



IN CONVERSATION: ROSS DOUGLAS & SILVIA PILLON

Photographs courtesy of Ross Douglas and Silvia Pillon.



Since we started the FNB Joburg Art Fair we have been pushing the line “Contemporary Art from Africa” as opposed to “African Art”. To answer your question “is there is such a thing as African Art”? Off course there is but it does not mean that artists in Africa have to use the label. I think the label is especially problematic for contemporary artists as so many people have the perception that African Art is limited to traditional Art & Craft.

Our Art Fair focuses on contemporary art from or linked to the continent and this definition has

been loose yet focused enough to give the FNB Joburg Art Fair a unique identity amongst the many fairs around the world. We are not really interested with questions like “what qualifies an artist to call themselves an African Artist” but are rather more interested in the quality of the work and the link to the continent.

I think it naïve to try and create an African Identity for African Art. Good artists make good art. Obviously the work of William Kentridge is closer to the western sensibility than that of Yinka Shonibare. However one is white and based in Africa and one black and based in London so who is more African? Who cares! They both make good art that contributes to the growing interest in the artistic production from the continent and the diaspora.

Thanks to a young demographic and massive diversity, Africa has a great potential for a thriving creative industries and art economy but as always there are challenges. Apart from the obvious ones of education, resources and infrastructure, I think that there are more subtle ones that are equally concerning. For example the banning of homosexual activities in the majority of African countries is a major obstacle to a successful art economy for obvious reasons.

I think we need to lose this notion that Africa will unite and the nearly one billion of us living on this continent will have a common identity. Art will be produced on the continent and beyond the borders of the continent under many identities. If it makes sense, artists will use African Contemporary, Nigerian, African Diaspora or simply contemporary to explain their work. Artists in different countries on the continent will stay and make good art if there are enough buyers and there is enough freedom for them to express themselves. If not they will migrate to new countries where they

have better opportunities. For this reason we continue to try and grow an African buyer base as opposed to flying in big buyers from Europe and the US. Not only are local buyers important for injecting cash into African Art economies but buyers are often politically connected and lobby for institutions like the Tate Modern in London.

Finally I don't have an opinion on what sort of Art people on this continent should be making. The beauty about the art world is that artists are full of ideas and curators, fair directors, galleries and buyers have the luxury of choosing what they want. I suppose my single wish would be for Africa to make more art.

Ponte City Joe Slovo Drive, Johannesburg, 2013.
Copyright Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse.
Courtesy of Goodman Gallery.



Looking up the Core, Ponte City, Johannesburg, 2008. Copyright Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery.

01

BOOK LAUNCH

JOBURG ART FAIR SPECIAL PROJECTS

Ponte City

By Mikhael Subotzky
& Patrick Waterhouse

Ponte City building is an iconic structure in Johannesburg's skyline that has long been a symbol for the city itself. Opened in 1976, Ponte has come to represent the best and the worst of Johannesburg, and has generated a particular mythology of city life. South African photographer Mikhael Subotzky and British artist Patrick Waterhouse combine photography, historical archives, found objects, and interviews to create a body of work that spans the pre-history of the building, its spectacular decline, and the recent attempts at its transformation. The building is cast as the central character in a tangled narrative about Johannesburg's magnetic pull on people from all over the continent.

In the artist's words; “From the beginning, we have been interested in the

mythical position of Ponte in Johannesburg's consciousness, as much as in its history and architecture. Our attempts to understand the psychology, structure and historical narrative of the building have included taking a photograph from every window, of every television screen, and of every internal door, as well as the collecting of archival material and forming long-term relationships with its residents present and past.”

The work has culminated in the production of a book, of which the Goethe-Institut has been a proud supporter and is pleased to be involved in its launch at the 2014 Joburg Art Fair. The book will be launched with an installation of some of the works at Ponte City itself, with a panel discussion and book-signing taking place at Joburg Art Fair.



02

BOOK LAUNCH

JOBURG ART FAIR

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Just Ask FROM AFRICA TO ZEITGEIST

Editor: Simon Njami

Just Ask!
Edited by Simon Njami
Kerber Verlag Bielefeld, 2014
Softcover
224 pages
ISBN: 976-3-86678-984-5

What are the significant conversations in African photography today? This alternative art guide book shows current developments and tendencies – a contemporary manual with a sense of humour that speaks to both young and professional photographers, collectors and people interested in photography.

Just Ask! is meant to be an introduction to contemporary African photography, and more broadly, a reflection of contemporary practice. There is also a focus on some of the African photographers that participated in the Goethe-Institut Johannesburg's portfolio workshop, the Photographers Master Class, which has been running since 2008. The richly illustrated publication is accompanied by essays by renowned authors, curators and art critics.

The Goethe-Institut is proud to launch this publication at the Joburg Art Fair with a panel discussion that features some of the contributors to the book and participants in the Master Class programme.

04

EXHIBITION

JOBURG ART FAIR

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Peregrinate

Photography

Peregrinate features the work of three photographers: South Africans Thabiso Sekgala and Musa Nxumalo, and Kenyan Mimi Cheron Ng'ok.

The exhibition explores the concept of photography as a common method of investigation, discovery and representation – an act of wandering undertaken by the photographer as traveler and explorer. The works featured present travelling as an elliptical narrative encompassing various locations, and explore each photographer's relationship to space.

Traversing Soweto streets, backyards in Nairobi, and dusty Jordanian alleys, Peregrinate invites viewers to consider the intimate politics of home and belonging, as well as the possibilities inherent in dislocation or a lack of anchoring, and the routes one takes to find a way forward. Considering visa restrictions and the cost of airfare from one part of the African continent to the other, the exhibition bears in mind how understandings of home and land/scape – connection or disconnection to a place – are shaped by limitation, and filtered through historical, political and personal ways of seeing. Peregrinate employs the interplay of mi-

gration, the artificial aspect of borders and how the African city is rarely considered a permanent space as a premise for storytelling. By documenting ordinary places, banal everyday events, strangers, friends, and family, these elements are assigned historical significance. The photographs stand as monuments to place, movement and new discoveries.

Sub-titled 'field notes on time travel and space', the exhibition examines spatial politics, the economics of time and travel, and the kinds of access granted to travelers. The travels of three different wanderers are juxtaposed as temporal sculptures to chronicle the personal experience of journeying within the home, neighbourhood and country, as well as the act of departing for distant places.

Jointly curated by the featured photographers – Peregrinate was conceived as the culmination of their participation in the Goethe-Institut portfolio workshop, the Photographers Master Class. Initiated in 2008 by the Goethe-Institut and Simon Njami, the Master Class provides a critical platform for emerging photographers from around the continent.



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Mimi Cheron Ng'ok, *Chebet and Chemu in the garden*, 2008 – ongoing, from the series, *the other country*. Courtesy of the Goethe-Institut; Musa N. Nxumalo, *Neighborhood 3*, 2009, from the series, *In-Glorious*. Courtesy of the Goethe-Institut.

03

EXHIBITION

JOBURG ART FAIR

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Documenting Fiction

LagosPhoto

Documenting Fiction, presented by Pirelli as a special project of the FNB Joburg Art Fair, includes a selection of artists in the upcoming edition of LagosPhoto Festival, opening in October 2014 in Lagos, Nigeria. Participating artists include Jenevieve Aken, Namsa Leuba, Cristina de Middel, Karl Ohiri and Riikka Kassinen, and Patrick Willocq.

The exhibition examines contemporary photographers working in Africa who negotiate the boundaries and relationships between photography, beliefs, and truths. Incorporating conceptual and performative practices that expand traditional photographic approaches and techniques, many contemporary artists working on the continent move beyond the confines of the photojournalistic gaze. These artists produce works that

consider the complex social and political concerns that define a new Africa in the twenty-first century, and they explore how the ubiquity of images plays a vital role in how reality is constructed and articulated.

Utilizing genres such as staged narratives, performance, appropriation, and self-portraiture, these artists push the temporal and spatial boundaries of the photographic medium. In doing so, Documenting Fiction considers how these artists imagine different futures and charter fictive worlds, using photography as a catalyst to investigate the changing realities of Africa today.

LagosPhoto is a month-long annual festival of photography which includes exhibitions, public programs, and outdoor installations throughout the city of Lagos.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Cristina de Middel, *Untitled*, from the series, *This is What Hatred Did*, 2014. 42 x 52.49 cm. Courtesy of the artist and La New Gallery Madrid. Featured in 'Documenting Fiction', Lagos Photo; Cristina de Middel, *Untitled*, from the series, *This is What Hatred Did*, 2014. 19.4 x 24.25 cm. Courtesy of the artist and La New Gallery Madrid. Featured in 'Documenting Fiction', Lagos Photo.

