

[Byline] Angela Buckland, a regular contributor to Elle Décor, has been shortlisted for a big art prize. We spoke to Angela about her photographs.

It is rare that a photograph startles one these days. Yet Angela Buckland's 'Block A Jacobs Hostel' did just that; it astounded viewers. The magnitude of this feat is amplified when you consider that audiences at the Johannesburg Art Gallery weren't simply looking at one photograph, but an affectionate tapestry of 542 images. Five hundred and forty two!

Angela's startling series 'Block A Jacobs Hostel' depicted the intimate sleeping **areas of the residents of Block A (believed to be the oldest mens hostel in Dbn)**. Concentrating on the idiosyncratic décor arrangements of the various lodgers, her essay, now a part of the Durban Art Gallery's permanent collection, says heaps about this imagemaker's searching photographic style.

"It was a progression from my 'Sleep Series'," explains this mother of two. "One of the sleepers from that earlier series was from Block A." Setting up her large format camera up against the low ceiling, "on one of those foul Durban, sticky summer days", she sat suspended on a plank between two lockers. "It was a clumsy and a difficult image to obtain," she remembers. "I found the environment absolutely overwhelming and decided spontaneously there and then (two years ago) to return and record each and every bed."

The images Angela finally returned with articulate the frail humanity of the hostel dweller's lives. What enraptured me personally was the sheer abundance of the world Angela framed with her camera. As impressed was Johannesburg Art Gallery curator David Brodie, who remarked on how Angela's work replaces "generic location with tender minutia." Reminiscing on this series, Angela says: "I was drawn to each personalised world in each and every demarcated space, the humility in such an unnatural and complex environment."

Putting herself in unfamiliar environments might tend to typecast Angela as a hardened photojournalist. "I have never seen myself as a documentary photographer," she protests. Curious as to her reasoning, I ask why. "Perhaps I'm uncomfortable with the term because of the tradition and its significance in South Africa. For my own practice, documentary photography is too traditional, stuck, and limiting."

It is an interesting observation, one that seems to be reflected in the shortlist for this year's prestigious DaimlerChrysler Arts Award. Of the eight photographers nominated, including Angela, only one is a photojournalist. I venture a cautious follow-on question: Is she an artist then? "I have never referred to myself as an artist," she replies good-humouredly, "but I have danced on the periphery." Not for long I would venture.

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Words: 406