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**Ecotopian States, a Group exhibition.**

08 Sep 10 - 29 Sep 10

While in centuries past, nature was considered a wild and dangerous place from which humans needed to be protected, we are now forced to recognize the importance of protecting nature. Ecological accountability is presently one of the main ideologies and concerns of the 21st century. Ecotopian States, an exhibition to be presented at the UJ Art Gallery from 8 to 29 September 2010, examines the interaction between nature and living environment from a number of different and uniquely South African points of view.

Ecotopian States, deriving its title from Ernest Callenbach's seminal 1975 novel Ecotopia: the Notebook and Reports of William Weston, focuses specifically on the socio-political and economic factors that shape the unique approach this country takes to environmental initiatives such as recycling.

This exhibition, curated by Jacki McInnes, Spier winner of an artist residency in Brazil in 2010, includes works by some of South Africa's most prominent artists working to the theme of the degradation of our environment. Exhibiting artists include Willem Boshoff, Kim Gurney, Maja Marx, Lee-At Meyerov, Marcus Neustetter and Strijdom van der Merwe, with collaborative works from Jacki McInnes and John Hodgkiss, and Mario Marchisella and Marianne Halter.

According to McInnes South Africa is a paradoxical mixture of first world wealth, with all its attendant aspirations, mass unemployment, poverty and displacement. On the one hand, the wealthy minority has been quick to follow global trends in eco-consciousness; while on the other a disproportionately large sector of our population considers recycling a means to survival. South Africa's high recycling rate must, without doubt, be attributed to informal 'entrepreneurs'.

Willem Boshoff has been applying his art to the task of raising awareness to the destruction of the environment for many years. He uses a style of language in his art that acts to stonewall or subvert traditional terminology, thereby empowering disenfranchised social groups or raising ecological issues. Boshoff's chief sources of inspiration are dictionaries, botanical nomenclature and other scientific taxonomies, but he also makes abundant use of found objects and carved wooden shapes to symbolically refer to social or environmental contexts specific to South Africa.

Also using botanical referents is Kim Gurney. Her work explores the honey bee as an environmental indicator and reflects contemporary anxiety around environmental issues, while suggesting that alternative knowledge systems might offer new ways forward. In stark contrast, Jacki McInnes and John Hodgkiss focus their attention on a community of informal recyclers. Photographic images record their lived experience, while lead replicas of the recyclable trash they collect become tokens; both to the permanence of man's collective and devastating impact on the planet and to the positive environmental role played by informal recyclers.

Land artist Strijdom van der Merwe has for many years taken the landscape as his canvas. Subtle interventions into land, water and plant-life reveal the sheer beauty that surrounds us but simultaneously allude to the fragility of these systems and their vulnerability to mankind. Also preoccupied with land and the way in which man misshapes it is Marcus Neustetter. Current work documents the mechanical shaping of ski slopes with snow ploughs, metaphorically reminding us of man's relentless urge to control and contrive systems to his own advantage.

Maja Marx rethinks the essence and politics of the land. She disrupts traditional views and employs unusual presentation strategies to draw her viewers' attention to changing conditions and their likely effect. Lee-At Meyerov explores the intricate and complex power relations surrounding the notion of oil, from its signification as a potent marker of financial and political exchange to its more sinister entanglement with ethical issues surrounding human suffering, loss, decay, extinction and death.

Swiss artists Marianne Halter and Mario Marchisella stage an absurd performance in a Johannesburg suburb dominated by huge houses enclosed with extremely high walls. Their work reveals man's fixation with the attainment and fierce protection of material things. Residents focus inwardly on their own little 'chunk of real estate' and there is a sense that as long as their own private haven is preserved, the destruction of environment as a whole cannot impinge. It is a vain belief indeed.

Please visit [www.ecotopianstates.net](http://www.ecotopianstates.net) for exhibition updates and details.



The exhibition will be opened by Jeremy Wafer Associate Professor, School of the Arts, University of the Witwatersrand on Wednesday 8 September 2010 at 18 30 for 19 00. Please join the curator and artists for a walkabout on Saturday 18 September 2010 at 10 00.

Image: John Hodgkiss  
Hazardous objects – House 38 Photography

**Gallery details**

Name: UJ Art Gallery  
Phone: 011 559 2099  
Website: [www.ecotopianslates.net](http://www.ecotopianslates.net)