

Books represent the accumulated knowledge of society, our history. They physically represent our stories – the stories of countries, societies, ethnic groups, families and individuals.

The deliberate destruction of an old book is somehow abhorrent to those of us who value the written word, what it represents, and what it can achieve. Visually it hits us. It elicits a physical reaction. The destruction of them is, somehow, a destruction of ourselves.

Yes, as we know too well, one can burn books. But the most common way of destroying the written word isn't burning. It is shredding. Every-day thousands of tons of written material is shredded. Knowledge and information being intentionally turned into narrow, un-readable, strips of unknowing.

History never says goodbye is a series of artistic representations that illustrate this process.

This is what the cycle of action, destruction, repetition and re-enactment looks like.

A shredded 100 year old Hebrew prayer book to represent the holocaust. A shredded legal text from 1950 to represent Apartheid. A shredded Victorian bible to represent the pain and judgment of that era's crippling morality. A shredded page from a book celebrating early settlement in Rhodesia to point out the flawed ideas being implemented. A shredded Reuters news report about a Palestinian teenager shot dead in Gaza to tell us of a mother's incalculable loss.

In History never says goodbye the books that tell our stories are used as raw material to tell stories of pain, violence, triumph, irony, trauma and the sometimes absurd twists that history manifests.

Old books. Rare books. Expensive books. Cheap books. In this project they are used as raw material to reveal historical narratives.

To show that history is always with us. That the past is always present, around us, constructing our realities. To show that history shapes us, drives us, clings to us.

And that it never says goodbye.

John Davenport was determined to become a historian before he realised that ADHD and the fact that he wasn't quite intelligent enough, meant this was unlikely. However, an ongoing interest in history, art and storytelling have lead to this series of work which is called History never says goodbye. This is his first exhibition.



Expropriation

2022

Shredded book with cotton thread
69cm x 77cm (framed)

R 4 600-00

Expropriation.

The expropriation of land without compensation seems to many of us to be a new thing.

And it is when seen in isolation.

But history does not conceptualise it that way. The historical narrative shows us that this concept is very far from a new one.

Documents from the period are used here to show that the concept of land being expropriated without compensation was first formulated by the lawyers of Apartheid.

An original legal manual from the 1950's provides the core of this piece, as the phrase "History never says goodbye" is formed from the words within the words of these texts, to deliver this new message.



From Genesis to Apartheid
2022

Shredded book with cotton thread
83cm x 100cm (framed)

R 5 750-00

From Genesis to Apartheid.

The largest of the pieces in the show, this work uses pages from dictionaries, encyclopedias, reference books and legal textbooks to illustrate one of the ways in which history never says goodbye.

Born in religious thought, Afrikaner nationalism took hold. It was burnished during the destruction of the Boer War and the mythologization of the concentration camps.

And flowered its sickly flowers in the legislation that underpinned the Apartheid state.

Our history is your history, and their history. And it is always with us.



Detail

Goering
2022
Shredded book with cotton thread
62.5cm x 75.5cm (framed)

R4 600-00



Goering.

The history of nations and communities is also the history of individuals.

This piece uses books from the middle of the 20th century to show the bizarre nature of tragedy.

Who knew that Herman Goering's father implemented one of the first genocidal campaigns of the pre-WWII era with the destruction of the Herero people?

Who knew that his mother had conducted a life-long affair behind this man's back with a wealthy Jewish aristocrat?

Who knew how this story would end?

History never says goodbye. Even when we would prefer that it does. Instead, it shapes events in ways that we could never guess.



Detail



Detail

Nuremberg to Nazareth
2022
Shredded book with cotton thread
63.5cm x 52.5cm (framed)

R3 450-00



Nuremberg to Nazareth.

Few words have the impact of the word "holocaust" - it is a word unlike any other.

It was a transformative event in the history of the Jewish people. Changing forever the way Jews saw themselves and their place in the world.

The events of WWII did not die with their victims, they live on in what can be seen as learned brutality every day in Gaza and the West Bank and beyond.

This piece uses a history book from the 1950's to establish the nature of German anti-Semitism, an old Jewish prayer book shredded to show the trauma of the holocaust, and a print-out of a Reuters report to complete the historical narrative.



Detail

Palestine

2022

Shredded book with cotton thread
60cm x 70.5cm (framed)

R4 600-00



Palestine.

The trajectory of history is an endlessly long one.

Nowhere is this more true than in Palestine.

And nowhere else is the danger of seeing events as isolated rather than as part of a whole more dangerous.

This piece starts using pages from an old King James Bible verse. After Cain has murdered his brother Abel, God says "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."

It then uses pages from different books (some very old, some new) to show the brutality of the ancient Jewish occupation of the region. It then uses a book from the 1950's to indicate how a group of Arab troops during the post-WWII Arab-Israeli war were trained by SS personnel, before moving onto a print-out of an internet article reporting the death of a Palestinian teenager at the hands of IDF soldiers.

Truly, we are all our brother's keeper, and his blood calls out from the ground over the centuries.



Detail



Rhodesia

2022

Shredded book with cotton thread
80cm x 61cm (framed)

R3 450-00

Rhodesia.

It's natural and disturbingly easy to see events like the Zimbabwe farm invasions out of context, to get caught up in small stories and render ourselves blind to the larger, longer stories that surround them.

This piece uses a page from a modern book about the loss of a tobacco farm in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe to deliver the final word "Goodbye" but sets up the loss of this farm in real historical context by using pages from much older books (cataloging the initial occupation of this land by colonial settlers) to present the words "History never says".

When combined, these found objects tell a story within a story to deliver a broader truth about the history of Zimbabwe, and how one action inevitably leads to another and another.



Detail

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