

## Daylin Paul - Broken Land

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Saturday 22nd February, 11 am  
Form Gallery, Orms,  
56 Roeland Street, Cape Town



*In Broken Land*, photographer and journalist Daylin Paul investigates the impact of Mpumalanga's controversial state captured coal power stations on local communities. The exhibition goes beyond documenting environmental cost of extracting and burning coal to "personalising the experience of local people who are on the front lines of this crisis."

The exhibition will be opened by award winning, environmental journalist Leonie Joubert and the book published by Jacana will be on sale.

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**ORMS**



South African science writer and author Leonie Joubert, speaking at the opening of Daylin Paul's *Broken Land*, a photographic exhibition that travels into the heartland of South Africa's 'state captured' coal industry. The role of the storyteller in these extraordinary times, and connecting Paul's local story with the global climate crisis.

Cape Town, 22 February 2020

Daylin Paul started his journey into *Broken Land* as a daydream, he says, but it ended with a nightmare.

This sounds like the experience of so many in the climate justice movement: launching into this work with a good-spirited idealism. But the longer you dig away at the coalface, the more nightmarish the reality becomes.

I remember my own first, tentative steps down this road: I was 30 years old, I was standing on the deck of the research ship, the SA Agulhas, about to head out on a splendid adventure: to travel to Marion Island in the Sub-Antarctic with a bunch of scientists who were trying to figure out how global heating was tweaking with lives of creatures living on that island. I was a rookie writer back then. I knew there was a story to tell, and I was effervescent with excitement to tell it. My hand-written notes are filled with the wide-eyed thrill of exotic travel.

That's when I started working on my first book on climate change nearly 20 years ago. It was filled with stories of albatrosses and sea-faring explorers and misadventures in the Roaring Forties.

Looking back at those early stories, I see how measured they were in tone. I wrote in the belief that the impacts of carbon pollution on our natural systems would be slow and easily reversible.

Two decades later, and the picture looks very, very different.

2019 was the year that the climate truth bomb hit. After years of headlines flooded with the news of one extreme weather event after another, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's *Global Warming of 1.5°C* report burst our complacency bubble. The top scientists on the planet are now saying that we are facing a planetary emergency. That we have less than a decade to bring about radical changes to slow the suicidal consumption trends that are driving us towards climate collapse. Some say that it may even be too late.

Daylin's journey is right into the heart of this nightmare.

*Broken Land* uses the artistry of visual storytelling to make a connection that many struggle to get their heads around: connecting the local, with the global; connecting the single-point sources of carbon pollution spills happening right here in our country, with a collective pollution crisis that is mostly invisible. The atmospheric landfill that we're dumping this pollution into is as enormous as the sky is wide. It looks infinite, from where we stand. But we have filled it to capacity.

Daylin's photographs capture the moments of those who are the victims of this slow, unfolding violence: a woman scavenging for the crumbs left behind by long-haul coal trucks, and so many others like her, who are forgotten by the development project that our coal-fired economy was supposed to rescue; an owl, and other wild animals, pummelled and dried to parchment on the

roadside; discarded safety gear, and the miners whose health failed in spite of it.

This is not a pretty picture. But it's not one that we can turn away from. Because this is the reality of our energy-industrial complex.

South Africa is the biggest carbon polluter on the continent and the 14th biggest, globally. Our contribution to the global pollution spill comes from the places that Daylin visits in *Broken Land*.

The single biggest point of leverage, for this country, in terms of becoming part of the global emergency response to slow climate collapse, is how we fix our coal-driven electricity grid. But years of investigative journalism have shown the political vested interests, the corruption, and the state capture by a pro-coal elite within government and how this is thwarting the best efforts to decarbonise our grid.

While the bull elephants in the upper echelons of our government fight about who gets the spoils of coal profits, it's the grass that gets trampled.

Daylin's photographs capture the stories of what happens when the grass gets trampled.

Each of Daylin's photographs tells a story, and these stories have never been more important. It's hard to overstate the urgency of the situation we are in.

Half of all the carbon pollution that we have dumped into the atmospheric landfill, and which is pushing the global temperature above 1°C, was put there in the time that you and I have been alive. And it's pushing our climate across a dangerous and irreversible tipping point. But we're headed for four times that warming which is, quite literally, an uninhabitable Earth.

The best minds on the planet have warned us that we have one decade in which to completely rework our economy and our politics to avert this crisis. One decade.

The environmentalist and activist Joanna Macy cut her teeth in anti-nuclear protests four decades ago. Today she is at the frontline of climate justice work. She talks about how we were born for these times.

This isn't some grandiose proclamation. She's not the voice of a collective messiah complex.

What she's saying is that we are all ordinary people, with ordinary skills, born into these extraordinary times. We have no option other than to respond to this planetary emergency. We have to put ourselves to the task of mopping up a pollution spill that is unravelling the natural systems that all of life depends on.

The storyteller has a vital role in that - drawing the world's attention to what's happening because of that pollution spill, to drive a collective shift in consciousness so that society wakes up and responds.

This is not to say that Daylin's talents are ordinary. This is not an easy story to tell. The energy-industrial complex in South Africa is an ugly palate of colours: coal dust, black lung, tuberculosis, criminally low wages, hunger, flooded sink-holes, hours of toil in hellish conditions. It's mine tailings, polluted wetlands, scars carved into the Earth.

But as uncomfortable as it is to see this, we cannot turn our gaze away.

When Daylin started out on this journey, he says it was a bit of a daydream. But he knew there was a story to tell. He had barely two cents to rub together, and

yet he emptied his bank account so that he could pull together a story pitch and send it to the Ernest Cole photographic committee, in the hope that they would trust him to do the job. He did. And here we are today.

Thank you to the Ernest Cole Award. These stories cannot be told without the funding to support these projects. Today's newsrooms still see these 'environmental' stories as nice-to-haves, after newsroom resources have been dedicated to the more 'important' stories like politics, economics, and even sport. But the climate crisis needs to be front and centre of the news agenda.

There is a ferocity of voice in *Broken Land*. This is the kind of ferocity what we need as we step into the next decade of work in these extraordinary times.