.
 2009 *Kingsmead Eyes*, a film made with pupils from Kingsmead Primary School was shown at the V&A Museum of Childhood and at the New York Photo Festival.
 2005 *AIDS orphans in Swaziland* broadcast on BBC Newsnight.
 2003 *The Harsh Divide*, a series of four short films about access to HIV Treatment broadcast on Channel 4 in the UK.

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

The International Centre of Photography (ICP)
 The South African National Gallery (SANG)
 FRAC Réunion
 Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG)
 MOCA Jacksonville
 WAM (Wits Art Museum)
 Les Rencontres de la Photographie, Arles

MAJOR MAGAZINE AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS

2022 The Guardian Weekend Magazine: *Climate Artefacts*
 BBC Africa: *Drowning World* (Nigeria)
 2021 National Geographic Online: Australia Fires (One Year on)
 2020 The Guardian Weekend Magazine, *Fires in Australia*
 National Geographic Online, *Fires in Australia*
 2019 Aperture Magazine, *The Watermarks from Drowning World*
 2018 Geo Magazine, *Drowning World*
 Foam Magazine, *Drowning World*
 The Guardian Weekend Magazine, *Fires in California*
 Fotografi (Norway), *Drowning World*
 2017 6Mois, *Drowning World*
 The Guardian Weekend Magazine, *Floods in Texas and Florida*
 2016 ArtAfrica, *Filming But Drowning*
 Vrij Nederland, *Drowning World*
 Musée Magazine, *Issue Chaos. Drowning World*
 2015 National Geographic, *Drowning World*
 The Guardian Weekend Magazine, *Migrants on Crossing the Med*
 The Guardian Weekend Magazine, *Drowning World*
 Photoworld (China), *Floodlines from Drowning World*
 2014 The Guardian Weekend Magazine, *Three Feet High and Rising*
 2013 The Independent on Sunday Magazine, *Drowning World*
 The Guardian Weekend Magazine, *Tacloban Disaster*
 2009–2012 Through Positive Eyes website: www.throughpositiveeyes.org
 2011 Kingsmead Eyes Speak website: www.kingsmeadeyesspeak.org
 2010 The Guardian Weekend Magazine, *Forgotten, But Not Gone*
 2009 Guardian Weekend, *Proposition 8, Gay Couples in California*
 Guardian Weekend, *Think Positive*
 2008 German Geo, *Memory Boxes for HIV/AIDS*
 Guardian Weekend, *Flooding in Haiti*
 2007 The Guardian G2, *From Mother to Child*
 Equal Treatment, *Children and HIV*
 The Guardian G2, *A Tale of Two Floods*
 2006 The Guardian G2, *Soweto, 30 Years After the Uprising*
 The Guardian G2, *The Memory Box Project*
 Guardian Weekend, *I Look Like my Mother* (Pantomime Dames)
 Observer Magazine, *Happy Days* (A Hackney School)
 2005 Guardian Weekend Magazine, *Eight Women, One Voice*

National Geographic, *Living With AIDS*
 Guardian Weekend, *An Answer in Africa*
 2004 Guardian Weekend *The Children Left Behind*
 Sunday Times Magazine *Violated and Isolated* (Rwanda Women HIV)
 Living Proof 10th Anniversary of the International HIV/AIDS Alliance
 2003 Guardian Weekend, *Salvation is Cheap*
 Positive Nation, *Facing AIDS in South Africa*
 National Geographic, *A Land Possessed* (Land Issues in Zimbabwe)
 2002 HIV Treatment Activist Poster Set made with MSF in South Africa
 Guardian Weekend. *Looking AIDS in the Face*
 2001 Guardian Weekend Magazine, *The Life Savers*
 2000 Guardian Weekend, *While the World Looks Away*
 L'Express, *Le Sida en Afrique*
 1999 Poster Campaign for the Terence Higgins Trust, *Fighting Stigma*
 POZ Magazine, *AIDS in Africa*
 Guardian Weekend Magazine, *Israel, State of the Nation*
 1998 Reportage Magazine Booklet, *A Broken Landscape*
 1997 Reportage Magazine. *Troubled Waters*
 Conde Naste Traveller. *Lost Tribe of the Kalahari*
 Focus Magazine, *AIDS in Africa*
 1996 Grands Reportages, *Koyasan, Japanese Village of Temples*
 Independent Magazine, *Days of Empire*
 Fortune Magazine, *Young Americans in Vietnam*
 Independent on Sunday, *The New Black Mayor of Ventersdorp*
 Greenpeace Magazine (Germany). *Senegalese Fishing Village*
 1995 Photographers International, *British Photography*
 Das Magazin, *King Goodwill Zwelithini*
 Reportage Magazine, *Claremont Road*
Claremont Road, A Festival of Resistance Publication
 The Open Book. *Publication for Crisis at Christmas*
 1994 Christian Aid Poster Campaign, *We Believe in Life Before Death*
 Reportage Magazine, *De Aar Elections*
 1993 The Independent Magazine, *A High School in Soweto*
 Tempo, *AIDS Ward, Middlesex Hospital*
 1993 Independent Magazine, *An Everyday Occurrence* (Zimbabwe HIV)
 Telegraph Magazine, *The death of the Zambian Football Team*
 1992 Independent Magazine, *Paradise Lost* (Return after Removals)
 1992 Tempo Magazine, *The Crisis of Somalia*
 Tempo Magazine, *London's Homeless*
 Merian, *Portrait of Johannesburg*
 1991 The Independent Magazine, *The Black Jews of Israel*
 1989 Leadership Magazine, *Promised Land*
 The Observer Magazine, *The British Who Choose South Africa*
 1988 Leadership Magazine, *Living in Yeoville*
 1987 Stern Magazine, *Forbidden Photos from South Africa*
Beyond the Barricades (Popular Resistance in South Africa)
 1986 Leadership Magazine, *Lines of Sight* (Images of the Struggle)