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Haunting from the Margins: Reading the Self in Place and Place in Self in Wolf Kibel's South African Art*

Apart from some brief biographical sketches of mainly unknown artist Wolf Kibel on the Jewish Art Historical site, the only conclusive existing biography of Kibel has been authored by his wife, Freda Kibel. Drawing strongly on the Expressionist movement of the early 1900s, two of his Expressionist paintings are currently held in the South African Gallery in Cape Town: one landscape, one of a woman in red apparel, interior. It is a continuity that is surprising, given that Kibel hailed from Poland, found his way to Cape Town, South Africa in the early 1920s through a mixture of a fluke, necessity and intention and only experienced a few years of artistic acclaim in Cape Town. Kibel's main desire was to reside in Paris, the intellectual and artistic hub for prominent Modernist and Expressionists like other artists of Jewish origin, Marc Chagall

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and Chaim Soutine, but he lacked the financial means to do so. Kibel's work would have drawn from Expressionism originating from Germany from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth century, through key artists like Der Blaue Reiter, disseminating to Paris. Paris allowed for a vibrantly intense transference and cross-absorption of German and French interest in distorted figures and a departure from realism which marked most of the nineteenth century literary and art world.

Spear-headed by Impressionists like Jean Francois Millet "insist[ing] that art represent the reality of daily life" with its undertow of "accurately and objectively recording contemporary life and the transient effects of light and color," the founding Impressionist artists in Paris like Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, and the post-impressionism of Paul Gauguin, and pointillist Georges Seurat, all had "stylistic differences" but "helped liberate art from a focus on subject toward personal expression and the study of creating," making way for Expressionism of the early twentieth century (Abella et al). By the time Kibel began to learn and paint within the Expressionist movement, the framing ideals of Expressionism as form were at its most pronounced:

> Depict[ing] not objective reality but rather the subjective emotions and responses that objects and events arouse within a person. The artist accomplishes this aim through distortion, exaggeration, primitivism and fantasy and through the vivid, jarring, violent, or dynamic application of formal elements (Abella et al).

Expressionism is also historically located as emerging in times of social or political dissonance, or spiritual crises within the artist or social context. Within Kibel's time and across Europe, the early twentieth century was wrestling with the lingering vestiges of the Victorian period strafed by ideological class and gender permutations. It makes sense then that Expressionism, the expression of the self, in images, would be underscored by "distortion" and "exaggeration," a reaction to, criticism and questioning of Victorian suppression, its promulgation of a stultified status quo and ideological prescription of self that long held reign not only in Britain, but across Europe and America, as well as South Africa. Distorting the reality of these fixed constructions of identity through Expressionism is an attempt to undo and challenge it, as I argue Kibel attempted to do. Expressionism paved the way for Abstract Expressionism of the 1940s onwards and thereafter the Minimalist Movement of the 1960s which questioned these overly expressive works. In South Africa from the 1930s onwards, Kibel was establishing himself as a latent Expressionist artist, drawing on the form

at its height, but also experimenting with form, engaging too in some degree, as I argue, with the dream-like elements of Surrealism. As seen in some of his landscape sketches in charcoal, he was emphasising the haunted self and place visible in not only the image, but also as a metaphorical reading of Kibel, a questioning of the self "un-homed," in contention with a fixed Polish Jewish identity, but also a contradictory longing for this identity that haunts his art.

Kibel's Jewish identity also comes into play here, possibly stronger than historically first perceived, with his gravitation towards Expressionism. Elaine Strosberg argues in *Human Expressionism*: *The Human Figure and the Jewish Experience* that Jewish artists at the turn of the twentieth century utilised Expressionism to remain connected to their Jewish roots amidst rapid political and social shifts and challenges to their heritage. They thus focused on the human face in their paintings, strikingly as a way of "fighting nihilism" and, expressing "love and sorrow," and because the human face was gradually vanishing from art (Strosberg 'Foreword'). The connection between retaining the human face in Expressionist art as a symbol of retaining Jewish heritage is key here, and it helps me to understand Kibel's wider focus on interiors, landscapes and sparser focus on human figures in charcoal drawings in relation to hauntedness, and the way in which he viewed, and wrestled with his Jewish heritage away from home. It is this article's framing perspective that Kibel's pertinent incorporation of interiors and exteriors largely devoid of human figures speaks to an awareness of the vanishing self, perhaps his own Jewish identity under "threat" of "nihilism," exacerbated by a deferred sense of belonging he attempts to reclaim in his paintings through his focus on place. The self is thus implied in these works, "haunting" in its absence, but nevertheless still to be read, whether in "love, or sorrow" (Strosberg 'Foreword') or a cognition of what it means to be human as the absence itself speaks. The darker aspects of his landscapes, along with those that draw on vibrant colour; can each be read in relation to this haunting and a persistent human need to belong, but a belonging that also appears deferred even when seemingly found and visualised in paintings and drawings that resonate with hope, and a sense of home, and self.

This article draws on Kibel's biographical details as a gateway into understanding his artwork as reflective of his lived experience, as well as a trajectory which enables me to draw on deliberate theoretical lenses through which to read his life, his work, and the sense of place and self that emerge as possible readings of his work. It reads the imbrications between the self in place and place in self, arguing that the imagined self and places in Kibel's work problematise the sense of belonging and not belonging these paintings convey. This haunting from the margins speaking to the centre, Poland, that invites and opens

conversations about and questions concerning home and identity shaped by being at the periphery to the home nation from the Global South and painting the self in place and place in self as a way of belonging, but a belonging that is also deferred. It is also interested in the "shared peripheries" between Kibel and fellow artist friends, and what these encounters and interactions reveal about shared histories from the margins of both the South African and Polish past "read" in their artworks.

As his wife attests, Kibel lived a productive but short life, bombarded by sickness and poverty. Born in Grodzisk, a village near Warsaw, in 1903 to a middle-class family of eight, Kibel was drawn to music before art, as his father was the village Cantor, and also its Shochet (the ritual slayer of livestock). The untimely death of his father placed the family in pecuniary difficulty. He studied briefly in Poland under the guidance of Appelbaum, a painter visiting from London. Their interaction motivated him to see whether he had potential as a painter. At the age of twenty he fled to Austria to avoid the draft. Not being a citizen of Austria, Kibel could not enrol as state pupil, and was taught privately. Between 1923 and 1925 he studied painting under Prof. Pick-Moroni in Vienna, suffering poor health from an impoverished lifestyle. He was advised by his mentor to leave, and settled in Palestine, as he lacked travel documents to enter France, his desired destination and the epicentre for Expressionism. He stayed briefly in Jerusalem, where he again took ill and became destitute. Kibel lived on a beach in Tel Aviv until someone he had befriended provided money for him to rent a room.

In Tel Aviv he soon established himself as a good painter. It was there that he started studying modern techniques of painting, as well as met and married his wife, Freda. Further poor health resulted in Kibel's decision to relocate to Cape Town in 1929, where his brother already lived. He left his wife and child in Tel Aviv with plans for them to join him in Cape Town in 1933. In 1932 he set up an art studio with the sculptor, Lippy Lipshitz, who had returned that year from Paris. They gathered some pupils and Kibel started settling into working on his painting. Kibel exhibited in 1931, 1933, 1935 and 1937 in Cape Town. His paintings were genre pieces (portraits, still life and some landscapes) much admired after a period of rejection by the public for their vibrant use of colour informed by Expressionism.

Kibel was diagnosed with advanced tuberculosis in 1937 and died the following year. Retrospective exhibitions were held in 1947 and 1950 in Johannesburg and Cape Town's National Art Gallery respectively. Subsequently, a number of exhibitions of his work occurred in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria. He was also commissioned to paint the Alhambra Cinema in Cape Town and

the Plaza Cinema in Pretoria in 1930 and 1931 respectively, both of which show that he was recognized and sought after early on for his artistic merit, since he only arrived in Cape Town in 1929, a relative stranger and unestablished in artistic circles ("Artists: Wolf Kibel"). It is this in part that brought him into connection with Hugo Naudè, considered South Africa's "pioneer artist" in Impressionism who "taught him etching" ("Artists: Wolf Kibel").

It is important, before I delve into my reading of haunting and hauntedness of both self and place, being in the margin (the margin being akin to the periphery in this sense that it is of the place, but also not wholly connected to the center), painting from the margin and the meaning-making that unfolds from this exploration, to state that in a sense, the theoretical lenses I depend on in my reading of Kibel's artwork take on a palimpsest approach, a layered reading of Kibel's work which continues to reveal new meanings. I find the art term "palimpsest notion", meaning a "layered, overwritten surface with traces of earlier content enabling us to unravel historical and cultural layers from the past, in present readings" (Dillon: 2) a fitting stepping stone for the layering of theories in my reading of Kibel's art which in themselves are layered. As Sarah Dillon explains in her recent *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*, the term palimpsest has morphed into readings of culture and the visual, which includes art and writing (2). In this approach, I am also depending on Irit Rogoff's definition of visual culture and "the curious eye" she describes in "Studying Visual Culture" for my exploration, my seeing of Kibel's painting, and in my thinking about these theoretical lenses. Rogoff defines visual culture as "a great deal more than the study of images, of even the most open-ended and cross-disciplinary study of images" (24). Rogoff's delineation allows me to explore selected charcoal drawings, water and oil paintings from Kibel's oeuvre beyond the aesthetic, to what is implied and explicitly conveyed in "ever accruing meanings" regarding Kibel's struggles and ideas of home and belonging and the self in relation to both, and the tensions that arise from these (Rogoff: 24). This understanding of visual culture marries well with the earlier-mentioned theoretical approaches, inviting curiosity. It is here that Rogoff's idea of curiosity is also useful to my exploration and close reading of Kibel's art and its concerns. Rogoff states that:

> Curiosity implies a certain unsettling, a notion outside the realm of the known – of things not quite yet understood or articulated… the hidden or the unthought – followed then by the optimism of finding out something that one had not known or been able to conceive of before. In short, the „curious eye" is able to discover that which was not seen

> before, making visible the invisible perhaps elided by history, previous studies of a work or what was overlooked, or the dearth in seeing (28).

The explication of curiosity and "the curious eye" in how we read the visual and the written calls for an aesthetic sensibility and an openness to a Keatsian "negative capability" (the ability to be uncertain). This intrigues me and I will return to it later in my discussion on Kibel's "Still Life." It creates a space not only to read and argue for convincing meanings of home, and the self and the haunting of both, but also to remain in the unknown at that point of discovery. It is a contradiction between knowing that something of Kibel's work (the reason for an elision of a table corner for example) remains unknown and leaving it as a known unknown, that I am well aware might become a part of my exploration of his work. It is then the "certain unsettling" that Rogoff speaks of in relation to curiosity that would also inform my exploration, be it in tenuous or explicit ways, producing, I argue, a haunting of its own.

I am also drawn to my reading of Kibel's work as "making visible the invisible" (Rogoff: 28). I am aware that even in what is visible, a "certain unsettling" can accompany it. I find Kibel's paintings a curious admixture of both the "visible" and "invisible," in their exploration of both domestic spaces and landscapes, that which also cannot be fully expressed even through Expressionism form, but the theory of which (as shall be unfolded in the succeeding sections) assists in lifting from the canvas a multi-layered reading of what I consider to be the central themes of his work. It critiques its historical context and figuration of that context upon home and the self, complicated by distance from home. In an extended self-reflexive vein, I note that attempts to address the overlooked in his work, might inadvertently overlook other aspects. This I see as an opportunity for future comparative research on Kibel's work with other Polish South African artists.

In my palimpsest exploration of theory and extension of the "curious eye" making "visible the invisible" and engaging the "dearth of seeing" in his work, I also draw on visual culture theory, Freud's *heimlich* and *unheimlich* and Michel de Certeau's theory of place. This enables me to question and explore Kibel's subjective expression of the self in place but also place in self, as a dichotomy of place and no-place, home and not-home which his paintings offer as one who painted from the periphery, the Global South, Cape Town, South Africa, against and with the center, Poland, his homeland as an ever present frame in which to paint the self, belonging/unbelonging. I am aware that the layered theoretical approach might seem convoluted in places, but its enhancement of my readings of Kibel's work outweighs this.

Turning now to Kibel's Expressionism, it is of interest that Kibel was regarded as one of the key figures who introduced Expressionism to South African art. This is despite the fact that his earlier work of the 1930s up to 1934 was severely criticised as being reductionist, rejected for their experimentation in Expressionist style. Although a generic delineation of Expressionistic form was provided earlier, I also find the Tate explication apposite to further understand Kibel's artistic impulse and in relation to this article's succeeding close reading of them:

> Expressionism… expresses subjective emotions, inner experiences and spiritual themes, as opposed to realistic depictions of people or nature. In expressionist paintings, colours may appear intense and non-naturalistic, forms become distorted, brushwork is typically free and paint application tends to be generous and highly textured. Typical images of reality, such as a landscape painting or a portrait, become dramatic expressions of the artist's inner feelings or emotions.

In focusing on Kibel's work as a departure from "realistic depictions," it must be noted at this juncture that some of Kibel's work also focuses on the realistic, especially when he paints places. These realistic interjections in an array of art that incorporates Surrealism elements suggests that when Kibel suddenly turns to this "realistic depiction" it reflects his identification in part with this place as home. One such painting is *District Six* (1920s) currently held in the Strauss & Co Gallery (see Fig. 1). This is brought into comparison with *Houses* where we see a distortion of the architecture absent in the *District Six* painting (see Fig. 1.2). The "paint application" in *District Six* with its bright hues (an interesting drawing on Expressionism in the realistic fidelity) and attention to symmetrical rendering of the buildings contrasts the asymmetry of the houses in *Houses*, a kind of jumbled effect in their leaning and overlapping that distorts the reality of houses as solid, and ideas of home, being at home, as concrete, and tangible. The subtle elements of Surrealism in *Houses* with the blurring of lines, and lack of vibrant colour, as also seen in *House near Orange Street* speaks to Kibel's departure here from the "typical images of reality" – readily identifiable, and known, in "District Six" despite the subtle nod to Expressionist use of colour. We can extend this idea of the known linked to the sense of home, and known place as metaphor for the known self, or an attempt to know the self in a place depicted as "real" and ordered. The *District Six* painting also conveys a sense of belonging missing in *Houses* and *House near Orange Street* because of the distortion overtones akin to both, despite a preoccupation with the ideological meanings underpinning the domestic space as closely linked to the anchoring



Fig. 1. *District Six*, watercolour, Strauss & Co Gallery



Fig. 1.2. *Houses*, watercolour over charcoal, Strauss & Co Gallery



Fig. 1.3. *House near Orange Street*, soot and grease drawing on paper, Strauss & Co Gallery)

of self and behaviour, spaces inscribed by the self, and the self, inscribed by these implied interior spaces of the three works.

House near Orange Street invites a reading of the switch to grease and soot as primary materials for Kibel's expressionistic distortion of both the house and its natural surrounds. The dearth in colour magnifies the haunting and melancholy hiddenness of the house seen in fragments through the gnarled leaning of trees towards the left of the drawing. If one looks closely, there is the suggestion the shape of eyes in the trees, lending to the eerie atmosphere in contention with the house, now tucked away, obscured by the overwhelming focus on the trees' branches reaching like bizarre arms towards the house, with only its chimney visible. In addition to the well-placed eye-shaped leaves that seem to stare out of the drawing, there is also the oddly shaped impressions of animals and human/non-human faces highlighted by the emphasised shading. A concerted departure from the home and self as known, one is reminded here of Sigmund Freud's definition of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* – elements of the "uncanny" – as a way of seeing and reading Kibel's work where expressionistic distortion is particularly drawn on. Freud defines *unheimlich* with the nearest semantic equivalents in English to "uncanny" or "eerie" but corresponds this with unhomely as its etymological meaning (124). He situates *heimlich* with the familiar and known, and *unheimlich* as the hidden, unfamiliar, being careful to distinguish that not "everything new and unfamiliar" is frightening (124–125). Returning to the duality of the house appearing tucked away but also obscured by the haunting, reaching trees, I find the doubleness of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* fitting here, as well as his argument that not "everything new and unfamiliar" is frightening. The house is defamiliarized by the eerie cascade of blackened trees oddly shaped to appear as animalistic and human, with misshapen faces and eyes, yet, it is also "saved" from the *unheimlich* being unsettling, invoking a degree of fear, through the clear rendering of the chimney, a domestic symbol of comfort, and stability, an ordered structural aspect of a home with a hearth around which warmth can be found. Place, using it here as de Certeau does as "static, stable, and ideologically informed" is again engaged with as alienating and foreboding, un-homely in which the self cannot be found or is as obscured in fragmentation as the house itself is obscured by the spectral-type trees but not fully, leaving room for the familiar as rescue from the unfamiliar (117). And if one sees this in relation to the self as unknown, and obscured within an alienating environment, then the drawing also suggests that even as this occurs, there is part of the self that remains known, tangible. It is an argument I return to later, in my exploration of Kibel's still lifes which contain this duality of expressionistic distortion and realism.

One of the earliest art critics of Kibel's work, Neville Dubow, intimates that of Kibel's paintings, in particular his landscape paintings of the later years – circa 1935:

> Mood becomes more tranquil. But only superficially so: the pronounced surface unrest, the violent distortions give way to a greater gravity, a reaching towards an outer repose. But underneath the works rumble as though in response to an emotional groundswell (40; see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 *Landscape with Trees*, oil on canvas, Strauss & Co Gallery

His further assessment of the notable *Landscape of Trees* circa 1933 reflects that the brushstrokes in *Landscape with Trees* are executed in a distinctly early Expressionist style. This speaks much to the milieu in which Kibel exercised his creativity. Though removed from the continent geographically, Kibel's work shows a deep sympathy for his European counterparts. Chagall and Soutine are of particular collegiality. Kibel's subject matter is ostensibly simple, a landscape reduced to the illustration of trees occupies the entire composition. Upon detailed inspection, there is a complexity that arises through the movement and palette of this work. There is a carefully balanced constructive tension present between instinctive sensualism and intellectual formal control. *Landscape with Trees* vibrates with inner energy, the pitch of which has been set and controlled by the artist's deep intellect. The emotive element, however, manages to hold strong congruent to this in their expressionist distortions (40).

In *Landscape with Trees*, the darkened, muted colours of the tree-like bushes in the background emphasize the skeletal, bare trees in the foreground and those that are stunted, have been severed at the base of their trunks. Dubow sees this enhanced focalization on the scraggly trees as "expressionist distortions", which, I argue, lends to the hauntedness conveyed by these trees brought to relief in comparison with the still fecund trees and bushes just behind them. Quite interesting is the attempt to focus on death, decay, a ceasing of life represented by the patent contrast in colour of the nondescript brown and lifeless trees and the green of the profusion of trees just behind. The duality then between life in abundance, and death and barrenness more prominent in the painting, creates an interesting metaphorical polarity of place as familiar and unfamiliar, the self at home, and not-at-home. It is within the spaces between the trees, and here, I depend on de Certeau's definition of space being "potentially anarchic movement" (117), that the challenge to the nineteenth century realism form underscored in the expressionistic distortion of the trees is apparent. Taken further, the conventional definition of identity as static, is challenged in the incorporation of contrasts in the painting. The juxtaposition of life and death in one landscape space opens this work to a reading of the self as complex, even fragmented as the distortion of nature suggests. And in this fragmentation, haunted.

In addition to expressionist distortion in Kibel's landscapes, I also find interesting the ways in which this translates in his interior paintings, connecting with an implied haunting in the disruption of the shape of familiar objects (see Fig. 3 and Fig. 3.2). If we return to our understanding of expressionism as



Fig. 3. *Interior*, oil on canvas, Wikimedia Commons



Fig. 3.2. *Interior with Lilies*, painted on the reverse oil board, Strauss & Co Gallery

subjective, the question to ask here is what Kibel is subjecting these interior spaces to. Spaces filled with known household objects, a bedroom meant to connote sanctuary, peace, tranquillity. A world apart from the public, impersonal spaces, where the "known" is meant to be integral to our understanding of home, and the bedroom as a known space, the distorted "aspectivity" of Kibel's work ("aspectivity" being the aspects of culture expressed in visual images according to Davis [4]) in the skewed chairs of *Interior* and the rickety table and asymmetrical mirror, painting, overall composition of *Interior with Lillies* and the implied reading of the distorted self in place problematises the idea of belonging even with the vivid colour palette and familiar objects. The sense of unbelonging sits in the expressionistic distortion of these very conventional shapes of the ordinary and familiar objects within a bedroom, a lounge, yet there is a tranquillity to both interiors that re-invites the dual perspective of belonging and unbelonging.

It is my argument that this duality captures the tension in Kibel's lived experience of creating a home in Cape Town, finding shared interests with fellow Expressionists who also emigrated from Europe, but still being un-homed in this creation of home through his work from the Global South, in relation to his homeland. It is in a sense a fragmented self, which his more patently distorted paintings and drawings convey, but which is suggested here by the absence of figures in the interiors, and the suggestion of impossibility that figures could be at home within these distorted interiors. As stated earlier, the absence of a figure is perhaps a more haunting element than one being included within

these asymmetrical but also tranquil interiors, and signals Kibel's departure from Jewish artistic practice to include the face in their art. Here I depend on Freud's argument again, that the unfamiliar may not always be frightening, to state that the implied haunting of self and place may not be particularly and conventionally frightening in these two works, but the asymmetrical elements he incorporates, the absence of figures, speak to the unfamiliar in relation to his Expressionistic distortion but also engaging the unfamiliar but modernist concern with the fragmented self, and fissuring of interior space that can be read as extended metaphors intimating a hauntedness from the margin. A haunted interiority.

Engaging this idea of a "hauntedness from within" in Kibel's work, distinguished South African art historian Anna Tietze and author of "A History of the Isiziko South African Gallery: Reflections on Art and National Identity" states that Kibel's still life works depart from the conventional Dutch art term "stilleven" meaning "motionless nature" to imbue his still lifes with "mystery and emotional weight," rife with "emotive undercurrents".

In description of his painting simply titled *Still life* completed in 1935 (see Fig. 4), Tietze has this to say: "The viewpoint is a high one, we see the objects from above, a device common to Kibel's work and one that has the effect of making each object seem more isolated from its neighbours, more adrift" ("Masterpiece of the Month: Wolf Kibel *Still Life*"). Of Kibel's *Still Life*, Dubov states that Kibel's work not only joins a European tradition of 18th C French painter Jean Simèon Chardin's still lifes concern with "transcendentalism," "but as part of a universal process, one which involves not so much a transformation of objects but the creation, through art, of totally new ones" (34). Tietze's pointing out of the painting as "isolated, more adrift" sparked my



Fig. 4. *Still Life*, watercolor on paper, Isiziko Museum Cape Town, South Africa

interest in haunted places, spaces, selves, embedded in artwork, whether viscerally containing and conveying stock Gothic elements or metaphoric haunting, and what this haunting suggests not only about the implied or imagined self, but the places depicted too, and what is revealed in the overlaps between self and place from the margin.

But what I also read here in this painting departs from Tietze's pointing out of the one edge of the table in the painting being intentionally obscured by the tablecloth so as to imply an endless falling into the abyss, suggested by the lack of an ordered and recognizable edge to the table. This endless falling away into nothing, Tietze suggests, can point to the ever-seeking for the known point of self which is deferred even within the known and familiar domestic aspectivity of the table, tablecloth, overturned cups and glass lying askew on the table. I argue that it is in this very "falling away" of the table-cloth that a softness to the image appears. It is a recognition and a peace with the unknown, symbolic in not including the opposite corner of the table, that is reminiscent of the Keatsian idea of "negative capability," the ability to sit in uncertainty, when "a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (370). Here, my argument aligns too more with what Dubow states about Kibel's mature work: "Kibel's vision was 'no less poetic' than Chagall but was 'of a rather different kind'" (35). Dubow argues that Kibel's poetry could "find its focus in a pair of chairs, the interior of a room, the contents of a table-top" (35). In comparing Kibel's latter paintings with Soutine's "violet colour eruptions," Dubow states that "Kibel's mature work exchanges trauma for finely wrought tranquillity. The urgency is there but it is set in a less anguished key" (35). There might even be a transcendentalism to be read here too, of Kibel's own internal turmoil and wrestling with the self out of place, the self in place, home/un-homed depicted in exaggerated distortion of his earlier work, as seen in *Landscape with Trees* and *House near Orange Street*, for example, but which shifts to include elements of tranquillity in some of his interiors, and here, with *Still Life*.

It is this article's closing arguments that Kibel's art oeuvre reveals both hauntedness of self and place along with resistance to this haunting in permeating the paintings and charcoals with layered meanings that play between known and unknown, visible, and invisible and his attempts to redefine home and belonging as Jewish migrant trying to rebuild a life in Cape Town, South Africa. There is, in this play, an almost deliberate disjunction to the centre. It reveals the dichotomy of the self in the making from the margin or periphery to the homeland as centre, and the self deferred in its fragmentation extending to the distorted and ordered ways in which he paints place and its associations

with the dualities of both home and unhomely. As this article has intimated, Kibel too is haunted, proliferating his works with his contestation between not being at home, away from Poland, but also, contrastingly, finding home, and thus, arguably, aspects of himself and a sense of belonging, as some of his landscapes and interiors convey. Kibel himself seemed to read his context and the places he inhabited with a „curious eye" which Expressionism perhaps allowed greater room for, but which also carried a haunting he encounters through this curiosity. Unlike the ordered world of Victorianism, Kibel's paintings speak to a lived experience of uncertainty of self giving rise to this hauntedness that we see in his paintings emerging from this period into Modernism, through expressionistic distortion.

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| Abstract

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Haunting from the margins: reading the self in place and place in self in Wolf Kibel's South African Art

Relatively unknown Jewish Polish-born artist Wolf Kibel fled from his home to Vienna, Austria, to escape being conscripted and after many hardships, made his way to South Africa, settling in Cape Town in 1929. Despite the dearth of bibliographical details on Kibel, what is offered shows an artist who lived a productive but brief life, plagued by sickness and poverty, driven like most Modernist artists and those preceding him to live by their brush. His friendship with two fellow South African artists, Hugo Naudé and Lippy Lipshitz transformed his work, which saw him gaining recognition in the South African art spheres, having successful exhibitions held in 1931, as well as being signed to decorate the Alhambra Cinema in Cape Town, and the Plaza Cinema in Pretoria. This article draws on Kibel's biographical details as a gateway into understanding his artwork as reflective of his lived experience,

as well as a trajectory which enables me to draw on deliberate theoretical lenses through which to read his life, his work, and the sense of place and self that emerge as possible readings of his work. It reads the imbrications between the self in place and place in self, arguing that the imagined self and places in Kibel's work problematise the sense of belonging and not belonging these paintings convey, a haunting from the margins speaking to the centre, Poland, that invites and opens conversations about and questions concerning home, not-home, identity shaped by being at the periphery to the home nation from the Global South and painting the self in place and place in self as a way of belonging, but a belonging that is also deferred. In this exploration I apply a palimpsest theoretical approach which involves the „curious eye" in how we read the visual and the written, arguing that a reading of his work asks for an aesthetic sensibility and an openness to a Keatsian „negative capability" (the ability to be uncertain) which intrigues. It is an openness and curiosity that creates a space not only to read and argue for convincing meanings of home, and the self and the haunting of both, but also to remain in the unknown at that point of discovery. Kibel's paintings are a curious admixture of both the „visible" and „invisible", in their exploration of both domestic spaces and landscape, creating a „certain unsettling" that haunts.

Keywords: Wolf Kibel; expressionism; modernism; visual culture; palimpsest, haunting; identity; place; curiosity; Poland; South African art

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