

CLAUDETTE SCHREUDERS



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TEXTS BY RORY BESTER, FAYE HIRSCH AND ANTJIE KROG



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Dustjacket *The Insider*, 2009

Page 1 *Mother of the Water*, 2001, pear wood,
enamel paint, height 30cm

Page 2 *Louise*, 1996, detail

Page 240 *Watermeisie*, 2003, avocado wood,
enamel paint, 80 x 24 x 24cm

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For Wouter and Trix Schreuders



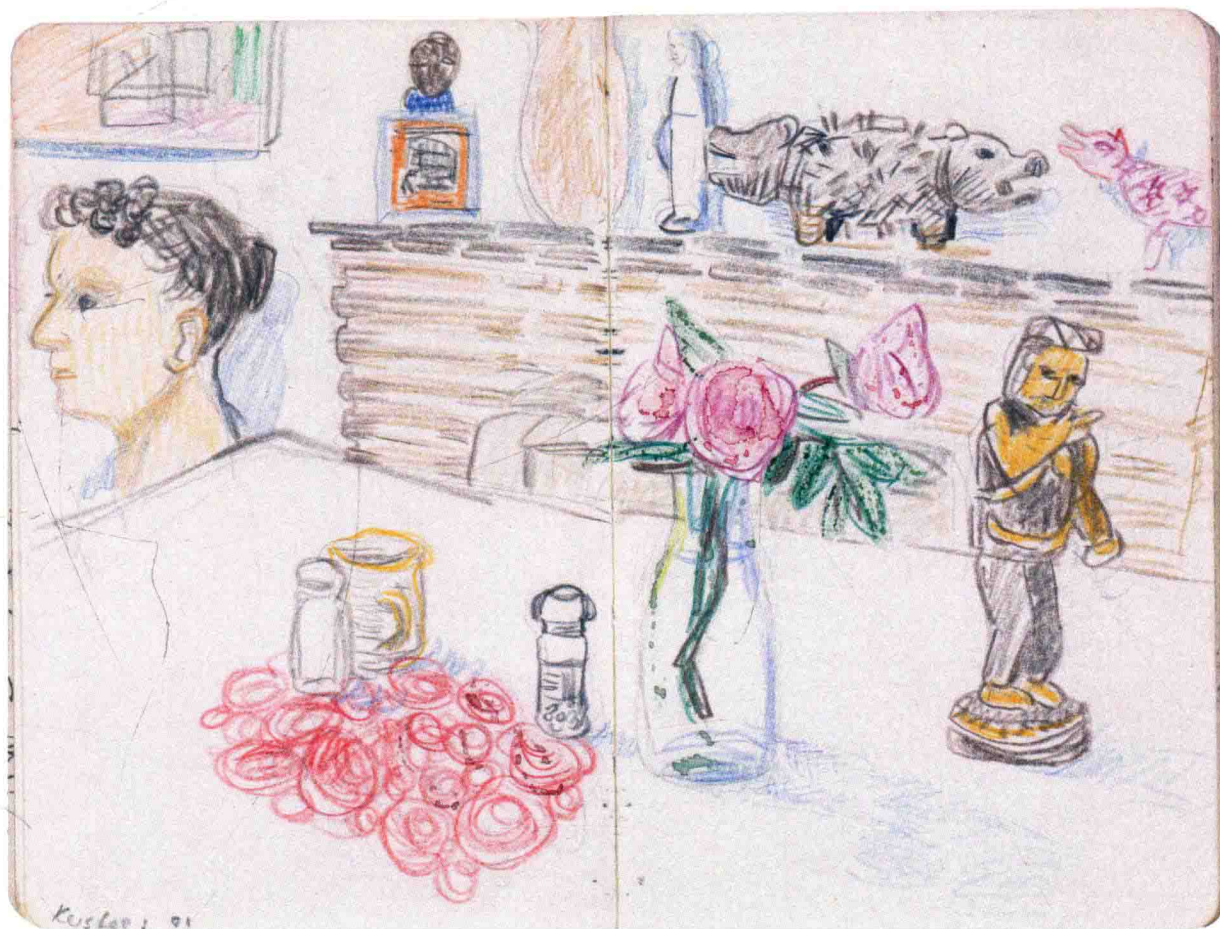
Claudette Schreuders in her studio at the Michaelis
School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, 1995

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Sketch of Bag Factory studio, Newtown,
Johannesburg, 2001, drawing book 8



'Kersfees' (Christmas), Linden, Johannesburg, 2001,
drawing book 8



CLAUDETTE SCHREUDERS AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF COMPLEXITY

RORY BESTER

Each of Claudette Schreuders' six major bodies of work encapsulates a phase in the artist's own life. *Family Tree* (1998), her graduate show, is preoccupied with experiences of family and life as a young adult. *Burnt by the Sun* (2001), produced at a time when she was completing residencies in Kenya and Nigeria, explores the impact of this travel on notions of self-identity in Africa. With Schreuders' work becoming increasingly exhibited and acclaimed, *Crying in Public* (2002) reflects on the complexities of emerging into a life in the world. *The Long Day* (2004), made in suburban Johannesburg, is an exploded view of the constrictions of residential living. Prompted by the birth of her first child and inspired by medieval representations of the biblical Eve, *The Fall* (2007) unfolds a story of love and creation. And lastly, *Close, Close* (2011) is full of the overwhelming presence of small children. It is no surprise then that Schreuders finds substance and meaning in this connection between life and art: "I enjoy art in which you can see the life where it comes from."¹

In exploring these different autobiographical phases, Schreuders makes extensive use of diary entries and sketchbook drawings. The sketchbooks are not only containers of what she sees and then draws, but also collations of photocopied references. They look inwards as well as outwards, ranging back into history and sideways across the layers of the social fabric around her. Sometimes these references will be kept for years before being used as the basis of a sculpture. Schreuders notes:

I think what I'm interested in is telling stories. It's portraiture, but it's a vehicle for telling a particular story, or the way in which society makes people who they are, or the group against the individual. As soon as you make a figure it has an identity ...²

In telling and repeating her stories, primarily in sculptural form, the artist navigates the narrative movements, tensions even, between private life and public perception, between what is hers and hers alone, and what is refigured to drift away in the ever-widening distances of public space.

Across the six bodies of work, there is little variation in Schreuders' sculptural style – stocky figures with slightly oversized heads and hands, carved in wood and painted with enamel and oil. They conform to the natural shape of the trunk of wood at hand, resulting in standing, sitting or lying figures with arms and legs relatively close to the body. She was inspired by the emotive use of faces and hands in German Expressionism, and made use of stocky proportions to give a doll-like quality to her figures. But their child-like emotive innocence is deceptive. The still quiet and apparent passivity of Schreuders' sculptures belies sharp insight and commentary on the private and public ordinariness of everyday life, and conjoins the personal, social and political with whispered lyricism.

Looking into the eyes of the figures shows nothing but vacant stares. Looking at the positions of the figures suggests rigidity, even paralysis of movement. The contradicting visual clues in the artist's style importantly underscore the narrative complexity of her subject matter. Don't judge a book by its cover, because all is not what it seems. To this end, Schreuders takes great care in the form and finishing of her work not to create any sense of realism, but rather to evoke a strong sense of believability in what the figures encapsulate and represent.

With some exceptions, Schreuders has produced each of her sculptures from a single block of wood: "When I started working in wood, I loved the limitation of the size of the piece of wood," she says. The resulting tube-like figurative quality, subtracted using a chainsaw and carving tools, implies an important reference: the *colon* figure.³ As found throughout West Africa, these small statues are depictions of Europeans or Africans in Western dress.⁴ While *colon* figures have always referenced European



Top Thumbnail sketches for *Close, Close* from the artist's diary, 2008
Bottom Thumbnail sketches for *The Long Day*, drawing book 10, 2002-2008