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Phallic presence in the sculpture of Michael MacGarry: an inquiry into competing nationalisms in post-apartheid South Africa

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This research report is an attempt to position Michael MacGarry's sculptures within a context of critiques of nationalisms in the postcolonial state. Looking specifically at Zulu and Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa, I consider the constructed nature of nationalism and highlight how it is always an imposition of rigidity upon the organic flow of peoples through spaces. By exploring the theme of the phallic signifier in conjunction with multiple conceptions of the fetish in Michael MacGarry's work, I explore the idea of competing nationalisms in South Africa. My research is a contribution to the existing literature on MacGarry in that it explores these readings of his work through a psychoanalytic framework. I show how MacGarry's work engages psychoanalytic discourses in relation to social and political formations in order to critique the construction and reproduction of state control through representations of the body politic, a concept articulated by Nicholas Mirzoeff (1993). MacGarry has created his sculptures in such a way that they can be read through all major registers of the fetish: ethnographic, Marxist, psychoanalytic and Modernist.