



A columbarium of words and a mode of locution

PIPPA SKOTNES

BIOGRAPHY

Pippa Skotnes was born in Johannesburg. She attended high school at Parktown Convent: the order of the Holy Family. This experience provided a wellspring of ideas, some of which materialised in her continuing artwork, *Lamb of God and the Book of Iterations* (2001-2011) which has been exhibited in Europe and the United States of America. She was educated at the University of Cape Town where she received Master of Fine Art and Doctor of Literature degrees. After she was sued by the South African Library for a copy of her artist's book about Lucy Lloyd and the !xam, *Sound From the Thinking Strings*, she became deeply interested in the nature of the book, producing several volumes inscribed on the bones of horses, leopards and blue cranes. She has published a number of other books, more recently *Claim to the Country* (Jacana 2007) and *Unconquerable Spirit* (Jacana 2008) and exhibited artwork widely. She is currently Professor of Fine Art and the Director of the *Centre for Curating the Archive* at the University of Cape Town where she is working on a project about land and language, and holes in the ground.

The dead speak from beyond the grave as long as we lend them the means of locution; they take up their abode in books, dreams, houses, portraits, legends, monuments, and graces as long as we keep open the places of their indwelling.

Robert Pogue Harrison (2003:153)

→ **In the safe of my** office at the University of Cape Town (UCT) is a dictionary. It is all that remains, along with a collection of notebooks, of the |xam language and the world it described. The dictionary is made up of tens of thousands of little slips, each describing a word or phrase, detailing translation, dialects and examples of use. The makers of this dictionary were two scholars and linguists, Wilhelm Bleek, a German philologist and intellectual, and Lucy Lloyd, the sister of his wife, and the language was the language of the Bushmen who inhabited the central interior of southern Africa. When, in the winter of 1875, Wilhelm Bleek died, his great project to publish the dictionary was left unfinished and the |xam language, soon to become extinct, lay in a mass of leftovers in his Mowbray home as scraps of paper and shreds of voiceless words and phrases (see Skotnes 2007).



Fig. 1. Entries in the unpublished Bleek and Lloyd dictionary. Page numbers refer to usage in their notebooks (UCT Manuscripts and Archives BC151). Photographs by Pippa Skotnes. Reproduced from & courtesy of the digital archive of the Centre for Curating the Archive (UCT).

My research into the project begun by Bleek and Lloyd has been expressed over several decades through scholarly and creative work (Skotnes 1991, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1999, 2007, 2009) culminating in an exhibition of work called *The book of Iterations*.¹ This is, like Bleek's dictionary, an exhibition of leftovers: a columbarium of words; of a colonial archive; of a way of life; of carthorses from a township in the Cape Flats; of a leopard from the Cederberg; of blue cranes; of fragments from a World War I battle site; of a skeleton wrecked by a forklift at a Johannesburg airport. It is also an exhibition of books. In them, the leftovers have been gathered and recovered from scattered archives, from collections, from scrap heaps, a taxidermist's workshop, antique markets, a local hairdresser, from the landscape. Some have been copied and returned to their archives, others have found new homes in artworks that have been part of exhibitions exhibited in Europe, the United States of America and South Africa. They are fragments, pieces detached from their founding whole, some discarded, others stored, some excavated, others stitched into new fragments that together make up the pieces that are the individual book-works in this collection.

At the heart of this collection of leftovers is the story of a dead language and the Bleek and Lloyd archive (UCT

Archives and Manuscripts) in which it is now a silent captive. In this paper, I describe how this language came to die and yet be preserved, and reflect on how I have tried, focusing on the visual as a site of knowledge, to curate its tangled legacy as both an expression of loss and a means of locution for the dead.

Bushmanland, once a wilderness rich in game, was the site of devastating destruction in the mid-nineteenth-century. Here bands of |xam, driven to desperation because of the loss of their lands and the mass slaughter of game by Dutch farmers, were outcasts, living by stealth, eking out an existence, and escaping, as far as they could, commandos sent out to execute a particularly brutal form of colonial justice. |xam was spoken across the central interior of the country, up to and beyond the Orange River, but by the 1860s the population was almost entirely destroyed. Concentrated efforts by commandos resulted in the tracking down of remaining communities of |xam and they were massacred in events described in colonial documents (see, for instance, in the Western Cape Provincial Archives documents relating to the massacre at Boschduif (CO 4414 #4); the massacre at Boschluis (A39-'63:10); the massacre at Bushmankolk (A39-'63:10) as well as Louis Anthing's letters to parliament published in summary in 1863). In 2009 I visited



Fig. 2. Fragments exhibited as part of creative expressions of the Bleek and Lloyd archive: votive objects. Photograph by Pippa Skotnes.

several of these massacre sites on the northern reaches of the old colony, places where the language was last spoken: Boschduif, near Kenhardt, for example, where two hundred |xam were slaughtered one morning; Namies, at the intersection of a road and a pass through the mountains where several hundred |xam were shot and rounded up, children passed to farmers as labourers,ⁱⁱ and Bosluis, a great salt pan, where the dead were seen like skins hovering over the crusty expanse (“Therefore his outer skin still looks at us, because he feels he does not want to go away and leave us ...” (Dia!kwain 1875)).ⁱⁱⁱ

Further south-east in Bushmanland, gangs of |xam were still resisting the colonial bullets, evading capture for decades, but were eventually driven by hunger to the farms and were rounded up and arrested. One such gang, known later as the ‘Tooren Gang’ was captured, brought to Kenhardt and each member charged with stock theft (see Traill 2007:136). They came to trial in Cape Town and Jantje Tooren, the elder of the gang, whose name was really ||kabbo, his son-in-law |han=kass’o and several others were given two years with hard labour at the Breakwater Convict Station. With them were several other |xam,



Fig. 3. Fragments exhibited as part of creative expressions of the Bleek and Lloyd archive: World War II shell dressings and bandages. Photograph by Pippa Skotnes.

some known, others strangers, like Dia!kwain who shot and killed a farmer, and =kasin who was his accomplice. The Breakwater was a grim, dank, sprawling place, a stone’s throw from the nascent harbour. Few situations could have been more desolating for ||kabbo, a man whose one consolation from the relentless litany of death and loss had been the landscape of his home in which his people were the ‘owners of the shade’, in which they could sense the coming of a distant rain, summons the mist and straddle the rain bull. ||kabbo himself was a man who loved tobacco. His were ‘smoking’s people’. He was the owner of his own waterhole, as well as a hunter who could run great distances across the history-rich plains. Above all, he was a storyteller, for his stories were not only about his world, they were the world itself.^{iv}

When ||kabbo and the others came to Cape Town, Wilhelm Bleek was newly married. His bride was Jemima Lloyd who had been disinherited by her father – a grasping, greedy man, a minister of the church in Natal – driven a little crazy by his brood of children and his unstable second wife. Jemima’s much-loved sister (whom she called ‘my brother’) was Lucy Lloyd, who, her life devastated at this time by the death of



Fig. 4. Boschduif near Kenhardt where a massacre of |xam took place in the 1860s. Photograph by Pippa Skotnes.

her fiancé, left Natal and joined the married couple in the home they rented in Mowbray. Bleek's doctorate had been in the area of linguistics and he had edited collections of east African languages. He had travelled in West Africa, eventually ending up in Natal to compile a Zulu grammar. Bleek worked in Natal for a time and then took up the post of Sir George Grey's official interpreter and cataloguer of his private library in Cape Town.

Survivors of the Bosduif massacre were, apparently, introduced to Bleek in 1863, and Bleek again met two other |xam convicts in 1866 when he started to collect word lists. When ||kabbo and his gang arrived to serve sentences at the Breakwater, Bleek saw this as a unique opportunity to learn and study the language. Bleek pulled strings, as the prison was not conducive to conversation and learning and the inmates were reluctant to speak. He obtained permission from the Governor for first one prisoner, then several others, to be released into his custody. ||kabbo, amongst these, came to live in the Mowbray home.

Bleek's work engaged both his wife, who managed the growing household, and his sister-in-law Lucy. Both women were intellectuals, and from almost the very beginning Lucy Lloyd joined Bleek in his project to learn |xam, and worked together with him for five years. After his death she continued the work with |xam and later also !kun speakers for almost a decade more and spent the rest of her life (until her death in 1914) working on the material she collected. Lloyd, who was responsible for the bulk of the archive, produced notebooks of carefully transcribed stories. The pages of the notebooks were numbered and each folded in half to create a crease down the centre. On the one side, she would write the story in |xam, and then later, often with the help of the narrator or other narrators, translate the story into English. There were times when the story was rewritten or parts emphasised as she would check details with a later narrator or go back to parts that seemed not to have been correctly transcribed. ||kabbo was said by Lloyd to have been a careful narrator, patiently watching the transcription, telling the story and presenting it in a 'bodily' manner. In one of the notebooks, Lloyd writes how ||kabbo



Fig. 5. A section of one of the boxes of the Bleek and Lloyd dictionary (UCT Manuscripts and Archives BC151). Photograph by Pippa Skotnes.

wanted his stories to become known by way of books. It was reading this note, this small leftover of one of her day's work, that set in motion all the work I have since done with the Bleek and Lloyd archive, and my own attempts to give ||kabbo a means of locution in the present.

By the 1920s, 50 years after Bleek's death, the |xam language had died. Those few men and women who could still speak it chose not to. |xam had no place in the kitchens of the Boer farms, or amongst the shacks on the edge of nearby towns in the northern Cape. Inextricably tied to a way of life that had died in the landscape of Bushmanland, |xam ceased to exist. Lloyd herself was dead, as was Jemima Bleek, and, apart from Bleek's daughter Dorothea, barely anyone took any notice of this loss for a hundred years.

Currently, the *Centre for Curating the Archive* at UCT is digitising the |xam dictionary. The Bleek and Lloyd archive, after languishing in obscurity for 100 years, is a national treasure (though still dimly understood), its language the language of the motto on the South

African coat-of-arms, a United Nations Site of the Memory of the World, a collection of material almost unprecedented anywhere else on the globe. The aim is to complete the process of photographing each dictionary entry, devising a search index, publishing it as a book and in digital form, by 2012. Once this is done, it will be possible to say that the |xam will not have died completely, that their language and stories will not only be available to the very few who can consult them and extract them from their library shelves and that their stories will join, in its astonishing equality of access, the immaterial archive of almost everything on the world wide web.

But what will have been preserved? And will that preservation honour the sacrifice made by ||kabbo and others, who remained, homesick, with Bleek and Lloyd for years after their sentences were complete? This question has been uppermost in my mind, and has been haunted by that small detail noted in the vast archive.

Curating the leftovers

The artist's book

My work with the Bleek and Lloyd collection began in the 1980s when only a handful of scholars had ever heard of it and fewer had actually read it. Reading the thousands of pages with stories not heard or read or published in a hundred years was like falling into an Aladdin's cave, but it was the reference to ||kabbo's desire for his stories to be known by way of books that most moved me and I resolved to find a way to produce the book, or books, that might honour that wish. What did ||kabbo understand about books? How did he imagine they could convey the life that was slipping away from him? How could the words on a page begin to approximate the telling of a story around a campfire, or conjure a world that could materialise the past in the present and resurrect a dancer dead from exhaustion? For ||kabbo stories were literally resident in the landscape, they were heard in the trees, the mountains, the valleys and at the waterholes. They hovered around the fires at night and they appeared in the hunting grounds. ||kabbo would

say that a story is a thing that floats on the wind – if one sits quietly, listening, one can hear it whispered around one (||kabbo 1873). Yet ||kabbo could also see a future for his stories in books – a future in which he and his people would no longer be present – the book for ||kabbo, perhaps, could be a place of indwelling long after his death. The challenge for me then, was to find a way to represent the labile, sensual, oral richness of the |xam imagination, and at the same time represent its loss. How could one embody both the stories of the rain, wind, the early times, the myths of creation alongside the massacres, and the murderous acts of Dia!kwain and his accomplices? How could one make sense of a story about |kaggen, the master of transformation and regeneration, in a context in which there was no resurrection, no making whole again from a damaged part? How could one be true to the leftovers, the fragment that the language had become and yet also lend ||kabbo, long after his death, a means of locution? These questions seemed to me to be unanswerable by conventional scholarship, by the making of a history or the analysis of narratives, and so my efforts to respond to them turned to both



Fig. 6. Skotnes. P. 1991. Cover and a page from the artist's book, *Sound From the Thinking Strings* (Skotnes 1991). Etchings, screenprinted pages and quarter leather binding. Photograph by Pippa Skotnes.

analogy and to my background as an artist and maker of books.

The artist's book as a means of locution

The artist's book is a medium that has evaded definition. It is neither sculpture nor painting, printmaking nor installation. It is not to be seen only as an object, nor necessarily as something that only reveals itself over time. It can include texts but it is not only about reading. It brings with it a whole history of the book, but also a history of creative practice. My quest to respond to |kabbo's desire thus began with a process of interrogating the nature of the book itself. How is a book defined as a structure, as a reading experience, in law? How does the history of its use, the discipline of its craft serve to identify the nature of a book as an object? How can an act of curatorship – curating the pages of a book or its content – transform the very nature of the material it takes as its subject and turn it into something else? What is the relationship between text and subject, between what is represented and what is understood through that representation? All these were questions of interest in relation to |kabbo's desire, but also fascinating to the artist-me, for they seemed to be located in the relationship between book as book and book as artwork – a relationship that echoed the one between the story as written text and the story as performance. I had thought, perhaps, that in the twin identity of a book as book and book as artwork I might be able to approach an answer to |kabbo's desire. If I could make a book, as |kabbo had hoped for, and make an artwork at the same time, I might be able to draw together into the resulting object-book both some expression of his stories and some experience that would refer to the sensuality of them as they had once been told. What was crucial then was to understand how to make a book that retained enough of its bookness to still be defined as a book, while at the same time create something that would gesture towards the rich sensory experience it would, inevitably, elide. Furthermore, I wanted the book not only to refer to the context of loss within which |kabbo told his stories but to offer some sense of his experience. I wanted to take the leftovers, and make something whole again. In short, I wanted to understand how to represent a dead language (and something of that which died with it) and at the same time offer it a means of locution.

A brief look at the literature of artists' books reflects their resistance to definition. Their origins have also been variously ascribed, but the artists' book as it is

currently known is really a product of the twentieth-century, with a wide range of artists making books in a wide variety of forms. Almost every art movement of this century has been associated with some form of expression in the artist's book. Maximally different to the book familiar to the academy, or to the written arts, which are, as Elaine Scarry (2001:5) describes, "almost wholly devoid of actual sensory content" and whose physical attributes are "utterly irrelevant, sometimes even antagonistic, to the mental images that [they] seek to produce", artists' books depend on perception. Some are objects and are defined according to their physical and sensory presence. There is a sense that there is a 'bookness' about artist's books that has little to do with text (Smith 1996). The nature of the artist's book is defined through its structure and the way in which its content is apprehended through that structure.

Johanna Drucker (1995:363), in her study of the artist's book in the twentieth-century, suggests it is less a thing to be defined than a "zone of activity" existing "at the intersection of a number of different disciplines, fields, and ideas" and a profound development of creative practice in the twentieth-century. Drucker (1995:363) writes that the artist's book,

is a passage of time, an expandable space, a fluid sequence of elements whose discrete identity becomes absorbed into the reality of a seamless experience, a static set of units whose unresolvable differences return the viewer to the cells of its interior spaces in a contradictory act of engagement and transcendence.

In my attempts to make |kabbo's book, I looked to the origins of the artist's book in illuminated manuscripts. These were, for many centuries, the books at the heart of Christianity. Not merely repositories of knowledge and information, the books themselves were sacred objects. There are scores of images from the mediaeval arena of saints holding books as if embracing the very messages themselves received from a hallowed realm. Images of St John at the crucifixion, head bowed with grief over a book that he holds, refer at once to the origin of the world with the Word and the identity of Christ himself as a book – his back hung against the spine of the cross, his arms and legs the splayed pages on which the story of sacrifice and redemption is written in the blood of his wounds.

Illuminated manuscripts were lavish, expensive, often adorned with jewels, ivory and precious metals. The beauty of the book was seen as a reflection of the beauty of God, the lavishness as a mirror of His

generosity. Pages were prepared from sheep, goat and calfskin and a great many animals were required for one. The Lorsch Gospels, for example, needed a whole calfskin for each of its double pages, and the Winchester Bible required the slaughtering of 250 calves (Walther & Wolf 2001:17).

Similarly, the labour involved in the preparation of the pages and the care with which each page was inscribed pointed to the enormous value placed on the activity of writing and illuminating the manuscripts and producing the books. Excellent scribes were revered but an unintended mark or an error in the text received severe punishment. Scribes themselves, given fastidious attention to detail, could look forward to the greatest reward in the after-life and were promised remission of sins and escape from the fires of purgatory. Legends tell of monk scribes whose exhumed bodies revealed uncorrupt hands or luminous fingers. In some cases, where the number of letters inscribed equaled the number of the scribe's sins, a safe and direct passage to heaven was assured (The making of manuscripts [sa]).

For me there is something of the illuminated in Lloyd's manuscripts. Not illustrated, nor employing valuable materials, her books nonetheless seemed to be made by 'luminous fingers', so fastidiously created they opened up, almost miraculously, a conversation with the dead. In these, the words, written upon the thousands and thousands of pages that constitute her and Bleek's archive, an imaginative universe of the |xam is conjured while at the same time they impress themselves into the surface of the paper in such a way that one is visited almost at once by a sense of the physical presence of the narrator and the recorder. One is not just reading these notebooks; one is bringing a rush of sensual content to the experience of handling the books and touching the hands of the writer. At the same time, the way in which the narratives and comments were recorded make reading the books a mobile activity and one which requires tacking back over the pages, confounding the usual linearity of reading. This, I sensed, referred back to the narratives themselves and the tradition of the repetitive staging of storytelling performances around the evening campfire.

Over the years I made several books. The first, *Sound From The Thinking Strings* (1991) (which was the subject of a protracted court case after I was sued by the National Library of South Africa - a legal deposit library - for a free copy, and in which I had to defend it as an artist's book), was lavishly hand printed on a German cotton paper and quarter bound in oasis

leather. I launched it with an exhibition at the *National Museum* in Cape Town that brought it together for the first time with some of the archival traces of the |xam's relationship with the Colony - letters and a published report, stories from the notebooks, photographs and objects made by |xam and !kun boys staying at the Bleeks' house and some of the notebooks themselves.

However, the book itself, I felt, fell short of my objective, requiring too much reading in the normal way. When it came to making my next book - one that would be both book (requiring reading, but of a different order) and artwork (as part of the sensual, visible, conceptual world) - I drew more directly on both the materials of the illuminated manuscripts and the content of the notebooks of Lucy Lloyd. I wanted to make something that called to mind a tradition of bookmaking, transcription and transcendence, and at the same time suggest an untraditional, or unconventional way of reading. I also wanted to curate the leftovers of Bleek and Lloyd's project in a way that would redeem its fragmentary condition - not by reconstruction but by revivification - retaining the fragmentary nature of the material I was working with while at the same time answering ||kabbo's desire to contain it within the form of a book.

The project I initially developed was called *Lamb of God*^v (now *Book of Iterations*). It focused on the idea of sacrifice as something perceived to be redemptive - and I looked at both the central Christian narrative of the sacrifice of the son of God, and its legacy in the major 'sacrificial acts' of colonialism and global warfare. The project tried, as Isabel Hofmeyr (2009:81) writes, to "experience texts as multimedia and multilingual portfolios which straddle the printed and the spoken, image and text, the visible and invisible world ... [and] maps out the imaginative boundaries of what a miraculous history of the book might look like". At the heart of the project I made three books, each page a bone that, when stitched together, made up the skeletons of three horses.

These were the *Book of Blood and Milk*, the *Book of the Divine Consolation* and the *Book of Speaking in Tongues* (Fig. 7). Each of these I defined as a book - pages - in this case bones (rather than the skins of illuminated manuscripts), hinged along a central spine and inscribed on their surfaces with texts that, unlike those of the written arts, are full of sensory content. At the same time they would draw attention to that very surface and the wider resonance of bone as reference to what remains after death.



Fig. 7. Skotnes, P. *Three bone books*. 2003-2009. Horse bone, gold, silver, ink, vellum, oak and cherry wood. Each approx. 2.5m x 2m. Photograph by Pippa Skotnes. Work exhibited at the Stiftelsen Gallery in Bergen Norway, 2003.

The *Book of Blood and Milk* is an assembly of texts and commentary that recalls the role of Christ as the bleeding victim of betrayal and as the lactating mother of the redeemed. It reveals the depth of devotion to the eating of the body of Christ that characterises late medieval and Renaissance worship and spiritual thought (see, for instance, Camporesi 1988, 1989; Bynum 1992, 1998). The bone surfaces act as a contrast to the flesh and blood of the narratives, the gold symbolising the incorruptible presence and endurance of ideas. Christ as mother is referred to, for example, by Aelred of Rievault (1167) when he writes:

On your altar let it be enough for you to have a representation of our Savior hanging on the cross; that will bring before your mind his Passion for you to imitate, his outspread arms will invite you to embrace him, his naked breasts will feed you with the milk of sweetness to console you (Rievault cited by Bynum 1982:123).

The *Book of the Divine Consolation* (Fig. 8) is a book about war. The bone is the bone of the grave, the gold the glory of the soldier who sacrifices his life and, in the case of the unknown soldier, even his name. Listed along the spine are the major battles of the First World War, on the tail those of the Second. The ribs carry chants and prayers for the dead. The head remembers the words of John Donne (1572-1631), in his poem 'The Relic'



Fig. 8. Skotnes, P. 2003-2009. *Book of the Divine Consolation*. Horse bone, gold, silver, ink, vellum, oak and cherry wood. Approx. 2.5m x 2m. Photograph by Pippa Skotnes.



Fig. 9. Detail from the *Book of the Divine Consolation*. Photograph by Pippa Skotnes.



Fig. 10. Detail from the *Book of Speaking in Tongues*. Photograph by Pippa Skotnes.

and recalls the loss of the loved one and the hope of one day finding each other beyond the grave.

And he that digs it spies
A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,
Will he not let us alone,
And think that there a loving couple lies,
Who thought that this device might be some way
To make their souls, at the last busy day,
Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

For at the resurrection, according to Renaissance belief, the body will reunite all its parts, and so the lovers find each other as he recovers his bone and she her hair.

The third bone book is the *Book of Speaking in Tongues*. This book is written in ||kabbo's language, transcribed from the pages of Lloyd's notebooks that he watched her write. These individual burnished, white, bone surfaces, now the leftovers of the mounted skeleton itself, seem to be embraced by the black and red ink and the gold leaf in an almost erotic way. Here, in Scarry's terms, the form and shape of the letters and their visceral presence is irrelevant to their meaning, but their meaning is also inaccessible and beyond the reach of any reader. There are no mental images following on from the understanding of the words, only incomprehensibility. In this book I have tried to force the words to assume a sensual quality, to lose their textuality, becoming expressive of the activity, obsessive in its persistence, of writing, recording and transcribing.

There is one other little book that is part of this continuing project to honour the desire of ||kabbo for his stories to be known by ways of books, but it is a book that is neither about ||kabbo, nor any of his stories. Instead it includes at its centre a copy of an essay by Stephen Greenblatt (2000) which examines early modern (and often murderous) debates about the transubstantiation of the wafer into the body of Christ and the concern over its fate were it to be eaten by a mouse, or once it passes through the body of the supplicant. It is a book about the leftover and in this context refers back to the Bleek and Lloyd archive – a columbarium of words – the leftovers of a language; the identity of which remains at once fragmentary and changed as it moves into a new zone of existence. The pages of this book are detached and spread out

side by side on a vertical surface. Each line of the text is cut up and rolled into small vials, like the cavities of a dove-cote, sewn into four of the pages making up a cross at the centre of the book. It has neither the 'bookness' of Smith's definition, nor does it conjure up the mental images that are at the heart of the verbal arts that Scarry describes. Instead it exists, as Drucker suggests of the artist's book, in a multilingual, multimedial conceptual zone, referring to the act of reading as something requiring both the comprehension of the text (a comprehension made visible by its denial in this case) and the sensual apprehension of a book as part of the visible world.

The *Book of Iterations* – the most recent iteration of these books on bone – is an exhibition of books made up of leftovers, a response to ||kabbo's desire. It is an attempt to find a conceptual space not available in the media of traditional scholarship, nor exclusively located in the world of art. In this space I have tried to create books that are not just about text and the mental images that texts generate but about things that are part of the visible and sensual world, acquiring their resonance because of their social and cultural circulation, their content, their reference both to diverse origins in both the illuminated manuscripts of mediaeval Europe and the storytelling around the campfires of the |xam in southern Africa.

At the end of this paper and with the installation of the exhibition in all its fragmentary presence, I must ask if I have yet begun to succeed in making the book that answers to ||kabbo's desire. The texts that are written on the horses and the fragments presented in the cases all explore a history of sacrifice, for the most unwilling, from the offering of Isaac by Abraham, to the sacrificial slaughter of the young men in the trenches of the Somme in the war to end all wars, and the extermination of an entire population of the |xam in Bushmanland in order to establish the Cape Colony. The exhibition remains an exhibition of leftovers, but in the form of these artist's books it becomes a columbarium, a place of the dead, an archive of loss, a memorial to something that has perished. The books, bearing a history of loss and sacrifice and the hope of resurrection, are books about absence, so that even while ||kabbo's words and letters gesture towards unheard sounds that were once spoken, they render the absence of that speech more powerfully present



Fig. 11. Detail from the *Book of Speaking in Tongues*. Photograph by Pippa Skotnes.

than its presence. In trying to lend ||kabbo a means of locution, I have tried to do two things through the work. In the first place, it acknowledges that his language, once just sound, is now also just words on a bone page. But in being such, it embodies a paradox – the absence of the spoken language has made it more present, the fragments able to speak out of their evisceration, in some sense as powerfully as they once did in the mouths of the |xam. Secondly the works lift the loss of the |xam out of the context of their singular annihilation and commit them to a dialogue with others – people who are different

– who have lived and died in other times and difference places in an endless iteration of loss and absence.

The answer to my question must, therefore, be no, for in making art that is committed to absence and to loss, and in working from an archive that can never be bounded and that is always to be burdened by its future, the book that represents the stories of ||kabbo can never be made, for the story is and always must be radically incomplete. The archive, of which these works are now a part, is ||kabbo's past, but it is also his future, a place of his locution.



Fig. 12. Detail from the *Book of Speaking in Tongues*. Photograph by Pippa Skotnes.



Fig. 13. Detail from the tail of the *Book of Blood and Milk*. Photograph by Pippa Skotnes.

Endnotes

- i. Exhibited in part in the Stiftelsen Gallery Bergen, at the MK Ciurlionis National Art Museum at the National Museum of Norway, Oslo in 2003 and at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, between November and February of 2009/2010.
- ii. Some of these events are documented in the papers of Louis Anthing (1863), State Archives A39-63 (Anthing's report).
- iii. See Dialkwain's story 'Concerning apparitions (or How, when the first wife of Dia!kwain was buried, those returning to their homes saw the apparition of a little child)' in the Bleek Lloyd collection of notebooks: A2_1_071-72:5810, 5811-32.
- iv. Brief life histories of these |xam are available in Skotnes (2007) and in Deacon & Dowson (1996). See also Bank (2006).
- v. The first iteration of which was exhibited in Norway, then in Lithuania in 2004, and the second in Michigan in 2009-2010.

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