

Routes/Roots:

Reimagining the *Owl House*

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ABSTRACT

Located in the town of Nieu Bethesda in the Karoo desert, the *Owl House* is a fascinating heritage museum that was once the home to outsider artist, Helen Martins. Much work has been created about the eccentric Helen Martins and her unusual home, and appears in the form of books, films, music and plays. The content of these works follow a similar pattern, and it is the aim of this research and film to explore a less literal interpretation of the *Owl House*, and its creators, Helen Martins *and* Koos Malgas. The *Owl House* is re-imagined through the lens of an experimental essay film, juxtaposing footage of the creative eastern imagery of the *Owl House* (in South Africa) with actual footage of the east (India, Thailand and Laos). In exploring these binaries, an investigation of theory of the landscape, home, mobility and hermeneutics takes place. Furthermore, these theories and concepts are looked at in relation to the politics of an apartheid, and later, a democratic South Africa. The *Owl House* is therefore analysed as the collaboration of the white, female Helen Martins, and the coloured, male Koos Malgas.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own unaided work, save insofar as indicated in the acknowledgments and references. It is being submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Film and Television, in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Alexandra Mary-Rose Knight

8th day of August, 2017.

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Firstly, to Thomas Blatcher for travelling the world with me, and being my second set of eyes. Your support, and your cinematography inspired me daily.

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And fourthly, to Steve Clarke who worked his magic on the final sound design and mix for the film – you made the visuals come to life.

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Finally, abundant thanks go to Obakeng Kgongoane and Lazanne Bassed – this Masters journey would not have been the same without you.

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Figure 1.
A photograph taken by my mother of me in
front of the *Owl House*.
[Photograph by Jane Knight, 1999].

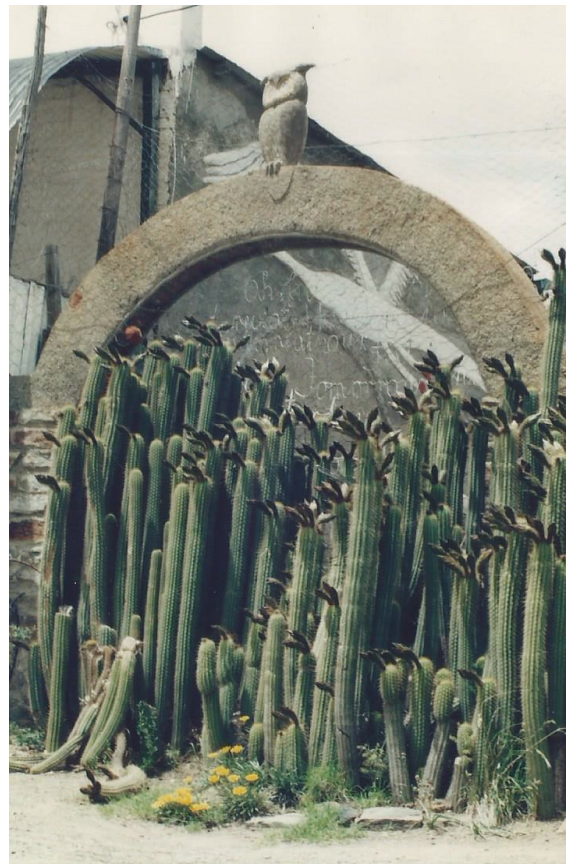


Figure 2.
A view of the *Owl House* from outside.
[Photograph by Jane Knight, 1999].



Figure 3.
The *Owl House* is located in the small and timeless town of Nieu
Bethesda.
[Photograph by Jane Knight, 1999].



Figure 4.

A green pane of glass next to a wall of crushed green and yellow glass adds to the sombre praying figure, with the sun reflected in the frame from an opposite window.
[Film still, by Alexandra Knight, 2016].



Figure 5.

The *Owl House* is located in the small town of Nieu Bethesda in the Great Karoo, South Africa
[Photograph by Jane Knight].



Figure 6.
A shepherd with his lamb in the *Camel Yard*.
[Film still, by Alexandra Knight, 2016.]



Figure 7.
Sheep being herded in Nieu Bethesda.
[Film still, by Alexandra Knight, 2016.]



Figure 8.
Golden nostalgic light on the last stretch of road to Nieu Bethesda.
[Film still, by Alexandra Knight, 2016.]



Figure 9.
A shot from a sunset timelapse over the valley looking onto Nieu Bethesda.
[Film still, by Alexandra Knight, 2015.]



Figure 10.
The *Camel Yard* at Helen Martins's home.
[Film still, by Alexandra Knight, 2016.]



Figure 11.
A collage of Helen Martins and Koos Malgas together.
[Film still, by Alexandra Knight, 2016.]

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