

Buckland's focus on emotional truth

ANGELA Buckland, a Durban photographer of note, is staging an exciting new photographic installation at the KZNSA Gallery in Glenwood, a display titled *Location – Block A, Thokoza Women's Hostel*.

It's an exhibition that has her making the public aware of the difficult and claustrophobic living spaces at the hostel and, as such, documents the private histories of seemingly ordinary people.

After winning the Emma Smith Overseas Scholarship, Buckland completed a Master's degree with distinction from Birmingham University. For many years she lectured in the Fine Arts Department at the Durban University of Technology (DUT).

Her first solo exhibition, titled *Zip Zip My Brain Harts*, toured nationally and focused on what it means to be a parent of a mentally and physically disabled child in South Africa.

This exhibition led to the publication of her first book in partnership with the Human Science Research Council, followed by her second, *Light on a Hill*, focusing on the architecture of the new South African Constitutional Court.

In her latest exhibition, Buckland has intuitively engaged with the residents of Block A by seeking an emotional rather than an objective truth.

The installation features 699 photographs, representing the 537 women resident in Block A, made up of 162 rooms and several dormitories.

The bottom row of these photos depicts all the doors to each room or dormitory, while those above that reveal the number of people living in that specific space, as well as some details of a few items in each room.

There are three beds in each room and up to 10 a dormitory.

What is remarkable about Buckland's work is that her choice reflects precisely the excess and claustrophobia of the building.

Not only does Buckland create awareness of conditions in the hostel, but her photographs are carefully shot to reveal the harsh, unforgiving environment and the humanness of the women.

Thokoza was the first hostel built exclusively for women in South Africa and opened in central Durban 85 years ago.

It remains the most densely inhabited residential site in the city, rising four storeys around a courtyard and ablution facilities.

Says Buckland: "I have

photographed each and every resident's bed or some artefact in their bed space.

"The photographic strategy adopted for both artworks was to take one frame within a couple of seconds and record a trace that marked a form of humanity in this historically unnatural and complex environment.

"I am interested by detail, emblematic of a universal need to humanise space".

The show most certainly has received wide attention for social awareness, but as an exhibition it could perhaps have been stronger by adding 10 enlargements of rooms, instead of drawings done by 10 Thokoza residents.

The curator of the KZNSA Gallery, Bren Brophy, explained why this was done: "A workshop, 'Journey Mapping', took place at Thokoza Hostel last month as a component of the *Location*



exhibition, and 17 residents took part. They were encouraged to write and draw about important events in their lives. From these journey maps, 10 were chosen to give viewers a chance to see and read the women's own work as part of the show."

The journey mapping process was developed by the Centre for Social Science Research at the University of Cape Town. The exhibition forms part of the KZNSA's Social Art in Development Programme.

Also now at the KZNSA Gallery, in the multimedia gallery, is an

exhibition by Lolette Smith. It has the tongue-twisting title of *Isomorphicintergrammar Code Switching*.

Smith, a visual arts educator and South African sign language interpreter, has asked two interesting questions. If silence were visible what would it look like? And if we could see deafness... what would it look like?

Her interest in visual communication began when her daughter, Michaela, was born profoundly deaf in 1984. She learnt sign language as the primary medium.

Smith has been actively involved in deaf education. She had studied art before this, and in 2003 was awarded the student merit award when she completed her fine arts degree.

By tying together language codes and by making the invisible visible, she hopes to improve the layman's understanding of

communication.

The visual language used by the deaf is a meaningful spatial language, which conforms to all the syntactical, grammatical and morphological features of any verbal language.

Smith's installation at the KZNSA features vertical perspex boxes/pillars with lit nylon lines that form marvellous patterns.

Meanwhile, on the KZNSA's mezzanine level you can see jewellery by Chris and Marlene de Beer, both lecturers in the Fine Art and Jewellery Design Department of DUT.

The display shows and mingles their preoccupation and, in the process, extends the boundaries of what is normally considered jewellery.

This is an exhibition rooted in jewellery design but uses print making, collage and assemblages to express their ideas as fine art.

See it!



Detail from the latest exhibition by Durban photographer Angela Buckland. It is titled *Location – Block A, Thokoza Women's Hostel*.