

Wonderland

an exhibition by Dagmar Sissolak

inspired by Sir John Tenniel

Alice in the Wonderland (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871) is a work of children's literature by **Lewis Carroll** (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson).

Although the second book makes no reference to the events in the earlier book, the themes and settings of *Through the Looking-Glass* make it a kind of mirror image of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: the first book begins outdoors, in the warm month of May, on Alice's birthday (May 4th), *Through the Looking-Glass* opens indoors on a snowy, wintry night exactly six months later (November 4th) into a more oppressive and defiant environment than the first book. *Alice in the Wonderland* plays with logic and uses the imagery of the deck of cards, while *Through the Looking-Glass* draws on the imagery of chess and uses frequent changes in time and spatial direction. Most main characters introduced in the story are represented by a chess piece, with Alice herself being a pawn. Although Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Humpty Dumpty and the Jabberwock are often thought to be characters in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, as they are often included in film versions of Alice in Wonderland, like also in the most recent one directed by Tim Burton, they actually only appear in *Through the Looking-Glass*, causing confusion.

Sir John Tenniel († 1914), an English illustrator and satirical artist, was especially known for political cartoons. In our times, however, he is best remembered for his black and white wood carvings of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872).

Dagmar Sissolak, born May 14th 1960 in Germany, studied Medicine in spite of an intense preparation for an Art study at school and her desire to study Art. Since taking up her medical profession, she consistently has continued developing her Art work, involving different techniques and materials, mainly guache and acrylic colours on paper and canvas. In 1990, she participated in a three-months' Summer Academy at Salzburg, Austria, conducted by Josef Mikl, one of Austria's leading contemporary Artists. Besides joining several joint shows in Germany "*Aesculap malt*" (aesculap paints), there have been four solo exhibitions on her work:

"*Augen-Blicke*" (eyes-glances) at Galery Green in Vienna in 1997

"*Engel*" (angels) in a private location Vienna in 1999

"*In the Stream*" in a private location Lusaka in 2004

"*Through the Looking Glass*" at Salon91 Contemporary Art Collection in Cape Town in 2009

The current *Alice in the Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass* exhibition is comprised of works, which were born from Sissolak's intense fascination with Lewis Carroll's visionary thoughts on future astronomical endeavours, one hundred years before the first man walked on the moon. *Through the looking glass* has become a symbol of man's desire to travel beyond his universe, while Alice's journey may be interpreted as a metaphor for the artist's personal travels. Sissolak has travelled and moved around throughout her adult life. She has lived and worked in Germany, Nicaragua, UK, Switzerland, Austria, Solomon Islands and Zambia before moving to South Africa in 2005. Her journeys and contact with different cultures and mentalities have had an important impact on her Art.

Dagmar therefore sympathises with Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass*, as the character encounters mostly inhospitable places & inhabitants on her journey. Time becomes relative, and even turns upside down. Mirror themes which Carroll incorporated, such as opposites and time running backwards, are symbolised by symmetrical image formation, reflection and glass effects. Acrylics are applied like water-colours, used sparsely and carefully, yielding delicate pastel-like effects, which are contrasted by strong accents of colours, Tenniel's concise, caricature-like characters as well as an uneasy canvas surface resembling an aged mirror surface with spots and defects. Through her original approach Sissolak succeeds in bringing a fresh, modern appeal to a theme that will always stay contemporary.

Book 1: Alice in the Wonderland



Alice falling

46 x 122 cm

Acrylic colour on canvas

3500 ZAR

Either the well was very deep, or she fell very slowly, for she had plenty of time as she went down to look about her, and to wonder what was going to happen next. First, she tried to look down and make out what she was coming to, but it was too dark to see anything; then she looked at the sides of the well, and noticed that they were filled with cupboards and book shelves: Here and there she saw maps and pictures hung upon pegs. She took down a jar from one of the shelves as she passed; it was labelled ORANGE MARMALADE, but to her great disappointment it was empty: She did not like to drop the jar for fear of killing somebody, so managed to put it into one of the cupboards as she fell past it.



Alice in the Hall

61 x 41 cm

Acrylic colour on canvas

ZAR 2400

There were doors all round the hall, but they were all locked; and when Alice had been all the way down one side and up the other, trying every door, she walked sadly down the middle, wondering how she was ever to get out again. Suddenly she came upon a little three-legged table, all made of solid glass; there was nothing on it except a tiny golden key, and Alice's first thought was that it might belong to one of the doors of the hall; but, alas! either the locks were too large, or the key was too small, but at any rate it would not open any of them. However, on the second time round, she came upon a low curtain she had not noticed before, and behind it was a little door about fifteen inches high: she tried the little golden key in the lock, and to her great delight it fitted! Alice opened the door and found that it led into a small passage, not much larger than a rat-hole: she knelt down and looked along the passage into the loveliest garden you ever saw....There seemed to be no use in waiting by the little door, so she went back to the table, ... this time she found a little bottle on it, and round the neck of the bottle was a paper label, with the words 'DRINK ME' beautifully printed on it in large letters...This bottle was NOT marked 'poison,' so Alice ventured to taste it, and finding it very nice, ... she very soon finished it off. 'What a curious feeling!' said Alice; 'I must be shutting up like a telescope.' And so it was indeed: she was now only ten inches high, and her face brightened up at the thought that she was now the right size for going through the little door into that lovely garden... After a while, finding that nothing more happened, she decided on going into the garden at once; but, alas for poor Alice! when she got to the door, she found she had forgotten the little golden key, and when she went back to the table for it, she found she could not possibly reach it: she could see it quite plainly through the glass, and she tried her best to climb up one of the legs of the table, but it was too slippery; and when she had tired herself out with trying, the poor little thing sat down and cried.



Prizes!

91.5 x 91.5 cm
Acrylic colour on canvas
3500 ZAR

However, when they had been running half an hour or so, and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out 'The race is over!' and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking, 'But who has won?' This question the Dodo could not answer without a great deal of thought, and it sat for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead (the position in which you usually see Shakespeare, in the pictures of him), while the rest waited in silence. At last the Dodo said, 'EVERYBODY has won, and all must have prizes.' 'But who is to give the prizes?' quite a chorus of voices asked. 'Why, SHE, of course,' said the Dodo, pointing to Alice with one finger; and the whole party at once crowded round her, calling out in a confused way, 'Prizes! Prizes!' Alice had no idea what to do, and in despair she put her hand in her pocket, and pulled out a box of comfits, (luckily the salt water had not got into it), and handed them round as prizes. There was exactly one a-piece all round.



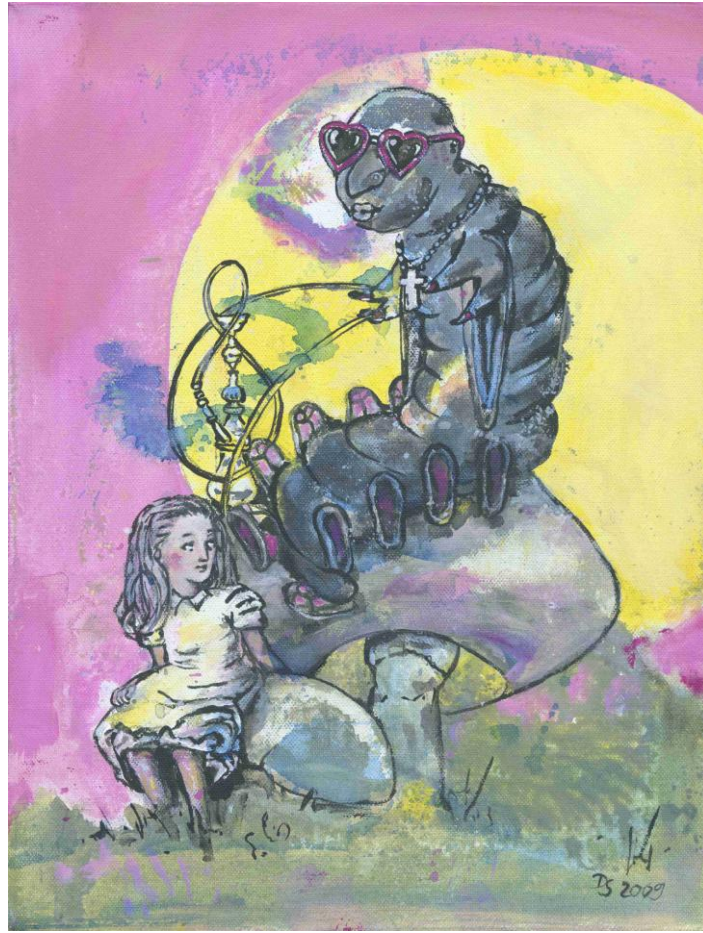
In the Rabbit Room

42 x 42 cm

Acrylic colour on canvas

1300 ZAR

"I know *something* interesting is sure to happen," she said to herself, "whether I eat or drink anything: so I'll just see what this bottle does. I do hope it'll make me grow large again, for really, I'm quite tired of being such a tiny little thing!" ...It did so indeed, and much sooner than she had expected.....before she had drunk half of the bottle she found her head pressing against the ceiling, and had to stoop to save her neck from being broken....Still she went on growing, and, as a last resource, she put one arm out of the window, and one foot up the chimney, and said to herself "Now I can do no more, whatever happens."



Alice and the Caterpillar

30.5 x 40.5 cm
Acrylic colour on canvas
1800 ZAR

The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence: at last, the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice. "Who are *you*?" said the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I - I hardly know, sir, just at present - at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."



Alice and the Pigeon

42 x 42 cm

Acrylic colour on canvas

1300 ZAR

As there seemed to be no chance of getting her hands up to her head, she tried to get her head down to them, and was delighted to find that her neck would bend about easily in any direction....She had just succeeded in curving it down into a graceful zigzag, and was going to dive in among the leaves, which she found to be nothing but the tops of the trees under which she had been wandering when a sharp hiss made her draw back in a hurry. A large pigeon had flown into her face, and was beating her violently with its wings. "Serpent!" screamed the pigeon. "I am not a serpent", said Alice indignantly. "Let me alone". "Serpent, I say again!" repeated the pigeon, but in a more subdued tone and added with a kind of sob, "I've tried every way, and nothing seems to suit them!"



The Two Footmen

31 x 31 cm
Acrylic colour on canvas
1200 ZAR

For a minute or two she stood looking at the house, and wondering what to do next, when suddenly a footman in livery came running out of the wood – (she considered him to be a footman because he was in livery: otherwise, judging by his face only, she would have called him a fish (- and rapped loudly at the door with his knuckles. It was opened by another footman in livery, with a round face, and large eyes like a frog; and both footmen,...,had powdered hair that curled all over their heads.....

The fish-footman began producing from under his arm a great letter, ..., and this he handed over to the other, saying, in a solemn tone, "For the Duchess. An invitation from the Queen to play croquet."Then they both bowed low, and their curls got entangled together.



Metamorphosis of the Duchess baby into a piglet

Acrylic colour on canvas
3 x 26 cm x 26 cm
2100 ZAR

The baby grunted again, and Alice looked very anxiously into its face to see what was the matter with it. There could be no doubt that it had a very turn-up nose, much more like a snout than a real nose....Alice was just thinking to herself, "Now, what am I to do with this creature, when I get it home?" when it grunted again, so there could be no mistake about it: it was neither more or less than a pig....



The Cheshire Cat

31 x 31 cm

Acrylic colour on canvas

1200 ZAR

"...I wish you wouldn't keep appearing and vanishing so suddenly: you make one quite giddy." "All right," said the Cat; and this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone. "Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin," thought Alice; but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life!"



A Mad Tea Party

122 x 46 cm
Acrylic colour on canvas
3500 ZAR

There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house, and the March Hare and the Hatter were having tea at it: a Dormouse was sitting between them, fast asleep, and the other two were resting their elbows on it, and talking over its head. "Very uncomfortable for the Dormouse," thought Alice; only, as it it's asleep I suppose it doesn't mind."

The table was a large one, but the three were all crowded together at one corner of it. "No room! No room!" they cried out when they saw Alice coming. "There is plenty of room!" said Alice indignantly, and she sat down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table. "Have some wine," the March Hare said in an encouraging tone. Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. "I don't see any wine," she remarked. "There isn't any," said the March Hare. "Then it wasn't very civil of you to offer it," said Alice angrily. "It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being invited" said the March Hare.



The Lobster Quadrille

76 x 91 cm

Acrylic colour on canvas

3500 ZAR

“Then, you know,” the Mock Turtle went on, “you throw the –” ..“The lobsters!” shouted the Gryphon, with a bound into the air. “ – as far out to sea as you can” “Swim after them! screamed the Gryphon. “Turn a somersault in the sea!” cried the Mock Turtle, capering wildly about. “Change lobsters again! Yelled the Gryphon. “Back to land again, and – that’s all the first figure,” said the Mock Turtle, suddenly dropping his voice; and the two creatures, who had been jumping about like mad things, sat down again very sadly and quietly, and looked at Alice.

Book 2 Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There



Through the looking-glass

Acrylic colour on canvas

3 x 122 cm x 45 cm

6300 ZAR

“Let’ s pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it’s turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It’ll be easy enough to get through.” - She [Alice] was up on the chimney-piece while she said this, though she hardly knew how she got there. And certainly the glass *was* beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist.



Jabberwocky

Acrylic colour on canvas
 3 x 122 cm x 45 cm
 7800 ZAR

*'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
 All mimsy were the borogoves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe.'*

"`Brillig` means four o'clock in the afternoon - the time when you begin broiling things for dinner. ... `Slithy` means `lithe and slimy`. You see, it's like a portmanteau - there are two meanings packed up into one word. ... `Toves` are something like badgers - they're something like lizards - and they're something like corkscrews.

`Mimsy` is `flimsy and miserable` and a `borogove` is a thin shabby-looking bird with its feathers sticking out all round - something like a live mop."



Alice and the Garden of Live Flowers

Acrylic colour on canvas
76 cm x 38 cm
2800 ZAR

However, there was the hill full in sight, so there was nothing to be done but to start again. ...“ O Tiger-lily!” said Alice, addressing herself to one that was waving gracefully about in the wind, “I wish you could talk!” “We can talk,” said the Tiger-lily, “when there’s anybody worth talking to.”



Alice and the Red Queen

Acrylic colour on canvas
3 x 51 cm x 51 cm
6000 ZAR

“...A most curious country it was. There were a number of tiny little brooks running straight across it from side to side, and the ground between was divided up into squares by a number of little green hedges.... just like a large chess-board..” “And they [the Red Queen and Alice] went so fast that at last they seemed to skim through the air, hardly touching the ground with their feet.



The Walrus and the Carpenter

Acrylic colour on canvas
51 cm x 101 cm
3200 ZAR

"I like the walrus best", said Alice: "because he was a *little* sorry for the poor oysters." "He ate more than the Carpenter, though. You see he held his handkerchief in front, so that the Carpenter couldn't count how many he took..."



The train journey

Acrylic colour on canvas
56 cm x 71 cm
3200 ZAR

All this time the guard was looking at her, first through a telescope, then through a microscope, and then through an opera-glass. At last he said "You're travelling the wrong way," and shut up the window, and went away. "So young a child," said the gentleman sitting opposite to her, (he was dressed in white paper,) "ought to know which way she's going, ..."



Alice and the Gnat

Acrylic colour on canvas

26 cm x 26 cm

1200 ZAR

...., and she found herself sitting quietly under a tree - while the Gnat ... was balancing itself on a twig just over her head, and fanning her with its wings. It certainly was a *very* large Gnat: "about the size of a chicken," Alice thought. Still, she couldn't feel nervous with it, after they had been talking together so long. " - then you don't like *all* insects?" the Gnat went on, as quietly as if nothing had happened.



Alice and the Fawn

Acrylic colour on canvas
56 cm x 71 cm
3000 ZAR

So they walked on together through the wood, Alice with her arms clasped lovingly round the soft neck of the Fawn, till they came out into another open field, and here the Fawn gave a sudden bound into the air, and shook itself free from Alice's arm. A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes, and in another moment it had darted away at full speed. Alice stood looking after it, almost ready to cry with vexation at having lost her dear fellow-traveller so suddenly.



Tweedledum and Tweedledee

Acrylic colour on canvas
51 cm x 51 cm
1800 ZAR

“I knew it [a rattle] was [old and broken]!” cried Tweedledum, beginning to stamp about wildly and tear his hair. ... Here he looked at Tweedledee, who immediately sat down on the ground, and he tried to hide himself under the umbrella. ...But he couldn't quite succeed, and it ended in his rolling over, bundled up in the umbrella, with only his head out: and there he lay, opening and shutting his mouth and his large eyes - looking more like a fish...



Metamorphosis of the White Queen into a Sheep

Acrylic colour on canvas
3 x 31 cm x 31cm
2400 ZAR

"Oh, much better!" cried the Queen, her voice rising into a squeak as she went on. "Much be-etter!... Be-e-etter! Be-e-eh!" The last word ended in a long bleat, so like a sheep that Alice quite started.



Wool and Water

Acrylic colour on canvas
61 cm x 91 cm
4000 ZAR

She [the Sheep] was now working with fourteen pairs [of needles] at once, and Alice couldn't help looking at her in great astonishment. ... "How can she knit with so many?" "Can you row?" the Sheep asked, handing her a pair.... "Yes, a little, but not on land - and not with needles - " Alice was beginning to say, when suddenly the needles turned into oars in her hands, and she found they were in a little boat, gliding along...



Humpty Dumpty

SOLD

Acrylic colour on canvas

2 x 101cm x 51cm

4500 ZAR

"...You may shake hands with me!" And he [Humpty Dumpty] grinned almost from ear to ear, as he leant forwards (and as nearly as possible fell off the wall in doing so) and offered Alice his hand. ...

"As to poetry, you know," said Humpty Dumpty, stretching out one of his great hands, "I can repeat poetry as well as other folk. ...Humpty Dumpty raised his voice almost to a scream...



The White Knight

SOLD

Acrylic colour on canvas

56cm x 71cm

4000 ZAR

Of all the strange things that Alice saw in her journey Through The Looking-Glass, this was the one that she always remembered most clearly.... – the mild blue eyes and kindly smile of the Knight – the setting sun gleaming through his hair, and shining on his armor in a blaze of light that quite dazzled her – the horse quietly moving about ... – and the black shadows of the forest behind – all this she took in like a picture.



The White King and the Messenger

Acrylic colour on canvas
26cm x 26cm
ZAR 1 200

At this moment the Messenger arrived: he was far too much out of breath to say a word, and could only wave his hands about, and make the most fearful faces at the poor King.

"You alarm me!" said the King. " I feel faint – give me a ham sandwich!" On which the Messenger, to Alice's great amusement, opened a bag that hung round his neck, and handed a sandwich to the King, who devoured it greedily.



The Lion and the Unicorn

SOLD

Acrylic colour on canvas

31cm x 31cm

ZAR 1 400

The Lion looked at Alice wearily. "Are you an animal – or a vegetable – or mineral?" he said, yawning at every other word. "It's a fabulous monster!" the Unicorn cried out, before Alice could reply. "Then hand round the plum-cake, Monster," the Lion said. "and ... fair play with the cake, you know".

...

"It's very provoking!" she [Alice] said "I have cut several slices already, but they always join on again!"

"You don't know how to manage Looking-glass cakes, the Unicorn remarked. "Hand it round first, and cut it afterwards."

...

"I say it isn't fair!" cried the the Unicorn, as Alice sat with the knife in her hand, very much puzzled how to begin. "The monster has given the Lion twice as much as me!" "She's kept none for herself, anyhow," said the Lion.... "Do you like plum-cakes, Monster?"



Queen Alice

Acrylic colour on canvas
51cm x 51cm
2800 ZAR

“What *am* I to do?” exclaimed Alice, looking about in great perplexity, as first one round head, and then the other, rolled down from her shoulder, and lay like a heavy lump in her lap. “I don’t think it *ever* happened before, that any one had to take care of two Queens asleep at once.”



In the large Hall

Acrylic colour on canvas
2x 38 cm x 76cm
7000 ZAR

Alice glanced nervously along the table, as she walked up the large hall, and noticed that there were about fifty guests, of all kinds: some were animals, some birds, and there were even a few flowers among them....There were three chairs at the end of the table: the Red and White Queens had already taken two of them.

And then,..., all sorts of things happened in a moment. The candles all grew up to the ceiling... As to the bottles, they each took a pair of plates, which they hastily fitted on as wings, and so, with forks for legs, went fluttering about in all directions....

At this moment she heard a hoars laugh at her side, and turned to see what was the matter with the White Queen; but, instead of the Queen, there was the leg of mutton sitting in the chair. "Here I am!" cried a voice from the soup-tureen, and Alice turned again, just in time to see the Queen's broad good-natured face grinning at her for a moment over the edge of the tureen, before she disappeared into the soup....

"I can't stand this any longer!" she [Alice] cried, as she jumped up and seized the table-cloth with both hands: one good pull, and plates, dishes, guests, and candles came crashing down together in a heap on the floor.



Metamorphosis of the Red Queen into a black kitten

Acrylic colour on canvas
3 x 26cm x 26cm
2100 ZAR

She [Alice] took her [the Red Queen] off the table as she spoke and shook her backwards and forwards with all her might. The Red Queen made no resistance whatever: only her face grew very small, and her eyes got large and green: and still, as Alice went on shaking her, she kept on growing shorter - and fatter - ... and softer - and rounder - and - it really *was* a kitten, after all.