

# The material of mourning: Paul Emmanuel's *Lost Men* as counter-memorials

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## Abstract

Paul Emmanuel's works to be discussed are site-specific, counter-memorial statements called *The Lost Men*. Each installation consists of semi-transparent cloth banners carrying photographic images of parts of the artist's body, imprinted with the names of men who represent participants from both sides of each conflict memorialised. These are often men who went undocumented in official records and include those who were lost or killed in major conflicts, from the Frontier Wars in the Eastern Cape: *The Lost Men Grahamstown* (2004), to the civil war in Mozambique: *The Lost Men Mozambique* (2007) and from World War 1: *The Lost Men France* (2014). Emmanuel's banners are fragile; some have been lost and some have deteriorated *in situ*. In all their iterations, they engage with memory, impermanence, vulnerability, death and an alternative view of masculine identity that undermines the macho aggression associated with warfare. I discuss the role a lack of material substance plays in enhancing the message of loss and grief. I argue that the very impermanence of cloth is essential to countering what Pierre Nora (1989:8) terms the '*lieux de memoire*' – lasting physical memorials that enshrine and perpetuate "memories" when the lived experience of those memories have long been lost. Emmanuel's *Lost Men* are truly in the process of being "lost" through disintegration, and I argue that this physical deterioration, in conjunction with the imagery Emmanuel uses, is the key to their success as counter-memorials.

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Original Research

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Paul Emmanuel (born 1969) is an artist who engages with the complex constructs of masculinity and rituals of life and death within the South African context. His early work from the 1990s consists of exquisitely delicate drawings, etchings and lithographs that evoke these existential issues with a subtle and sometimes enigmatic vision that always expresses the vulnerability of life.<sup>1</sup> The works to be discussed here, however, are aspects of Emmanuel's later *Lost Men* projects (from 2004 and ongoing) – a series of site-specific installations of fragile cloth banners bearing images of Emmanuel's naked body marked with the names of dead soldiers who partook in each conflict. *The Lost Men* projects have been discussed in several articles,<sup>2</sup> but in this essay I aim to approach the works with particular reference to discourses on counter-memorials.<sup>3</sup> I also consider how Emmanuel's use of fabric as a signifier of human fragility functions within this framework.

Before analysing Emmanuel's approach to memorials, I give a brief overview of the practical aspects of each installation by discussing the choice of setting, the material, and the installation details. I then consider the function and structure of war memorials and monuments and their attempts to "fix" specific memories, in order to provide a context from which to identify how and why Emmanuel's *The Lost Men* project differs. This is followed by a discussion of *The Lost Men* under the heading of counter-memorials to explain how these installations might actively undermine the commemorative function of memorials. I argue that it is the nature of their (im-)materiality and impermanence, as much as the imagery and content of Emmanuel's works, that identifies them as counter-memorials.

## *The Lost Men*

*The Lost Men* projects began with *The Lost Men Grahamstown* (1-10 July 2004; Figure 1). The installation consisted of 21 synthetic voile banners<sup>4</sup> hanging in three parallel rows, like laundry on washing lines. It was erected on a piece of empty land adjacent to the 1820 Settler's Memorial and the Settler's Monument building, thus responding to specific battles and acts of colonial appropriation that have been memorialised on this site. The work includes the names of both black and white soldiers who took part in the Frontier Wars that occurred between 1779 and 1879.<sup>5</sup> These names were imprinted into Emmanuel's naked skin with lead type<sup>6</sup> and photographed before the marks could fade. These names are clearly visible in the photographs on the banners and look like scars on Emmanuel's skin. The procedure for "embossing" the names of participants in each conflict is carried through into all *The Lost Men* projects. Emmanuel (2015a) notes that, for this first project, the letters were only pressed onto his body for about ten to fifteen minutes and the marks faded quite quickly. For the later projects he lay in moulds for up to half an hour (Figure 2) and the imprints on his body took much longer to fade away.



FIGURE **Nº 1**



Paul Emmanuel, *The Lost Men Grahamstown*, 1-10 July 2004. Counter-memorial, tenth anniversary of South Africa's democracy. 1820 Settler's National Monument, Gunfire Hill, Makhanda (formerly known as Grahamstown), Eastern Cape, South Africa. Twenty-one pigment-printed photographs (100x200cm each) voile, steel, 3x16x6 meters. Photographed by Paul Emmanuel.

*The Lost Men Mozambique* (24 April-12 May 2007) differs in context, as it was placed on a public jetty for the Catembe Ferry in Maputo (Figure 3). Unlike the previous installation, it is not responding directly to a monument or memorial. It is rather a tribute to those lost in the long running Mozambican civil war between the Renamo and Frelimo political factions. This conflict lasted from 1977 to 1992, and during this time approximately one million people were killed (Momodo 2018). Many of the names of the dead were not recorded, and furthermore, in 2007, a moratorium had been placed on the release of participants' names to the public<sup>7</sup> so, to emphasise their complete obliteration, Emmanuel had 'unknown soldier' (Figure 4) embossed repeatedly on his skin along with the names that he was able to find.<sup>8</sup>

The banners in the first two *Lost Men* installations differed in size and number – in Grahamstown the 21 banners each measured 1m x 2m. In Mozambique the banners were long and narrow, each 3m x 1m, and hung from the lampposts along the jetty. There were originally nine banners, but this format allowed for less fragmentation of Emmanuel's body. This fact drew some unforeseen consequences, as Mozambican



FIGURE N° 2



Paul Emmanuel impressing his body with lead type for *The Lost Men Grahamstown* and *The Lost Men Mozambique*. Photographed by John Hodgkiss. Courtesy of Paul Emmanuel.

officials objected to what they identified as a graphic display of male nudity. The installation was nearly censored entirely, but eventually was allowed to go ahead provided the two most "offensive" banners were removed (Emmanuel 2019).<sup>9</sup>

The third work in the series, *The Lost Men France* (1 July-1 October 2014), was a site-specific, once-off counter-memorial and an official feature of the 2014-2018 First World War Centenary. It consisted of five banners each 5m x 5m, hung from seven meter high poles erected along the Rue de l'Ancre, which is a farm road that runs through wheat fields leading up to the *Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme*. The site responds to the fields of battle (in which it stands), as well as counters the rigidity of the official built memorial covered with the names of missing soldiers (Figure 5). The road on which the banners hung also connected the memorial with the Lonsdale cemetery containing the graves of soldiers who died in WWI (Emmanuel 2020b). As in the earlier works, the sheets bear photographs of Emmanuel's body, cropped and marked with the names of French, German, South African and allied servicemen who fell on the western front. The names were pressed into his skin, without reference to rank, nationality, or ethnicity, questioning the hierarchy and exclusionary practices of traditional memorials, including this one. It is not surprising therefore that there were several complaints about Emmanuel's counter-memorial intervention. Like *The Lost Men Mozambique*, these



FIGURE **Nº 3**



Paul Emmanuel, *The Lost Men Mozambique*, 24 April – 12 May 2007. Counter-memorial, Catembe Ferry Jetty, Maputo, Mozambique. Nine pigment-printed photographs (300x100cm each), voile, aluminium, polyethylene, 7x7x150 meters. Photographed by John Hodgkiss. Courtesy of Art Source South Africa.

naked bodies hanging adjacent to the official memorial caused offence to some people. Others objected to the critique inherent in the idea of a counter-memorial that questions their acceptance of the grand gestures of traditional memorials. But as Jonathan Jones' (2014) review of this exhibition explains, '[Emmanuel] reminds us in a simple stark way that war is not about ideas or causes or hardware but the destruction of human beings. Nudity in this context is the unveiled truth.'

Unlike the previous two installations, which used the more robust synthetic voile, these banners were made of silk organza, which is fragile and less durable (Emmanuel 2019). As the banners, subject to the ravages of inclement weather, remained for three months, the images printed on them faded and they eventually hung in tatters with some even falling into the fields (Figure 6), becoming, as Annette Becker explains (2020:24) 'shrouds marking the location and giving a name to the bodies which were lost – or found? – in the land of the Somme'.



FIGURE **N° 4**



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Paul Emmanuel, a banner from *The Lost Men Mozambique*, 24 April-12 May 2007. Photographed by John Hodgkiss. Courtesy of Art Source South Africa.



FIGURE **N° 5**



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Paul Emmanuel, *The Lost Men France*, 1 July – 1 October 2014. Counter-memorial, World War One Centenary, Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, Picardy, northern France. Five pigment-printed photographs (500 x 500 cm each), silk, steel, 7 x 7 x 300 metres. Photographed by Paul Emmanuel. Courtesy of 2014 Centenaire de la Première Guerre mondiale and Art Source South Africa.



FIGURE N° 6



Paul Emmanuel, *The Lost Men France*, 1 July – 1 October 2014. Counter-memorial, World War One Centenary, Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, Picardy, northern France. Five pigment-printed photographs (500 x 500 cm each), silk, steel, 7 x 7 x 300 metres. Photographed by Paul Emmanuel. Courtesy of 2014 Centenaire de la Première Guerre de Mondaile and Art Source South Africa.

*The Lost Men* project has continued with several exhibitions of *Remnants* (the tattered remains of the banners taken from *The Lost Men France*).<sup>10</sup> Other developments from the three installations include photographs, drawings, video works and planned further iterations of *The Lost Men*, which are ongoing. Collectively, *The Lost Men* projects aim to undermine the grand narratives of patriarchal history emblematised by war memorials and monuments, which is why Emmanuel calls them counter-memorials. To explain how these artworks function as counter-memorials, however, it is necessary to identify the parameters of what is being countered.

## Memorials and monuments

Art historian Arthur Danto (1986:42) identifies the purpose of memorials as aids in remembering, reconciling and healing. In other words, memorials function as places to mourn, whereas Danto (1986:42) sees monuments as markers of celebration, glorifying

triumph and heroism. Even in terms of traditional edifices, however, the terms are used quite loosely. For example, as a case study, consider the *United States Marine Corps War Memorial* (unveiled in 1954) which is located in the Arlington Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia in the USA. According to the National Park Service official website, this memorial was built '[in] honor and in memory of the men of the United States Marine Corps who have given their lives to their country since November 10, 1775'. The Cemetery itself is a national monument and the memorial title refers to a long history of men who died in service of their country. The idea, presumably, was to recognise a long history of sacrifice, yet the centrepiece consists of a sculpture showing the six marines who raised the American flag atop Mt. Suribachi, Japan, on 19 February 1945. It thus depicts a victorious event from America's interventions in World War II. The sculpted figures stand on a rock slope above a granite base, and the entire memorial rises to a height of approximately 78 feet (nearly 24 meters), ensuring the visitors look up to the events being depicted, surmounted by the American flag fluttering in the breeze and brightly (cheerfully?) contrasting with the bronze of the figures.<sup>11</sup> This "memorial" is quite clearly demonstrating the triumphal celebration of "heroic" individuals and a particular national victory that occurred a mere 11 years prior to its unveiling. The purpose appears to be to promote national pride rather than memorialise the dead, so it seemingly fits into the category Danto describes for monuments rather than memorials.<sup>12</sup> John Bodnar (2010:141), in fact refers to it as both a cultural icon and a monument, because it evokes 'the memory of one of the bloodiest battles in the Pacific war without any hint that there was enormous loss of life on the island'. I suggest that it functions in terms of Michael Rowlands's (1998:54) explanation for some memorials that are deemed to be successful 'not by encouraging remembrance but rather by the demands they make for recognition of what was done, to whom and by whom'. In other words, it is a means to overcome the negative emotions raised by wasteful death and achieve catharsis in the viewer by evoking a message which 'unproblematically affirm[s] that they did not die in vain' (Rowlands 1998:62).

Accepting that the line between memorials and monuments is clearly blurred, whether monument or memorial, most of those erected by national governments since the twentieth century to memorialise armed conflicts have been physically large (or "monumental") and therefore visually impressive. As with the *Marine Corps War Memorial*, most appear to be designed with the intent to immortalise and glorify the efforts of those lost in war. Examples include *The Vimy Ridge Memorial* in France, unveiled in 1936 to commemorate Canadians who fought and died in World War I. This is described on the Canadian Veteran's Affairs (2020) website as 'majestic and inspiring'.<sup>13</sup> It is situated on the highest point of Vimy Ridge, marking the victory achieved by Canadian troops in capturing Vimy Ridge in April 1917. It also overlooks the French countryside in which over seven thousand Canadian soldiers are buried so, like the *United States Marine Corps War Memorial*, it is set amongst the dead to be memorialised.



*The Vimy Ridge Memorial* consists of two limestone pylons erected 30 metres above a platform. Both the position and the scale are imposing, ensuring visibility from miles around and informing the viewer of the importance of this cause. The pylons are adorned with a *fleur-de-lis* for France on one and a maple leaf for Canada on the other – to symbolise the unity and strength of the two countries. On top of the pylons, you find a "Chorus" consisting of romanticised personifications representing Justice, Knowledge, Truth, Humour, Faith, Hope, Peace, and Charity. Noble sentiments are thereby attributed to base conflicts and memories are constructed which have little to no bearing in reality. But again, they serve what Rowlands (1998:62) identifies as the psychological purpose of a "successful" memorial, which is to 'resolve the conditions of negativity and impotence' resulting from the feelings of loss and futility after the trauma of war. Rowlands (2001:131) goes on to suggest that a memorial thereafter becomes a monument 'through the creation of an appropriate memory' such as appreciation for a sacrifice that was made for the greater good. Such memorials are a form of propaganda, as explained by Susan Sci (2009:42), who notes that,

Together, memorials' symbolic meaning and the aesthetic experience they inspire present individuals with embodied arguments regarding civic duty and responsibility that guide not only what to think, but more importantly, how to think about the people and events they commemorate.

Traditional memorials that include figural representations, in the words of Bodnar (2010:139), attempt to 'diminish the legacy of individual suffering and proclaim the unity and victory of the nation'. Bodnar (2010:141) explains that historically, the norm for remembering those who died in armed conflicts is by listing the names of the dead in local cemeteries, on buildings or town monuments; making the point that such lists 'by their very nature, raise questions of whether the tragic aspects of war were justified'. Bodnar (2010:141) also points out that there are *no* names of dead soldiers listed on the *US Marine Corps War Memorial*. *The Vimy Ridge Memorial* includes the names of 11,285 Canadians who died in France and whose graves are unknown, but they appear secondary to the impact of the scale of the monument and the decorative scheme.

*The Vietnam War Memorial*, designed by Maya Lin, on the other hand, lists the names of the 57,000 dead without glorifying the conflict or trying to evoke unity, without any comment, and without any decoration whatsoever.<sup>14</sup> As Peter Boswell (1998:10) explains: 'It neither apportions guilt or claims victory. It simply affirms the fact, far more real than any political idea, of being there and dying there'. This memorial also has a minimal architectural presence.<sup>15</sup> Several writers have identified Lin's memorial as a counter-memorial, owing to its lack of glorifying additions and unmonumental construction. In a discussion of the simple lists of names on the memorial, Rowlands (1998:61), for example, describes it as 'anti-monumental' because it 'denies the inscrip-

tions an existence as a timeless, numinous image of the nation to which the viewers might submit themselves'.<sup>16</sup> Lin (2000:4,10) explains, 'I had a simple impulse to cut into the earth'. The notions of cutting, pain, and eventually healing, can also be identified by the polished black granite into which the names are incised. The visitors are reflected in the stone, with the names in effect appearing to cut into their reflections, so both trauma and catharsis are evoked – the trauma of loss and the catharsis of acknowledging the continuation of life. This memorial is probably the closest a stone memorial can be to the effect of Emmanuel's counter-memorials (that are discussed further below).

In terms of this discussion on Emmanuel's *Lost Men*, it is interesting to note that the official memorial to the soldiers lost in the battle of the Somme in World War 1 at Thiepval made a 'strong impression' on Lin (2000:4; 9) and influenced her approach to her memorial design. Unlike the discreet physical presence of the *Vietnam War Memorial*, the *Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme* is the largest British War memorial in the world and consists of a series of intersecting arches standing over 45 meters high, giving it a sense of historic gravitas rooted in classicism (Figure 7).<sup>17</sup> It was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, who was considered one of the greatest British architects at the time. Lutyens's design clearly resembles the *Arc de Triomphe* in Paris, evoking some form of triumph associated with those who died, or ennobling the cause they died for. In addition, above each list of names there are discreet laurel wreaths encircling the names of the battles that were fought, presumably as a form of honouring the dead. Both the arches and the laurel wreaths speak in the iconography of victory from the classical past. The monumental scale of the structure ensures that it is seen for miles and has visual impact so one might be forgiven for thinking that it fits into James Young's (1992:270) description of 'the state-sponsored monument's traditional function as a self-aggrandizing locus for national memory'. Yet, the aspect of this memorial that impressed Lin most was the simple lists of names on the memorial, recording the over 72,000 missing (presumed dead) British and South African soldiers. As Lin (2000:4; 9) explains, 'This memorial acknowledged those lives without focusing on the war or on creating a political statement of victory or loss'.<sup>18</sup> Lin (2000:4; 9) went on to express her intent to similarly create an apolitical memorial that foregrounds the price of human life and does not civilise or glorify war in any way. The *Thiepval Memorial* does, in fact, confer a sense of glory, perhaps not to war but to the soldiers memorialised. It exudes gravitas, partly owing to its size and visibility and partly due to the fact that it stands adjacent to a graveyard, suggesting that it carries almost religious significance. I mention it here, however, because *The Lost Men France* is a direct reference to this memorial, as mentioned above, and was installed so that both Lutyens's memorial and Emmanuel's counter-memorial could be seen and read in conjunction with each other (Figure 8).



FIGURE **N° 7**



Research photograph of Thiepval Memorial, Thiepval village, Somme department, Picardy region, northern France. 2012. Photographed by Paul Emmanuel during the *Institut Francais Visas pour la Creation* research residency, Paris, France.



FIGURE **N° 8**



A banner in situ from *The Lost Men France* with Thiepval memorial in the background, July 2014. Counter-memorial, World War One Centenary, Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, Picardy, northern France Five pigment-printed photographs (500 x 500 cm each), silk, steel, 7 x 7 x 300 metres. Photographed by Colleen Costick. Courtesy of 2014 *Centenaire de la Première Guerre Mondiale* and Art Source South Africa

To conclude this section, war monuments and memorials are designed to, as Rowlands (1998:63) explains, acknowledge the importance of death and sacrifice for an ideology. In addition, they acknowledge that there is gain from that sacrifice and thus deify (glorify) the dead by providing a physical reminder of their sacrifice as sustenance for our fading memories. Pierre Nora (1989:7) identified such monuments as '*lieux de memoire*, [or] sites of memory' which are constructed to replace the real environments where memories evolve. Nora (1989:12) thus ascribes responsibility to monuments and archives as a repositories of past events, ensuring they provide 'commemorative vigilance' lest we forget. The problem with erecting lasting physical memorials to embody historical events is that the real memory of which event is gone and the *lieux de memoire*, in whatever form, become a 'reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer' (Nora 1989:8). This raises the question – is a counter-memorial inherently countering this forced memory? Might the purpose of a counter-memorial be about forgetting? And if so, how does it accomplish this?

## Counter-memorials/monuments

The term "counter-monument" was employed by James Young (1992:271) in response to the problem of holocaust memorials in Germany, where young artists and architects faced the incongruous task of memorialising events in which they took no part and did not personally experience. In addition, they were constructing memorials where the notion of glorifying a cause has no meaning,

After all, while the victors of history have long erected monuments to remember their triumphs, and victims have built memorials to recall their martyrdom, only rarely does a nation call on itself to remember the victims of crimes it has perpetrated (Young 1992:270).

Young (1992:271) explains that in Germany, the response to this 'memorial conundrum' was for artists and architects to create 'counter-monuments' that inherently undermined the very function of a monument, both in structure and purpose.

According to Quentin Stevens, Karen Franck and Ruth Fazakerley (2012:952), the term counter-monument is imprecise and covers too many diverse approaches to reactions against monuments. To clarify the counter measures and define the terms more clearly these authors have identified 'anti-monumental' and 'dialogic' approaches to creating counter-monuments (Stevens *et al.* 2012:952). In the first instance, a monument might adopt '*anti-monumental* design approaches to express subjects and meanings not represented in traditional monuments', whereas a *dialogic* monument is a direct commentary on the purpose or the design of a *specific* monument, in which case it is usually physically paired with the monument in question (Stevens *et al.* 2012:952).

Stevens *et al.* (2012:952) furthermore explain that dialogic monuments may not necessarily be anti-monumental.

Emmanuel's approach to creating a counter-memorial falls into both these categories. For example, in *The Lost Men France* and *The Lost Men Grahamstown*, these installations were both site specific. Their pastel colours, the fragility of their substance, the fragmented images of Emmanuel's marked body that looks soft, unmanly and ephemeral are conceptually and visually the antithesis of the adjacent stolid, imposing stone monuments. In both installations one looks through the semi-transparent banners to see the land-scapes upon which so many of these named men died. As Stevens *et al.* (2012:962) explain, the proximity of monument and counter-monument 'dramatises new meanings beyond those conveyed by each of the works considered individually' and they might thereby be identified as dialogic.

In terms of design approach, however, all Emmanuel's *The Lost Men* installations are also anti-monumental. If the meaning of a monument is considered, Emmanuel's installations are not didactic; they do not present 'arguments regarding civic duty and responsibility' (Sci 2009:42), but instead question such arguments and leave the viewer to contemplate what the answers might be. Their subject is loss, pain and death rather than glorifying a political ideology. In addition, they actively undermine a patriarchal ideology normally associated with war memorials. Male nudity, for example, infers vulnerability rather than glorious sacrifice. The fragmentation of Emmanuel's body in the banners evokes amputation, with the soft unmanly skin further scarred by the names that appear as wounds. Thus the masculine rhetoric of war is replaced by a feminised vision of fragility and loss, which is imprinted on what might pass for a shroud.

This brings me to the importance of form in identifying an anti-monument or counter-memorial. Stevens *et al.* (2012:956) suggest that anti-monumentality is a typical approach for addressing troubling memories and therefore it would be logical to invert monumental form when creating an anti-monument. The examples they give include Lin's *Vietnam War Memorial* (Washington 1982) and Sol LeWitt's *Black Form* (Dedicated to the Missing Jews) (Hamburg 1989), or the rows of rectangular blocks of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* in Berlin (designed by Peter Eisenman and Buro Happold in 2005), each of which consist of abstract geometric shapes rather than anything figurative and ideological (Stevens *et al.* 2012:959). Stevens *et al.* (2012) cite many more interventions in opposition to traditional memorial form, but in all their examples the material used is physical and capable of structure, even if it is a structure that sinks below the ground or leaves a physical (but permanent) void instead of a permanent presence.

The examples Young (1992) discusses in his article on counter-monuments are also physically defined in anti-monumental terms. For example, Horst Hoheisel created a

negative-form monument to commemorate the Nazis' destruction of the Aschrott-Brunnen, a 12 meter high, pyramid shaped fountain in Kassel that had been a gift from a Jewish entrepreneur (Young 1992:288). Hoheisel commemorated the absence of this fountain by recreating its silhouette and lowering this shape into the ground, thus memorialising an absence by preserving that absence in negative space (Young 1992:290). Another example, the Harburg *Monument against Facism* designed by Jochen and Esther Gerz, is a 12 meter high by 1 meter square lead column, which was installed in 1986. A stylus was attached and people were invited to inscribe names or graffiti, and as the column became filled it was lowered into the ground. Eventually (by December 1990), the column was completely underground and the top covered with a grave stone with the words 'Harburg's monument against Facism' (Young 1992:276). In these examples there is still some form of memorial that is preserved, even if it is in negative terms (Hoheisel) or underground (Gerz) with a small reminder of what is buried inscribed in the gravestone on top, as would be the norm for any burial.

Emmanuel's installations foreground the importance of fabric as the substrate that underlines his anti-monumental approach. Each soft gauzy banner of voile or silk organza has a formless pliancy that is shaped by the wind (Figure 9), the semi-transparent sheets tangibly evoke the soft vulnerability of the skin imprinted on them, and flutter gently in a manner antithetical to the rigidity of soldiers marching in straight rows or buildings constructed in straight lines. Such flimsy material has nothing to do with masculinity nor with monuments, other than a passing reference to the flags representing the ideologies that underpin the wars being memorialised. The images on these "flags" have been discussed at length in all articles on *The Lost Men* and can obviously be described as counter-ideological, inasmuch as images of mortality and vulnerability are counter to the memorial impulse.

Despite the care with which the remnants of *The Lost Men France* are exhibited or stored, they are neither permanently displayed nor will they exist in perpetuity. Their material presence has already deteriorated markedly owing to the silk content in the material (silk is a notoriously difficult material to preserve).<sup>19</sup> The nature of fabric is something we associate mostly with clothing or home décor – personal items that touch our skin and become part of our lives for a limited time. The personal nature of this interaction is commented on by Emmanuel ([sa]) in the 'Concept Document and Media Kit', where he was making reference to the *The Lost Men Grahamstown*. Emmanuel ([sa]) talks about the installation resembling 'washing' on a line as a reference to the private and personal nature of clothing, 'For the artist, clothing signifies an absence of the body – an outer skin, holding the inner emotions'. Fabric is an integral part of the meaning of these works, it is, as Emmanuel ([sa]) mentions, our 'second skin' in daily life. The use of fine voile or silk fabric for the "flags" is echoed by the inherent fragility of Emmanuel's fragmented

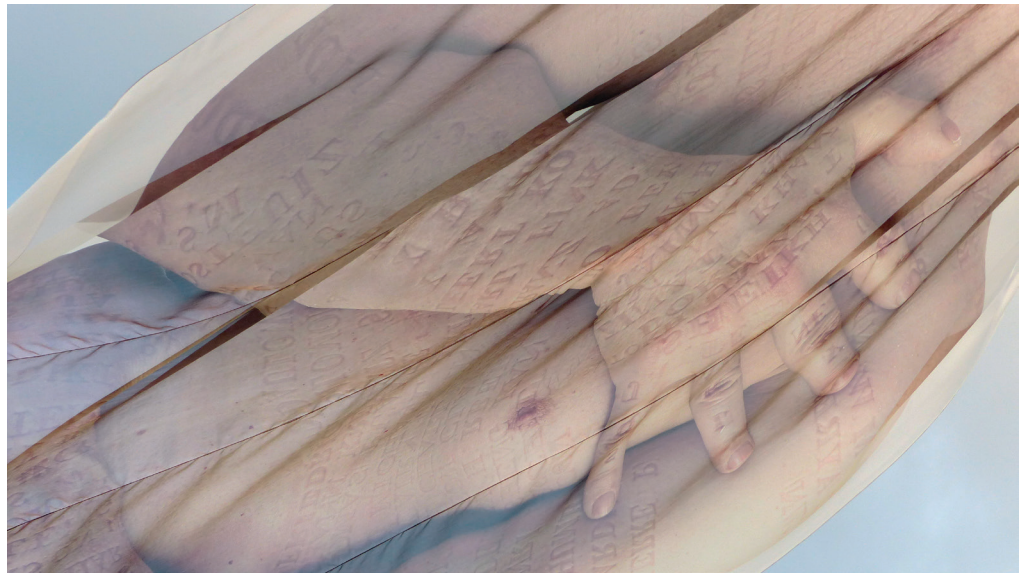


FIGURE **N° 9**



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Paul Emmanuel, *The Lost Men France* (detail), 1 July-1 October 2014.

body. His bruised nakedness appears increasingly insubstantial owing to the transparency of the silk voile. The formless tattered fragments exhibited as *Remnants* from *The Lost Men France* (Figure 10) are the antithesis of monumental stone architecture or bronze sculpture and its solid durability. The images on them have almost faded away and exist only partially as ghostly fragments. The carefully researched names of soldiers resurrected on Emmanuel's skin now dissolve with the substrate and are once again erased from memory as the silk material is clearly in the process of completely disintegrating. Far from being *lieux de memoire*, these *Remnants* express the loss and the erosion of past memories and engage, instead with the intimate realities of the human condition.<sup>20</sup> *The Lost Men* function in terms of Young's (1992:295) identification of the counter-monumental impulse that 'refers not only to its own physical impermanence, but also to the contingency of all meaning and memory – especially that embodied in a form that insists on its eternal fixity'. *The Lost Men* are in fact "countering" memory and the memorial impulse in their inability to preserve it intact which, I argue, is the purpose of Emmanuel's counter-memorials.



FIGURE **Nº 10**



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Paul Emmanuel, Exhibition view of *Remnants* at the 808 Gallery, Boston University, Massachusetts, USA, 28 January-20 March 2016. Photographed by Paul Emmanuel. Courtesy of Boston University Art Galleries and Art Source South Africa.

## Conclusion

In *The Lost Men* installations, Emmanuel deals with the trauma and memories of events that he did not witness nor partake in. His purpose, instead, is to engage with the post-traumatic memory of recorded conflicts by expressing them through his own personalised, metaphorical language of loss and pain. As an artist he is not attempting to create a permanent memorial, but is instead reacting to the notions of glory, nationalism and purpose that underpin such edifices, by presenting their obverse. *The Lost Men* installations and *Remnants* expose the futility of attempting to “fix” memories and encapsulate the ideologies with which they were associated, within a prescriptive, rigidly-defined monumental form that will have continued relevance. Emmanuel's use of fragile semi-transparent cloth on which to express his counter-memorial impulse is, I would argue, more profoundly emotive and pertinent to the theme of wasted life and fading memories than any traditional memorial could be.



# Notes

1. Emmanuel's works can be seen listed and reproduced chronologically on his website at: <https://www.paulemanuel.net/Works/chronology/mainchronology.html>
2. For other writings on *The Lost Men* see Pamela Allara (2012, 2017, 2020). Allara has also written on Emmanuel's earlier work, *Transitions* (Allara 2011), and on *Remnants*, (the remnants of *Lost Men France*), which were exhibited in Boston (Allara 2016). See also Irene Bronner (2012), Jonathan Jones (2014) and Karen von Veh (2019), among others. The most recent publication on *The Lost Men* is von Veh (2020). *Paul Emmanuel* is a book produced by the Wits Art Museum to accompany Emmanuel's solo exhibition, *Paul Emmanuel: Men and Monuments* (3 March-16 May 2020). This book contains essays by Annette Becker, Karen von Veh and Pamela Allara.
3. Emmanuel's works have been described as both anti- and counter- memorials, although I mainly use the term "counter-memorial" in this essay. Both terms identify an approach that undermines the expected design of monuments through form and material. Both negate the memorial impulse in content and affect. The terms and their application are discussed in depth in the third part of this paper.
4. Synthetic voile is commercially known as "flag material".
5. The Fifth Frontier War, fought between 1818 and 1819, would have been most closely related to the Settlers Monument where Emmanuel's installation was displayed. Grahamstown was attacked on April 1819 by Xhosa forces who were then defeated by the colonial army (South Africa History Online [sa]). When Emmanuel was searching for names to imprint on his skin, however, he had great difficulty accessing information on specific wars and time periods. He found the names of white soldiers in casualty lists from December 1834 to September 1835, compiled by an amateur war enthusiast named Terry Sole in 1986. The names of black combatants were more difficult to trace, as they do not appear in any official (or semi-official) records. The few names Emmanuel found were jotted in the margins of diaries kept by British soldiers, anecdotal entries, incomplete, often misspelled (anglicised) and usually without a surname. Emmanuel (2020a) explains that due to these difficulties, the names he employed, both black and white, were mostly selected at random.
6. Emmanuel would lie on the letters, often with weights applied to his body to ensure that the names were pressed deeply into his skin.
7. Emmanuel (2020b) notes that this moratorium was in place while he was researching for *The Lost Men Mozambique*, but it may have changed now.
8. For a more detailed discussion of these works and the political and social implications, see von Veh (2020:30-43).
9. Further discussion on the censorship issue in Mozambique can be found in von Veh (2000:36-40).
10. *Remnants* has been shown at Freedom Park in Pretoria in 2015, in Boston University's 808 Gallery, USA in 2016, and in the Oliewenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein in 2017. The *Remnants* were also installed as part of the *Paul Emmanuel: Men and Monuments Exhibition* at the Wits Art Museum in 2020.
11. All information on the Marine Corps War Memorial comes from the National Park Service website ([sa]). Images of the memorial can also be found on this site.
12. Owing to this blurring of categories, I intentionally use the terms monument and memorial interchangeably in this essay.

13. Information on Vimy Ridge was taken from the Canadian Veteran's Affairs website, which also includes images: <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/overseas/first-world-war/france/vimy>
14. Lin's design for the Vietnam War Memorial caused controversy due to the lack of figural elements or ennobling details. This resulted in a public furore (for details, read the chapter by Patrick Hagopian (2005) on The Discourse of Healing and the 'Black Gash of Shame') and the end result was that owing to political pressure, additions were made after completion. Despite Lin's objections, a 15.5 meter flagpole with a flag and a nearly 3 meter high statue of three soldiers was approved. Fortunately, these additions were not placed close to the wall, in an attempt to preserve the integrity of Lin's design. 'A statue dedicated to the women who served in the Vietnam War was also added to the site in 1993' (Klein [sa]).
15. *The Vietnam War Memorial* consists of two black granite walls, 250 feet long, that meet at a right angle. The ground slopes from the outside edges down towards the vertex (meeting point) where the walls rise to a height of 10 feet (Hagopian 2005:97).
16. See also Stevens *et al.* (2012:956; 967), Rowlands (2001:137-141) and Hagopian (2005).
17. All information on the Thiepval Memorial is taken from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2020) website.
18. Emmanuel (2020b) explains that when he stood underneath the lists of names, they were so vast that they became almost featureless, and any emblematic detail was subsumed by this overwhelming evocation of loss. Perhaps Emmanuel's experience might explain the effect this memorial had on Lin.
19. In addition to the physical insubstantiality of these counter-memorials, *The Lost men Grahamstown* banners were themselves lost in a tragic car accident while being transported and the original *The Lost Men Mozambique* banners have also been 'lost' (Emmanuel 2015b).
20. When exhibited as *Remnants*, their presence up close in a gallery space is quite different to the effect of the banners when seen at a distance. The official nature and physical framework of galleries might be equated with the physical permanence of museums and memorials. There is a certain irony to these tattered fragments draped within institutional walls. They appear even more ghostly as one gazes through them at the brick and mortar spaces in which they are now presented; yet owing to their size and proximity they have an emphatic presence as haunting reminders of wasted youth, fragile masculinity and the *impermanence* of memory.

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