

Goethe *on* Main

Stardust

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8 November- 16 December 2012

The Drive-in was one of the last visible signs of a world that is past, a major site of the pre-TV era and a form of social interaction that is now gone. It remains one of the central recollections of most Joburgers. Nearly everyone has a story about the Drive-in.

The Ferreira mine tailings of 1899 were the original deposits which were to become the Top Star Drive-in. They covered 11 hectares and rose to 59 meters above the original ground level. When the Top Star Drive-in was established in 1958 it became a pervasive presence in the city. Known by almost everyone and seen by commuters daily or weekly from Braamfontein in the north and Main Reef Road, the M1 and M2 in the South and the West. It was a place of nostalgia for people who saw it from a distance, a unique iconic presence quite distinct from any other structure in the city. Elevated above the city it provided spectacular views and gave a fantasy connection to leading stars. A place where for a time people could forget their daily chores.

This artificial mountain made manifest the gold mining industry—and came to stand for its mining heritage. Latterly, it also provided a venue for raves and a landing site for helicopters, testifying to the economic and physi-

cal mobility of Johannesburg's denizens. But, since 2009, it has slowly been sluiced away, its substance carried in pipes to a gold reclamation plant in Crown Mines and after 2010, its golden sand was taken in pipes 30 kilometres along the M17 all the way to the Ergo gold-refinery in Brakpan. What remained of Top Star was then deposited onto a super-dump there that measures 23 kilometres at its base.

As the Top Star mine dump was slowly reclaimed, new views of the structures around it and beyond it gradually became visible—where once they were occluded by this man-altered landscape. These pictures show its slow disappearance. Coupled with these photographs is a parallel text of the stories remembered by those who visited the site.

But this is a Johannesburg story: it was estimated in 2009 that its grains of sand were worth R32 billion. As in the past, payable gold drives us to move mountains. An extraordinary effort of surface mining has occurred on the site, yet around it factories and warehouses are distinctive architecturally of a certain period in the city's history. A variety of economies are operative here, of tenuous and mobile lives that contrast with the scale of surface mining. How they co-exist in an intimate symbiotic re-

relationship speaks to one of its present realities of the city. The combination of the structures and people who occupy the terrain surrounding the old mine dump, some of which are nestled against it, show that its surface bulk gives physical support to the surrounding context. Under threat, and partly decrepit, these too exist momentarily and will be replaced as part of the city's expansion.

Photography contains an element of time trav-

el. In our mind we remember what was there, and the stories accompanying these photographs are mute testimony to this. This project takes cognizance of the history and memories of the site; of its shifting social, economic and cultural forces. The mine-dump and its demise can be seen as a metaphor for the booms and slumps in the price of gold that have occurred over time, and which have shaped this city.

Gallery Hours: Monday Closed
Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday 10.00am-16.00pm
Thursday 11.00am-20.00pm
Sunday 10.00am-14.00pm

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