

An Arresting Portrayal

Marco Cianfanelli's Release at the Nelson Mandela Capture Site

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photos by Paul Mills, except where otherwise noted

On August 4, 2012, an extraordinary monument was unveiled on the rural outskirts of the small town of Howick in the Midlands of the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa (Fig. 1). Comprising fifty discrete black steel components, each between 6.5 and 9.5 meters tall, Marco Cianfanelli's *Release* is approached via a paved pathway set between two embankments. While it is initially unclear what the sculpture may represent, this changes as one proceeds down the pathway. When the viewer arrives at a spot some 35 meters in front of the sculpture, the work reveals clearly an image of Nelson Mandela's face in profile, looking towards the west, the side where the sun sets (Fig. 2, Cover). Then, as the viewer moves closer to the structure, the illusion disappears, and it becomes evident that the sculpture is in fact made up of a series of wholly abstract steel plinths (Figs. 3–4).

The location of *Release* is important. A few meters behind the work, just across the R103 motorway, a plaque is set into an unprepossessing brick structure that was erected in 1996 to mark the place where Nelson Mandela was arrested on August 5, 1962 (Fig. 5). Shortly after his acquittal at the Treason Trial on March 29, 1961, a warrant for his arrest had been issued. Mandela had consequently gone underground. Making various trips to Africa and the United Kingdom to solicit support for the African National Congress (ANC), he also undertook military training to equip himself for the sabotage campaigns that Umkhonto we Sizwe, its recently constituted military wing, had begun to plan. Returning to South Africa, he spent much of his time from October 1961 hiding out at Liliesleaf farm, north of Johannesburg. His arrest occurred after he had attended a Congress Alliance party in his honor at the home of a photojournalist in Durban and was likely the result of a tipoff to the security police by somebody there.² Mandela was posing as a chauffeur for a comrade,

Cecil Williams, as the pair headed back to Johannesburg, when they were pulled over by security police.¹ Although Mandela was initially sentenced to five years imprisonment on charges of incitement and illegally leaving South Africa, he would in fact remain in prison considerably longer. While he was in prison, security police raided Liliesleaf farm and discovered material that led to his being charged with sabotage, and he received a life sentence on June 12, 1964. The so-called capture site is thus the location that marked the end of the era in which Mandela enjoyed any immediate freedom of movement and would see him instead subjected to twenty-seven years, six months, and five days of incarceration, mostly on Robben Island.

The portrait in Cianfanelli's sculpture was based on several photographs of Mandela that the artist found on the Internet, as well as a film still.³ Noting that it "reads as a familiar photographic image, structurally suggestive of his incarceration"⁴ when seen from the front, when viewed from the side, the artist observes, "the design and arrangement of the columns create a sense or moment of fracture and release."⁵ The idea of "release"—the title of the sculpture—which refers to both the liberation of Mandela from prison twenty-seven years after his arrest and the emancipation of South Africans from apartheid rule, is thus invoked formally through the illusion of Mandela being discharged or dissolved.

Erected to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Mandela's capture, Cianfanelli's sculpture has in the space of just half a decade become a landmark monument in South Africa. Despite its remote location, it attracts busloads of visitors daily. As Christopher Till, director of the Apartheid Museum and a former director of culture for the City of Johannesburg, has observed, the sculpture "captures people's imagination" and has in fact become "a place of pilgrimage."⁶ It is notable that hundreds of people came to the monument to pay respects immediately after Mandela's death on December 5, 2013.⁷ One would indeed be hard pressed to find a person who has visited Cianfanelli's sculpture and not responded positively to it—although South Africans critical of Mandela have presumably avoided it.

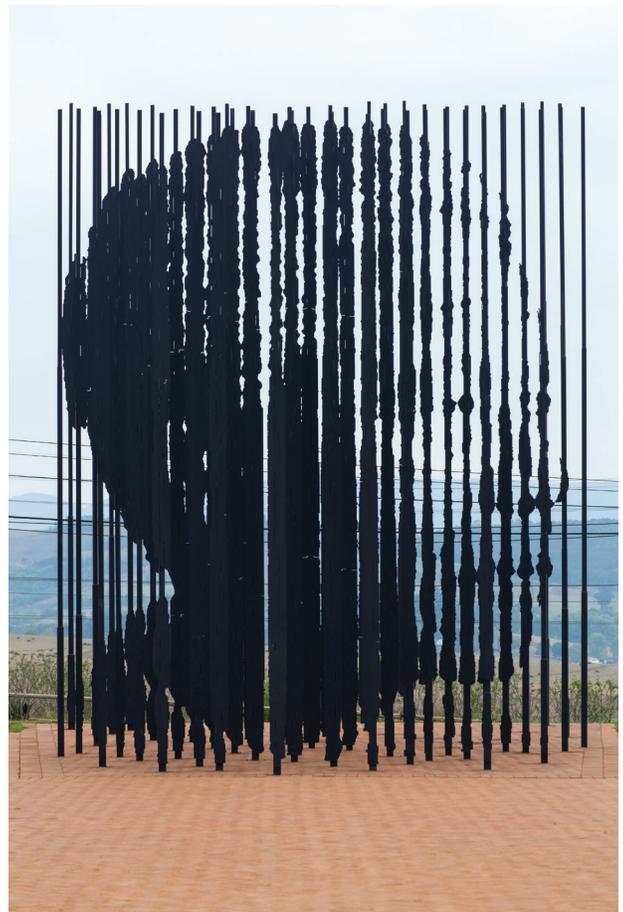
In a country with a multitude of other monuments to Mandela, not to mention heritage sites that refer to the struggle against

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1 Marco Cianfanelli
Release (2012) from a distance of 35 m
 Painted laser-cut mild steel and steel tube construction, to be rusted; W: 5.19 m, H: 9.48 m, L: 20.8 m
 Nelson Mandela Capture Site near Howick, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, October 2017

2 Marco Cianfanelli, *Release* (2012), detail



apartheid and liberation histories, what is it about this particular work that accounts for its increasing popularity? And how is this work different from these other representations, given that it also involves figuration and portraiture? Most crucially, how has it played a role in shifting what viewers in South Africa (and potentially beyond its borders) may understand as the role and purpose of a commemorative monument in the twenty-first century?

In this article I explore and address these questions by analyzing *Release* and comparing it with other depictions of Mandela in the public domain in South Africa. Arguing that the reasons for its popularity may reside in what I explain as its “performativity,” I reveal how it departs from traditional monuments in the sense that its imagery is quite literally brought into being through the actions and responses of its viewers. Located within a contemporary international genre of monument-making that shifts the impact of the work away from the realms of narrow didacticism to how it is experienced, Cianfanelli’s monument suggests how public sculpture in South Africa—and indeed in Africa more



strategies that defy the authoritarianism associated with traditionalist monuments is clearly apt for a leader associated with liberation from the oppressive circumstances of apartheid and the adoption of a democratic bill of rights. But I suggest additionally how understandings about the statesman and memories of him specifically are perhaps best achieved through emphasis on his image as transient and allusive.

Representations of Mandela have previously been discussed in valuable and insightful ways by Steven Nelson (2014) and Lize van Robbroeck (2014), but both focus on a variety of media and visual forms rather than on public sculpture specifically.⁸ Although there is a short interview with Grant Parker, a scholar of Classics, about representations of Mandela in public sculpture (Fredner 2014) as well as short write-ups of Cianfanelli's work in popular media such as newspapers and blogs, *Release* has not yet been unpacked in depth. In this article I seek to remedy this gap. Discussing first the circumstances of its commission, which has not hitherto been explained, I offer an interpretation of the work in comparison to other large-scale public sculptures of Mandela in South Africa. I also suggest briefly some ways in which it has exerted influence on representations in the public domain and outline further plans for the site where it is located.

DEVELOPING A CAPTURE SITE IN HOWICK

The idea of constructing an illusionistic image may have originated with Christopher Till. In the 1990s, Till and the late Jeremy Rose of Mashabane Rose Architects had constituted a small company, Culture Mechanics, to work on the interiors of heritage structures and often shared ideas. Till recalls describing to Rose his impression of a structure in a literature museum in Japan where, “when you looked out of a window, there were some pillars with some Japanese lettering and things on it. And at a particular moment you could look at it and it made a sentence which was part of a poem.”⁹ But the plans for an illusionistic image of Mandela's face through a series of steel plinths was devised in 2005 by Cianfanelli and Rose (who had met while both worked on the first phase of the development of Freedom Park in Pretoria between 2001 and 2004)¹⁰; submitting a competition entry for a

generally—might also potentially become a genre that encourages the viewer to focus less on official accounts of events than on their own understandings or memories of them.

I also propose that visual strategies used within the work enable particularly effective commentary about Mandela. Deploying



3 Marco Cianfanelli
Release (2012) from a distance of a few meters

4 Marco Cianfanelli
Release (2012) close up



5 Monument to commemorate the site of Nelson Mandela's arrest on August 5, 1962, unveiled on December 12, 1996.

6 Nelson Mandela Capture Site Museum constructed from a renovated shed.

public representation of the statesman, they envisaged at that stage an image of Mandela's portrait in three-quarter view rather than in profile or facing the west.¹¹ While the competition never resulted in a work being commissioned, Rose, Cianfanelli, and Till felt that the design had enormous potential for success and began to seek out other opportunities to realize it. As Cianfanelli explains: "I'd sketch visuals of these different places and Jeremy and Christopher, and sometimes just Christopher, as he is a campaigner, would go off and speak to people."¹²

The idea for the capture site arose in about 2008. Till, who lives in the Midlands, was struck by how much more effective their idea might be than the unremarkable commemorative structure from 1996 marking the site, which he often passed while commuting between his home and Johannesburg. Having met the director of planning of the local uMngeni Municipality and ascertained that he was amenable to receiving suggestions for a redevelopment of the site, Till worked with Rose to draw up a proposal—one that involved buying a farm across the road from the piece of land where the 1996 monument was placed. But moving forward with the idea turned out to be a protracted affair. Although the municipal council were excited by the plans, they could only proceed when they received the requisite funding to purchase the farm via a grant from Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), a body responsible for providing municipal support. Matters went awry during the tender process for developing the site, however. As a result of a team member accidentally submitting an expired tax certificate, not only was their bid summarily excluded but also this penalty was imposed without their knowledge. Months later they learned that the tender had been won by a group of engineers in Pretoria, who solicited architects from Durban to help them work on a design. But the Nelson Mandela Foundation deemed the proposal

developed through that collaboration unacceptable and requested that the project instead revert to Rose and Till, who completely reconceptualized it.

Initially Culture Mechanics obtained a lease for the farm property—which was subsequently taken over by the Apartheid Museum. There were a few derelict structures on the site, which they renovated into a small restaurant and some shops. The site also included a rudimentary shed, which was refurbished with a floor and some internal walls to serve as a basic museum (Fig. 6). While these developments were underway, Amafa aKwaZulu-Natali, the provincial heritage conservation agency for KwaZulu-Natal that is known simply as "Amafa," had taken over management of the small plot of land across the road that contained the 1996 memorial and were keen to erect a sculpture. Till successfully proposed that COGTA release monies left over from the purchase of the farm to pay for the Cianfanelli work.

Using long poles produced to scale, Cianfanelli, Rose, and Till began to work out the exact position for the sculpture, seeking to





7 Driveway leading to parking area and museum at the Nelson Mandela Capture Site, July 2015.

8 Inside the original Nelson Mandela Capture Site Museum, July 2015.

ensure it be appropriately framed by the background landscape. Crucial in this regard was their idea, as Till explains, “that you don’t just approach it off the road and walk a few meters but that you have to drive through the entrance to a driveway, drive right to the top of the driveway, park, look at the exhibition, come down a pathway and only then there is the sculpture” (Fig. 7).¹³ Important too was Rose’s design for a groove in the earth as one approached the work. “It is not just a sculpture plonked down,” Cianfanelli observes, but is instead constituted in such a way that it facilitates “a pilgrimage or re-enactment of the long walk to freedom.” As you get closer to the work, he notes, “the earth is cut away and pushed forward and becomes this shelf” for the sculpture. Thus, not unlike the experience of visitors traversing Maya Lin’s well-known Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, “you also walk down and find the earth around you.”¹⁴

August 4, 2012, was set for the unveiling, one day ahead of the actual fiftieth anniversary of Mandela’s capture, and work proceeded apace. While Till and the Apartheid Museum devised an overview exhibition for the shed, one including printed wall-high texts and images as well as television footage of interviews with Mandela (Fig. 8), Rose organized landscaping for the site and Cianfanelli commenced his refinements of the sculpture, finalizing the design between March and June.

RELEASE AND THE REPRESENTATION OF NELSON MANDELA

Cianfanelli’s sculpture at the capture site is by no means the only large-scale representation of Mandela in the public domain in South Africa. For example, Mandela Square in the large shopping complex Sandton City includes a 6-meter-high sculpture by Kobus Hattingh and Jacob Maponyane that was unveiled on March 31, 2004 (Fig. 9). Showing the

elderly statesman engaged in a so-called Mandela Jive, its installation marked ten years of democracy. Relatedly, a 9-meter high bronze sculpture by André Prinsloo and Ruhan Janse van Vuuren erected outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria on December 16, 2013, some eight days after Mandela’s death, shows him in one of his informal shirts —this time with outstretched arms—a gesture of “embracing the whole nation,” former President Jacob Zuma remarked at its unveiling (Fig. 10).¹⁵ There are others, too. For example, Jean Doyle’s 3-meter representation of Mandela offering a power salute outside Groot Drakenstein Correctional Centre, formerly Victor Verster Prison where the statesman spent the last years of his incarceration, was unveiled on August 27, 2008 (Fig. 11), and the statesman is shown in a related pose in an 8-meter-high bronze figure that Kobus Hattingh sculpted for Naval Hill, overlooking Bloemfontein, that was unveiled on December 14, 2012 (Fig. 12).

As these examples indicate, figurative statuary on a grand scale





9 Kobus Hattingh and Jacob Maponyane
Nelson Mandela (2004)
 Bronze, H; 6 m
 Mandela Square, Sandton City

10 André Prinsloo and Ruhan Janse van Vuuren
Nelson Mandela (2013)
 Bronze, H; 9 m
 Union Buildings, Pretoria

is often assumed to be the most appropriate way of creating recognition for heroes of South Africa's struggle such as Mandela. But traditionalist mimetic works of this type can in fact be in tension with the mnemonic agenda that those building the monuments have in mind. Even when rendered on a grand scale, mimetic figures have a propensity to become invisible. Robert Musil, an Austrian writer and philosopher whose work included critical reflections on the visual and literary arts, first observed in a talk in 1927 that grand figurative monuments tend to be "conspicuously inconspicuous": while "no doubt erected to be seen," they are "impregnated with something that repels attention, causing the glance to roll right off, like water droplets off an oilcloth, without even pausing for a moment" (Musil 2006: 64). Consequently, traditionalist figurative monuments, while seeming commemorative and ensuring that the sacrifices of a



statesman and hero such as Mandela are remembered, actually provide permission to forget about him. As James Young (1999: 2) notes of sculptures of this type: "It is as if once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember."

Monuments including figuration—at least of a grandiose type—can be additionally problematical in their frequent association with totalitarianism and extravagant displays of power and authority. It is notable in this regard that elaborate monuments with figurative groupings have been popular in various parts of Africa, particularly through commissions given to the Mansudae Overseas Development Group, a North Korean company, whose many undertakings include Heroes Acre near Windhoek in Namibia, the National Heroes Acre in Zimbabwe, and the African Renaissance Monument in Senegal. A bronze rendition of Mandela by Barry Jackson and Xhanti Mpankama, while not in itself especially grandiose, has been integrated into a sculptural arrangement that, while different in style to work by the Mansudae Group, has the extravagance and heavy-handed symbolism that tends to characterize many projects of this type (Fig. 13). Arranged as if on a "long march to freedom," the initiative comprised larger-than-life bronze sculpted figures—fifty at that stage, but with considerably more envisaged for the project—that were installed at Groenkloof Nature Reserve in Pretoria in 2015 (see Gamedze 2015). Showing Mandela, in this instance offering a power salute, the emphasis in this sculpture and others in the



11 Jean Doyle
Nelson Mandela—Long Walk to Freedom (2008)
 Bronze, H: 3 m
 Groot Drakenstein Prison, Paarl
 Photo: Gordon Hiles

12 Kobus Hattingh
Nelson Mandela (2012)
 Bronze, H: 8 m
 Naval Hill overlooking Bloemfontein

scheme was on achieving mimesis—a quality increased through the addition of polychrome to the representations. But while offering tourists the opportunity to encounter figures from the past as if palpably in the present, its overall impact is unfortunate. Problematical in its rendition of figures from different historical moments (and with unlike imperatives) into an arrangement in which they trail after Mandela in a supposedly preordained march to freedom, the overall effect is rather more ghoulish than inspirational.

Cianfanelli's sculpture of Mandela is even taller than the sculpture at the Union Buildings. It also involves illusionism and is part of a scheme invoking reference to the "long walk to freedom." Yet it nonetheless avoids all the problematical associations and effects of the sculptures already discussed. One important reason for this, I contend, is what one might term the "performativity" of *Release*.

While generally understood to derive from a study first published in 1962, in which the philosopher J.L. Austin drew a distinction between instances in which "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" rather than purely descriptive or a statement of fact or assumed fact (Austin 1975: 6), "performativity" has tended to become, as Shannon Jackson observes, simply "an umbrella to cluster recent cross-disciplinary work in time, in space, with bodies, in relational encounters" (Jackson 2014). But while the term does not clearly and unequivocally pertain to a particular category of art, it can be helpful in highlighting what Dorothea von Hantelmann (2014) identifies as a shift from what an artwork depicts and represents to the effects and experiences that it produces—or, to follow Austin, from what it "says" to what





of Mandela by Prinsloo and Janse van Vuuren at the Union Buildings tends to leave viewers transfixed, losing all immediate sense of their own bodies in time and space. Norman Bryson identifies this form of looking as the “gaze” and associates it with works that are illusionistic and blot out all signs of their own construction.¹⁸ The Cianfanelli work, while also incorporating an illusionistic image, has the opposite effect on viewers. Walking on a pathway that is sunk into the landscape, indeed seemingly burrowed into the earth, visitors are aware of their own physical or embodied presence in the surroundings. Furthermore, as Kim Miller and I have pointed out, the Cianfanelli work reveals its own constructedness:

One walks up to the steel columns, discerning how these components fuse into an image, and then, as one moves closer and looks at them from different angles, the viewer ceases seeing any reference to a face and instead comprehends only abstract metal stakes—the raw materials, as it were, from which the illusionism is constituted (Miller and Schmahmann 2017: xx–xxi).

the work is given shape and form through the journey towards it. In other words, visitors in a sense produce the imagery rather than simply scrutinize an existing image. While viewers often take photographs of the sculpture at 35 meters and post these on social media sites, perhaps conveying a sense to those who have not visited the monument that this is its only “correct” and appropriate viewing position,¹⁶ it is in fact the process of bringing the image in and out of perspective that contributes to its impact. Or, as Cianfanelli remarks: “For me, it is the process of becoming that is exciting: it is not the point of arrival.”¹⁷

While one may become so accustomed to the presence of some traditionalist monuments that they are not even noticed, let alone the significance of their subject matter known, this is obviously not true of monuments that become part of heritage tourism—that is, sculptures that are specifically sought out. Nonetheless, viewers tend to relate to even the latter somewhat differently than to the Cianfanelli work. When it is scrutinized from a sufficient distance to enable the whole figure to be seen, the representation

The outcome, we note, is that “rather than being transfixed by the image and viewing the work as iconic and remote, one comprehends it in terms of what Bryson (1983: 94) calls ‘the glance’—a form of looking that recognizes ‘the durational temporality of the viewing subject’” (Miller and Schmahmann 2017: xxi). It is probably this quality that also results in a work that, despite its enormous size, seems to sustain an image of Mandela as accessible. This was clearly important to Cianfanelli, who, while often working on a large scale, consciously sought to avoid an image that was oppressive or overbearing. As he observes: “I’ve never related to the sort of machismo sense of male artists ... I want works to be large because they become uplifting and you engage with them but not to be oppressive or assertive.”¹⁹

13 Installation of bronze figures by various artists at Groenkloof Nature Reserve, Pretoria. The sculpture of Mandela on the right is by Barry Jackson and Xhanti Mpankama. December 2015.

14 Chris van der Vyver
Jacob Zuma Capture Site Monument (2017)
Mixed media, H: about 6 m
Groot Marico



The uplifting quality has something to do with the fact that the image of Mandela appears as if by a magical or even supernatural intervention, as if he were an apparition in the place where he was captured. Till explains this quality:

People love it because this is where Mandela disappeared for twenty-seven years. This is where he came back, he reappeared. You feel his spirit. You walk between the poles. They dissolve. They're almost organic in that way. They're not rigid. People love the way they are almost magic, but they feel spiritually about it too.²⁰

This association of a portrait with the magical is particularly appropriate for an individual associated during his presidency with capacities to “magically” overcome a divisiveness so entrenched within an apartheid South Africa and thus enable a peaceful transition to democracy. As Deborah Posel (2014: 71) observes, the euphoria in the early period of democracy

was inextricable from a discourse of “magic” and “miracle,” in turn inseparable from the extraordinary persona and presence of Nelson Mandela. It was Mandela, preeminently, who inspired conventionally sober people to speak and write with unfamiliar hyperbole. Many agreed with Archbishop Tutu that without Mandela the “whole country would have gone up in flames.” Far more than anyone else, it was Mandela who performed the breach with the past and the “national reconciliation” that went with it. That Mandela stepped out of prison after twenty-seven dark years willing to negotiate with his oppressors became a metonym of the

wider national “miracle” of a peaceful transition to democracy, with Mandela acclaimed as the miracle maker.

This “magical” quality is apt in a further sense. Zolani Ngwane (2014: 127), in the course of his exploration of Mandela’s relation to “tradition” and custom, considers the significance of Mandela’s decision to appear at his 1962 trial (where he served as his own attorney) donned in the leopard skin and beads of Thembu royalty. He notes that, in the period prior to Mandela’s capture and trial, when operating underground and wanted by the police, “he

15 Marco Cianfanelli
Shadow Boxing (2013)
Laser-cut painted steel, 5.3 m x 2.3 m x 0.5 m
Seen with the Magistrate’s Court in Johannesburg in the background

16 Marco Cianfanelli
Shadow Boxing (2013)
Laser-cut painted steel, 5.3 m x 2.3 m x 0.5 m
Seen with Chancellor House in Johannesburg in the background



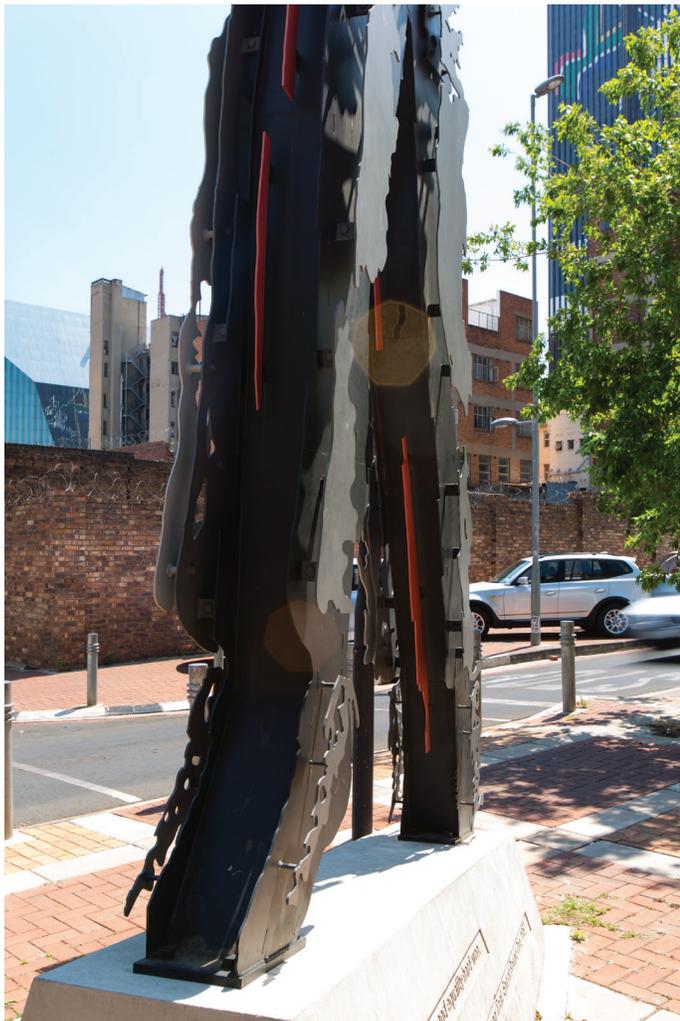
developed a public image that centered on his body—a corporal icon with phantasmal amplifiers.” Observing that a “mythology around Mandela’s body developed sharply during his time in hiding when he would make spectacular unannounced appearances at meetings and rallies around the country,” Ngwane remarks also that “sightings of his phantom-like body had begun to circulate in hushed conspiratorial tones in the townships.” While the point Ngwane is making is that by the time of his appearance at his 1962 trial “Mandela had already attained something of a Christological status as a miracle worker” and that the period saw

his construction as a Messiah, it would seem apt also that this sculpture evokes a sense of the time he was in hiding and would “magically” show up at various locales.

In their discussion of Mandela’s mortality, including his own view of death as well as the potential effects of his passing, Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe have written about how Mandela had long since accomplished the art of managing his self-presentation, often subduing traces of his own emotions and sacrificing personal wants and needs to a larger political purpose. Suggesting that “the beauty and subtlety of his person and his life must be mapped onto his invocation of the ‘we’ of a community, of a public in which he partakes and that he personifies,” they propose that “Nelson Mandela has long been a set of surfaces, completely readable and completely flat at the same time. He has been a screen on which to project wishes and dreams, often contradictory ones” (Nuttall and Mbembe 2014: 285). Cianfanelli’s sculpture, with its illusion composed of various images of Mandela, is itself a work that reveals itself to be “completely readable and completely flat at the same time.” It is as if the viewer has thus summoned into visibility an image of Mandela that, in its changeability, seems to invoke a sense of the way in which he becomes material for modeling diverse hopes and aspirations. And by bringing in and out of focus (or, when seen from the side, fracturing) his image, Cianfanelli’s sculpture simultaneously encapsulates a sense of the allusiveness of Mandela’s individual subjectivity.

17 Detail of Marco Cianfanelli’s *Shadow Boxing* (2013) from the side

18 Sign including Bob Gosani’s photograph of Nelson Mandela sparring with champion boxer Jerry Moloj on the rooftop of the South African Associated Newspapers office. The photo was used as a source for Marco Cianfanelli’s *Shadow Boxing* (2013).





19 The new museum at the Nelson Mandela Capture Site, designed by Mashabane Rose, in incomplete form.

20 Across the road from *Release*, five laser-cut steel plinths have been added to the site containing the 1996 monument commemorating Mandela's capture.

MIMICRY AND INFLUENCE

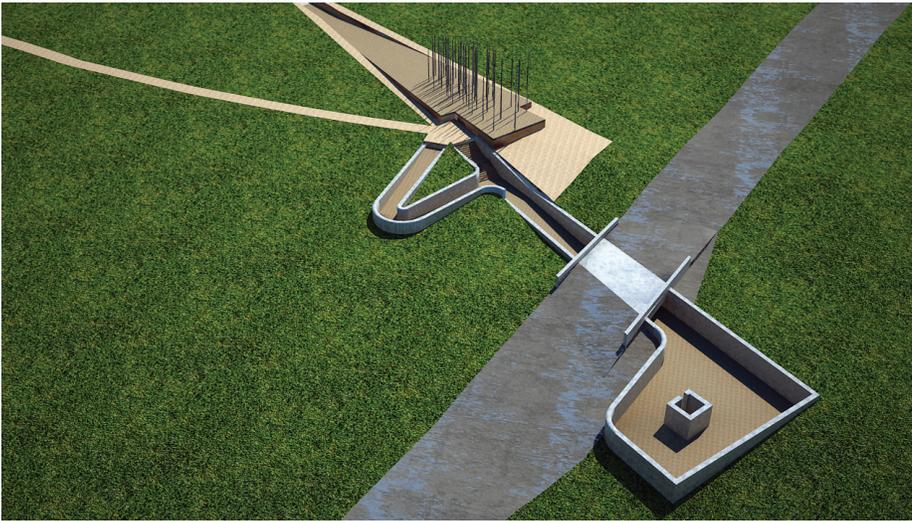
New forms of representation can pose the danger of becoming a recipe and, if used without sensitivity to context, losing their impact and relevance. This potential difficulty has become a concern to Cianfanelli, who has been approached by people and bodies from various countries seeking to order sculptures that would immortalize their own heroes and leaders in related ways. While turning down such invitations and instead seeking to “give people alternative options rather than to say we take should take this method and put a new face on it,”²¹ he agreed to produce a small number of models (macquettes) of *Release* on a ratio of a quarter, eighth, and sixteenth in scale to the original. But the intention of the models, he indicates, is to emphasize and celebrate the value of the capture site itself rather than to serve simply as substitutes for the experience it invokes.²² Thus, for example, one of the two largest of these models, which is placed on a plinth in the Apartheid Museum, refers to the original work on its accompanying plaque.²³ And although displayed in such a way that viewers are directed to stand in a particular spot to comprehend the illusion and in that sense to imagine the impact of the original, the model nevertheless does not, and cannot, enable the experience that results from the act of bringing the image in and out of perspective by proceeding towards it via a pathway dug into the earth and at the location of Mandela’s capture.

The success of the Cianfanelli work has, however, prompted further thoughts about the possibilities of the “capture site” as a trope within heritage discourse. In October 2017, the public learned via media reports that Jacob Zuma, then South African president, was scheduled to attend the unveiling of a monument to his own capture on June 9, 1963—in the district of Groot Marico near Zeerust in the North West—that resulted in his

ten-year incarceration on Robben Island. Zuma and collaborators were captured as they were on the point of escaping South Africa. The Groot Marico Heritage Site, through its glorification of the former president, is envisaged as a key component of the Liberation Heritage Route of the North West “where activists crossed as they went into exile to continue the struggle against apartheid” (Montsho 2017). But the work (Fig. 14) turned out to be entirely devoid of the impact of Cianfanelli’s sculpture at Howick. An unremarkable structure by an unknown boiler maker and fireball artist, Chris van der Vyver (see Tshehle 2017), it features a fireball shape incorporating a portrayal of the president in triplicate displayed on top of curved steel struts. Trophy-like in form, and placed in the center of a space with eight walls featuring a narrative about Zuma, it is ultimately no less overbearing than many traditionalist monuments with figural embellishments.²⁴

But *Release* also has the potential to exert a positive influence on the development of a more compelling language for





that the Magistrate's Court is "the context of the legal system, where prosecution and defense are metered out according to the law."²⁵ This association was seen as apt for Mandela himself as it is "symbolic of the fight for equality, dignity, and human rights, through the vehicle of the South African legal system." But it was also a game that involved negotiating a system characterized by inequality and bias: The legal system was one in which "champions of the struggle" such as Mandela "were effectively boxing outside of the ring or at least, [within] a ring that was distorted and biased in its nature."²⁶

Made from painted laser-cut steel, Cianfanelli's sculpture reveals its origins in a photograph not only through the artist's rendition of the figure in terms of the stylizations and devices used in two-dimensional representations to convey light, shade, and a sense of volume but also through an avoidance of sculptural traditions of depicting a figure in the round. Rather than being shown from the front and back, the figure in fact comprises two front views. If one stands with one's back to Chancellor House and faces the Magistrate's Court, a boxing Mandela is shown as he appeared in Gosani's photograph (Fig. 15). But, when viewed from the opposite side, by a viewer standing with his or her back to the court, facing Mandela's office buildings, Mandela is also shown from the front—as if the negative of the source photograph had simply been reversed (Fig. 16). Then, as in *Release*, any sense of illusion in the work dissipates when it is seen from the side: The planar forms constituting the work are exposed as abstract sheets of metal that have been bolted and welded together (Fig. 17).

public art portraits than the traditionalist approaches that have tended to predominate in South Africa, and the artist himself has continued to look for less literal ways of rendering heroes and figureheads than is the norm. In 2013, Cianfanelli completed another public sculpture featuring Mandela. Commissioned by the Johannesburg Development Agency for the City of Johannesburg, *Shadow Boxing* (2013; Figs. 15–17) is outside the Magistrate's Court and just opposite Chancellor House in Johannesburg, where Mandela and Oliver Tambo practiced law in the 1950s and which had been restored by 2011. While the artist avoids simply repeating the same formal language deployed in the capture site, *Shadow Boxing* nevertheless reveals how *Release* may have played a role in developing ideas about how depicting a recognizable figure might be done in such a way as to avoid the literal and instead involve metaphor, as well as how a sculpture of an individual rendered on a large scale can be engaging rather than bombastic or overwhelming.

A nearby sign (Fig. 18) informs the viewer that the work refers to a photograph, by *Drum* photographer Bob Gosani, of Mandela "sparring with boxing champion Jerry Moloi on the rooftop of the South African Associated Newspapers office," and it reproduces the image that served as its source. For Cianfanelli the practice of boxing could be associated with the practice of law. While "boxing consists of rules of engagement, for which the ring is the context or field," law could be likened to it in the sense

that the Magistrate's Court is "the context of the legal system, where prosecution and defense are metered out according to the law."²⁵ This association was seen as apt for Mandela himself as it is "symbolic of the fight for equality, dignity, and human rights, through the vehicle of the South African legal system." But it was also a game that involved negotiating a system characterized by inequality and bias: The legal system was one in which "champions of the struggle" such as Mandela "were effectively boxing outside of the ring or at least, [within] a ring that was distorted and biased in its nature."²⁶

CONCLUSION—A CAPTURE SITE FOR THE FUTURE

The popularity of *Release* made it clear that its site warrants a more advanced museum than the shed renovated for the work's unveiling in August 2012. Rose subsequently designed a building that might serve this purpose, while Till secured funding for its construction from COPTA. Rose, sadly, died on December 20, 2015, and various delays have meant that, some three years after construction began in 2014, it had not yet been completed

21 Elevation view illustrating the planned connection between the site of Cianfanelli's *Release* and the site across the road of the 1996 monument commemorating Mandela's capture. A passageway between the two sites is envisaged for under the motorway. Image: courtesy Mashabane Rose

22 Plan for the redeveloped site of the 1996 monument commemorating Mandela's capture. The idea is that this monument will be walled and accessed via a passageway underneath the motorway between it and the site of Cianfanelli's sculpture. Image: courtesy Mashabane Rose



by February 2018, when this article was written (Fig. 19).²⁷ But, while awaiting completion of the building, Till began developing components of its exhibition. Envisaging an account that focuses on the liberation struggle in KwaZulu-Natal and Mandela's role within it rather than what he terms "the life and times of Nelson Mandela" in the temporary museum, he is developing an exhibition that has emotive impact rather than being narrowly didactic.²⁸ Having located a 1962 Austin Westminster of the type that Mandela was driving when he was captured, Till plans to put the vehicle itself on display at the entrance to the museum. From there, visitors will enter a large exhibition hall with a window looking out towards the sculpture. At the center of the room will be a 20 x 3-meter light box, a "glowing white light table which you'll walk around," with various layers: "At the bottom is glass which is where effectively where you can put things," Till explains, "and there is a top glass which you can print on. And there are screens with films and small things you can listen to."²⁹ Around the walls of the space will be a 360-degree film that will, at first, show footage of the car traveling through the local landscape. Thereafter "it morphs into a second articulation which is some of the events of the time—so that it places the journey in the context of what was happening at the time."³⁰ After this, the focus will be on the First Democratic Election. Viewers, he indicates, will then proceed to the auditorium, where the display will encourage visitors "to think about how they are going to take the essence of what Mandela was about into the future."³¹ Finally, they will be guided to the pathway leading to the sculpture.

Till has been unable to get permission to remove or physically

alter the monument erected in 1996 (Fig. 5). While there were attempts to integrate it and the Cianfanelli monument through the addition to the site of steel plinths incorporating the date of Mandela's arrest, of the type used in the sculpture (Fig. 20), its relationship to the newly developed site remained uncomfortable and peculiar. Alert to this, Rose in cooperation with Till devised a more complex relation between that structure and the museum (Figs. 21–22), one that will serve as the next stage of the site's development once the museum is complete. The plan in this regard is to create a physical connecting point to the 1996 monument by excavating underneath the road and using this extension as a further exhibition site. The intention is that visitors who have progressed through the museum and experienced Cianfanelli's sculpture will continue via this underground space to see the monument marking the site of Mandela's capture.

But even though the site remains a work in progress, *Release* has proved itself to be compelling. The success of Cianfanelli's sculpture, I have sought to reveal, is not only the outcome of its celebration of an individual who is widely loved and admired or its location within a space that has captured the public imagination. Additionally, it has impact because of its performativity as well as the appropriateness of its metaphoric language to perspectives about Mandela. While incorporating illusionism as well as the enormous scale one might associate with traditionalist figurative sculpture, its performativity and associative qualities situate it within a contemporary discourse and enable it to avoid the bombast and the impetus towards forgetting that characterizes so many other public sculptures of icons and heroes.

Notes

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1 Williams was subsequently released. He relocated to the United Kingdom, where he was born.

2 Before he died in March 2016, Donald Rickard, a former US vice-consul in Durban with links to the CIA, admitted responsibility in an interview with film director John Irving (see Allen 2016).

3 Tracy Murinik, "Powerful New National Monument Marks Nelson Mandela's Capture Site in Natal Midlands." Press release produced prior to the work's unveiling in 2012, supplied to me by the artist.

4 Cianfanelli is not referring to prison bars in a literal sense, however. As he observed in an interview with me at his studio in Parktown on September 7, 2017, people tend to misquote this commentary. This sense of confinement is in "the image of Mandela because it is linear and vertical. There's a sense of confinement because it is static. That for me represents confinement and not because it is 'prison bars'."

5 Cianfanelli quoted by Murinik, "Powerful New National Monument."

6 Christopher Till, interview with author, September 27, 2017, the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg.

7 According to Regchand (2013), "More than 2500

South African and international visitors flocked to the Nelson Mandela Capture Site near Howick yesterday [December 8, 2013] to pay tribute to the former president. Floral arrangements, candles, written messages and drawings of the world figure" were placed in front of the sculpture. The article indicates that about 1700 people visited the site on December 7 and more than 1200 on December 6.

8 Looking at a range of images in popular visual culture, Nelson offers a sensitive exploration of what he terms the two bodies of Mandela—the physical one that bore the changes of old age and ill health, on the one hand, and an ageless mythic one, on the other—that is, the body associated with aspirations for ideals of justice and equality. Reworking W.J.T. Mitchell's question, "What do pictures want?" into "What do pictures of Mandela want?" he argues that "through an almost mystical merger of his mythic body with our psychic desires," representations of the mythic Mandela enable us to "fashion ourselves as subjects who stand on the right side of history" (Nelson 2014: 142). Van Robbroeck focuses perceptively on ways in which representations of Mandela negotiate a set of tensions in a country where competing allegiances and identities complicate the idea of achieving a unified sense of nationhood. Looking on the one hand at how "his durable love affair with the media soothed white fears and fostered black hopes," she considers more broadly how his vision of ideal citizenship involved a "stitching together of African traditional values, Western democratic liberal structures, global capitalism and pan-African communitarianism" (Van Robbroeck 2014: 263).

9 Christopher Till, interview with author, September 27, 2017, the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg.

10 Marco Cianfanelli, interview with author, September 7, 2017, the artist's studio in Parktown, Johannesburg.

11 A diagram of the design can be seen in Dodd 2005: 4.

12 Marco Cianfanelli, interview with author, September 7, 2017, the artist's studio in Parktown, Johannesburg.

13 Christopher Till, interview with author, September 27, 2017, the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg.

14 Marco Cianfanelli, interview with author, September 7, 2017, the artist's studio in Parktown, Johannesburg.

15 <https://www.brandsouthafrica.com/people-culture/mandela/18-facts-about-the-9-metre-mandela-statue> Accessed December 1, 2017.

16 Cianfanelli points out that photographs of the work tend, in fact, to convey a clearer portrait of Mandela than is the case in actual experience, speculating that the "reason is that when you look, you look with two eyes, so that it is really not a perfect perspective" (Marco Cianfanelli, interview with author, September 7, 2017, the artist's studio in Parktown, Johannesburg).

17 Marco Cianfanelli, interview with author, September 7, 2017, the artist's studio in Parktown, Johannesburg.

18 By obfuscating any sense of the work as something produced, the sculpture may instead "encourage a synchronic instant of viewing which will eclipse the body and the glance, in an infinitely extended Gaze of the image as pure idea," Bryson (1983: 94) writes.

19 Marco Cianfanelli, interview with author, September 7, 2017, the artist's studio in Parktown, Johannesburg.

20 Christopher Till, interview with author, September 27, 2017, the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg.

21 Marco Cianfanelli, interview with author, September 7, 2017, the artist's studio in Parktown, Johannesburg.

22 Marco Cianfanelli, interview with author, September 7, 2017, the artist's studio in Parktown, Johannesburg.

23 The other large-scale sculpture, Cianfanelli observes, "was produced for the exhibit in Paris. And that one disassembles. You take the parts out and unbolt them and pack it flat and it can ship" (Marco Cianfanelli, interview with author, September 7, 2017, the artist's studio in Parktown, Johannesburg).

24 An initiative to direct public focus to the beleaguered former president's struggle credentials through

establishing a capture site monument for him was badly misjudged. Given South Africa's focus on Zuma's role in facilitating state capture by the Gupta family, it was unsurprising that the opposition Democratic Alliance suggested that Zuma's capture site was in fact not Groot Marico but instead the compound of the Gupta family in the suburb of Saxonwold in Johannesburg. See, for example, Bornman 2017.

25 Press release for *Shadow Boxing*, 2013.

26 Press release for *Shadow Boxing*, 2013.

27 According to Till, these delays were in part caused by contractual complications and disputes (Christopher Till, interview with author, September 27, 2017, the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg).

28 Christopher Till, interview with author, September 27, 2017, the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg.

29 Christopher Till, interview with author, September 27, 2017, the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg.

30 Christopher Till, interview with author, September 27, 2017, the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg.

31 Christopher Till, interview with author, September 27, 2017, the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg.

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