



Left: David Goldblatt,  
*Squatter Camp*,  
Woodstock, Cape Town,  
22 August 2006, color  
photograph, 38 1/4 x 48 1/4".  
Right: David Goldblatt,  
*KTC Squatter Camp*,  
Cape Town, September,  
1984, black-and-white  
photograph, 17 1/2 x 22".



## David Goldblatt

NEW MUSEUM, NEW YORK  
Leora Maltz-Leca

**SERENADING THE QUOTIDIAN** has always been David Goldblatt's forte. He pries away the surface of the ordinary and pushes his audience to do the same. Dissatisfied with the spuriousness of easy conclusions—and having thus long eschewed the didactic aesthetics of South Africa's resistance-era documentary tradition—Goldblatt refuses the drama of the clash for the stifled pain of its aftermath. And it is the toxic residues of apartheid that linger in his ongoing *Intersections* project: a corpus of large-format color photographs from the past decade that probe cross-currents of peoples, values, and ideas. This rich and nuanced survey, titled "Intersections Intersected" (and organized by Ulrich Loock of the Fundação Serralves in Porto, Portugal, where it originated, and the New Museum's Richard Flood), found the artist shuffling, cross-pollinating, and creatively plumbing his own photographic archive. The New Museum's third-floor galleries not only revealed Goldblatt threading single images—often taken decades apart—into complex narrative strings, but also featured examples of the recent triptychs that seem to have inspired this narrative bent. Upstairs, he had orchestrated tighter pairings of his pre-1994 black-and-white photography with the more recent color images, creating dialogic exchanges between the works that proposed a dynamic logic of revision and return.

Repeatedly circling back to certain wounds in the landscape, Goldblatt has revisited key sites, layering temporalities so that monuments and buildings are given to us suspended in the viscous medium of history. Take the modest homes of Fietas, a racially diverse Johannesburg suburb. Under the terms of the Group Areas Act, the

residents of Fietas were forcibly relocated to outlying areas in 1976 and 1977, their houses leveled. On the eve of the destruction, Goldblatt photographed pristine interiors as part of his project *South Africa: The Structure of Things Then*—his decadelong exploration of the way that the country's physical structures came to embody its histories of racism. These silent, melancholy black-and-white images are given renewed meaning by his return to the bulldozed site in 2003. Now washed in muted blues and chalky light, concrete ruins rear up before us: Goldblatt's taut, laconic text informs us of the apparent indestructibility of the water tank and lavatory that had belonged to one family, the Docrats. The toilet as monument typifies the way in which Goldblatt homes in on the absurdly ordinary remnants of apartheid's trauma.

The gaps and yawns of time stamp these photographs with meaning, yet Goldblatt rejects a teleology of redemption in favor of reversible, nonlinear trajectories that complicate official narratives of progress. Monuments rise and fall; heritage tourism and capitalism creep into spaces of memory; AIDS decimates the population; shanties from the 1980s meet the shanties of 2006. An iconic 1984 image of a mother and her sleeping infant rendered homeless by government workers' destruction of their tempo-

**In Goldblatt's work, monuments rise and fall; heritage tourism creeps into spaces of memory; shanties from the 1980s meet the shanties of 2006.**

rary shelter finds its counterpart in a photograph of a mother and child from 2003. Refusing the simplistic binary of before and after, Goldblatt gives us the protracted pressure of an in-between that binds past to present, joining one to the other through private microhistories of resilience and loss. His temporal juxtapositions confound the desire to read his postapartheid shift to color as celebratory. Rather, then and now grapple with each other in ways that resist the logic of contrast in favor of a complex model of chiasmic fusions.

The triptychs that Goldblatt began producing in 2006 pattern meaning through spatial rather than temporal slippages. For example, in the exhibition's opening trio, *Miernes D/Winkel*, *Lotta Cash Loans*, *Piet Retief Street*,

*Sutherland*, Western Cape, 16 November 2007, the multiple perspectives insinuate a lone stretch of sunbaked tarmac as a crossroads, thereby embedding the foundational metaphor of the intersection in physical cartographies of small-town streets. Photographing scenes from several viewpoints, Goldblatt seems to circle respectfully around his subjects, as if loath to lock onto them with the authoritative gaze of single-point perspective. Yet rather than giving us more information about these cryptic streetscapes, the self-conscious perspectivalism of triptychs such as *On Justisie Straat*, *Philippolis*, *Free State*, 19 October 2006—three views of a nondescript dirt road dotted with old cars—instead disorients.

While the notion of intersecting perspectives provides the philosophical mooring for Goldblatt's postapartheid roamings, the *Intersections* project was in fact initiated by the less Nietzschean, more aleatory premise of photographing the sites where lines of latitude and longitude cross—an idea that the artist quickly abandoned as forced. Nonetheless, the troubled South African landscape remains at the heart of Goldblatt's investigations, which are invariably staged within the distinctive topography of the Highveld, the scrubby plateau of unblinking, cloudless skies on which Johannesburg and Pretoria are built, and the Karoo, the desert expanse of seeping ennui to the southwest. This is the dry terrain of memory in which Goldblatt feels, he says, "marinated." Whether in the crosses—literal intersections of wooden slats that speak of final intersections between humans and the earth—commemorating the murders of white farmers or the AIDS grave markers and monuments that Goldblatt poetically describes as "punctuation marks" in the environment, he treats the Highveld and its towns as texts to be deciphered. In this parched territory, signs, fences, and gates come steeped in histories of division and separation, security and threat, claim and counterclaim. It is, finally, at these intersections between the traumas of the past and the chilling auguries of the future that Goldblatt pauses, surveying the two-way traffic between the old South Africa and the new, so as to signal the dangers of bracketing apartheid off from its afterlife. □

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