
**'Translation/Seduction/
Displacement'**

White Box
601 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through April 1

This group show, organized by Lauri Firstenberg and John Pepper, dips into the wealth of contemporary art being produced in South Africa. Most of the work, by artists of two generations, is post-Conceptual, photographic in form and internationalist in style. Political consciousness runs deep without necessarily declaring itself in polemical terms.

The protean photographer Santu Mofokeng, born in 1956, is represented by three superb groups of work. The largest is a series of 20 pictures of cemeteries and sites of atrocities, taken over 15 years around the world and linking South Africa with a modern history of political violence.

Mr. Mofokeng's work, which is both documentary and an expression of personal witness, finds an echo in black-and-white photo-etchings by Zwelethu Mthetaw, who was recently in the exhibition of South African work at the Museum for African Art in SoHo, and in Andrew Tshabangu's pictures of African-based Christian religious practitioners in Johannesburg, London and Brooklyn.

Also in the show are collages by the Conceptual artist Willem Boshoff, 49, which mince and scramble white nationalist texts to make them unreadable. Mr. Boshoff's practice of recycling and altering found materials is shared by many younger artist in the show.

Hentie van der Merwe has made

an interesting look-but-don't-touch installation from World War II photographs of nude South African soldiers. Senzeni Marasela silkscreens portraits of political victims on napkins and offers them sacrificially on tea trays. Kim Lieberman stitches sheets of postage stamps with blood-red thread.

In some work, sound plays a key role. A slide-and-audio piece by Abrie Fourie accompanies slide images of bibles translated into South African languages with a recording of barked-out military commands; Marlaine Tosoni's CD mixes voices into a deafening, disaster-impending roar; in a video by Joachim Schonfeldt titled "My Boy Was a Beautiful Girl," a man responds to orders to perform a dance for tourists.

Finally, the show's spirit is captured in Siemon Allen's "Screen 2000 VHS Tape," a large Minimalist rectangle woven entirely from video tapes. Dark, mute, abstract and space-filling, it says nothing specific but seems, like Pandora's box, to hide dark ideas.

HOLLAND COTTER
