



Smokey Signals
from the Groot Karoo

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Art interactions in South Africa tend to concentrate in urban centres Johannesburg and Cape Town. But what about the space in between? That endless stretch of tarmac flanked by an ever-changing landscape, which connects these two cities?

The rural town of Richmond is exactly midway between HERE and THERE. It's a quiet space that carries the memories of many generations—personal memories, and also those of a broader, historical nature.

This location served as starting point for *Smokey Signals from the Groot Karoo*, an incubator of sorts for a group of diverse creative practitioners. Participants were selected for the quality of their art initiatives, as well as their ongoing commitment to dialogue and collaboration across physical borders. Most work was process-driven and produced in conversation with the landscape, but participants also delved into the emotional presence of this historically loaded space. Projects ranged from dance performances to sound experiments and oil paintings, and resulted in numerous collaborations that highlighted the interconnections between different geographic locations—a localised attempt at creating a denser cultural fabric.

These investigations within Richmond took place over two weeks and are recounted by the group on the following pages.

Liz Lessner

My work focuses on gesture, so I began the residency with some sculptural gestures made in clay. These were inspired by a book I was reading—The Story of an African Farm—which is set in the Karoo.

Adjusting to the vastness of the Karoo took some doing. The broad sky, the humbling and immense expanse of stars, the sweeping landscape—I felt cosmically small while immersed in these things. But it was not a depressing feeling; it was strangely comforting to feel part of a part of a part of a vast whole. These effects encouraged an openness to the landscape and a desire to work with the materials it provided (like barbs and rushes), as well as an appreciation of the other artists' processes and solutions. Nienke and Caoimhghin taught me to weave, and I also worked with natural materials I had seen Liza use. As I started incorporating these techniques, my sculptures reached completion. Collaborations arose naturally as common themes appeared in the course of making. Future plans for performances with Liliana and sculptural collaborations with Liza have their roots in this openness to place and people.

Liz Lessner is a sculptor and installation artist whose work stems from a framing of resonant gestures. She uses materials like scent, micro-controllers and clay to craft sensory and interactive objects.



