The African Exile Museum

7 June – 10 August 2003


“The African Exile Museum” is a mobile exhibition platform for contemporary African art. Sixteen artistic positions tell a story about the social changes that are currently taking place on the African continent. It concerns questions of multiple identities, of the close interweaving of urbanity and the collapse of social systems as well as the personal stories about them.

At the beginning of the 20th century, aesthetic revolutions occurred with the Dadaist and Surrealist movements. For their strategic actions the poet Léopold Sédar Senghor coined the term “franc-tireurs entrenched behind the enemy” – those who as vanguard start a new world order on unsecured ground. The initiators of “NEXT FLAG – an African sniper project for European spaces” use this image of Senghor’s franc-tireurs in order to express their desire for a new artistic and social space. That the initiators are Africans is due to the Marxist concept of historical materialism. This states that no changes of circumstances can be derived from those who have profited from the contrasts of this world. In an act of post-postcolonial occupation, NEXT FLAG has made it its aim to represent contemporary African art in European exhibition rooms. The project thus makes the attempt to bring together existing contradictions under a new – the next – flag, not in the sense of unity but as the establishment of a new, emotional geography, detached from physical actuality.

Willem Boshoff (1951, South Africa) has been researching the relationship between language and writing for several years. His installations deal with human individualities resulting from their differences in language, culture or nationality. For Boshoff, the large variety of communities and languages comes second to the importance of a common mankind. His Garden of words is an installation of thousands of botanical names, written on plastic film and that are arranged to form a word carpet. The names are those of disappeared plants and his work serves as a memorial garden, as a symbol of the cycle of life and death.

Lisa Brice (1968, England) is one of the first artists of the post-apartheid generation. In her artistic work she illustrates day-to-day violence, domestic violence hidden from public view as well as violence on the streets. Her themes include the sexual exploitation of women as well as city dwellers’ excessive need for security. The pictographs covered with needles in the Pin-Cushion-Series are borrowed from the sign language used by gangs on the periphery of Cape Town. The symbols include warning, viewing and temptation.

Soly Cisse (1976, Senegal) Soly Cisse’s drawings swarm with chimera: mythological creatures, which can no longer be identified as animal, human or plant. The diagrammatical arrangement of the figures, their screening, numbering and dimensions are an attempt to create order, to portray fictitious evolutionary development and to make corrections. They also represent an attempt to create order, in the complex structure of relationships between living beings, and to demand respect for nature.

Loulou Cherinet (1970, Sweden) uses her work to examine identities and the manner in which these identities are assumed, changed, denied, questioned or compared. For her photo series Barber Series she visited some hairdressing salons near Addis Ababa / Ethiopia with the aim of recording vanities and gossip. The photos revolve around the hidden messages of a hairstyle and at the same time pay homage to everyday life in Ethiopia in all their poetic details. In the video White women, filmed in a bizarre setting, Ethiopian men recount their experiences with white women – familiar catastrophes arising from such relationships, successes and failures. White women is almost a socio-psychological stocktaking exercise, embedded in the personal accounts of those involved in the video.
Kendell Geers (1968, South Africa) states to have been born into an Afrikaner family from which he fled at the age of 15 to join the anti-Apartheid movement. In the same way as Geers fits his entire biography into a wider historical setting his date of birth is also contextualised: Geers has moved his date of birth to May 1968, a time of radical social changes. The works of Kendell Geers evoke the immediate emotional involvement of the audience by creating potentially dangerous and physically taxing situations. His Title Withheld (Vitrine) is the relict of a performance, during which Geers threw a brick through the window of a gallery. His work Title Withheld (Exported) is a reference to the practice of permanent aggression and disassociation exercised during the Apartheid period.

Kay Hassan (1956, South Africa) uses his works to recount city life from the perspective of population migration and emigration to the cities. His installations reconstruct social places of the South African life: discotheques, hidden bars, shops, workers’ lodgings. Shebeen is a reconstruction of one of the former illegal bars in Soweto, the so-called whisper bars. Each installation recounts the subliminal balance of power in these places.

William Kentridge (1955, South Africa) sees drawings as a form of knowledge production. Since the start of his activities as an actor, director, set-designer and filmmaker in the 70’s, Kentridge has further developed this graphical concept. He has modified traditional animation techniques by developing several successive accounts from repeated processing of a single drawing. In his short 16 mm and 35 mm films Felix in Exile (1994) and Mine (1991) inanimate objects, re-occurring human characters and South Africa’s political scene merge to a steady flow of surreal transformations.

Moshekwa Langa (1975, South Africa) lives in Amsterdam. As a member of Diaspora his selection of all expressive forms is based on the search for a private Esperanto, making poetry and politics universally understandable. In The Mountains of My Youth, Langa puts together an imaginary geography. He constructs worlds in which reality and playfulness fight with each other. His geographical maps represent no comparison to real scientific maps, showing the boarders of the country. Moshekwa Langa’s cartography is emotional and burdened with feelings; a rhizome consisting of vanishing lines.

Toma Muteba Luntumbue (1962, Democratic Republic of Congo) lives in Belgium. U. N. Check-Point is a pile of luggage in the exhibition room. Luntumbue sees a suitcase not only as a useful object but regards it as one of our most personal items. The installation of haphazardly stacked pieces of luggage symbolizes the condition of numerous refugees and the anonymization of the victims of armed struggles.

Zwelethu Mthethwa (1960, South Africa) expresses his concepts in drawings and photographs. His portrayals of current problems – in particular those of immigration and flows of people – are a far cry from the stereotype traditional images of misery normally regarded as the legacy of the South African Apartheid society. From his works of interior pictures on which Mthethwa has been working for several years, 4 x sacred homes represents a series of photographs in which representative of different, partly adapted religious denominations pose in front of their private house altars.

N’Dilo Mutima (1978, Angola) is less interested in the portrayal function of a photograph but uses his serial small-sized photographic works for the narrative potential of the repeatedly strung together photos and the type of representation of the action commented therein. The presentation form is subject to contextual changes and is variable and extendable. Untitled consists of 40 reproductions of an African cockroach – a two-dimensional swarm of framed vermin.

Aimé Ntakiyica (1960, Burundi). Although he has lived in Belgium since 1963, Ntakiyica has never taken Belgian nationality. Aimé Ntakiyica is an eternal nomad, carrying his experiences and hopes to all corners of the world. Die Welt ist mein Haus (The World is my Home) is the title for a number of his works that connect a range of different exhibition rooms throughout the world with each other, like a network. Aimé Ntakiyica uses individual fragments of rooms – a well, a hallway or a patio – to conquer foreign territory and find his place in the world. His Shower installation represents a further fragment of this acquisition strategy: dozens of video clips preserve a story that makes room for the imagination of the public for “palabre” – or palaver, the core idea of Ntakiyicas’ artistic concept. The seemingly poetic surface of the Verba Volent Scripta Moment installation – a swarm of telephone directories spraying millions of names into the expanse of the ether – conceals references to events at the time of the civil war in Ruanda between the Hutus and Tutsis: Names from the telephone directory denounce members of the government at the time.
Olu Oguibe (1964, Nigeria) grew up in Nigeria during an extremely unstable political period. Apart from his artistic works, Olu Oguibe also produces comprehensive theoretical social criticism, as well as poems. Olu Oguibe's conceptual works deal with topics such as exile, social injustice and the problematic handling of “commemorative culture”. His *Keep it real (Memorial to a Youth)* installation represents a reproduction of a memorial to a lost friend and is based on hip-hop style. In *The Portrait of an old country*, Olu Oguibe portrays British people as exotic beings from the European continent as seen through the eyes of an American 19th century traveler.

Tracey Rose (1974, South Africa) comes from a wealthy catholic family and bases her themes on the resulting fragmentation of her social origin as a colored person in South Africa. In her videos and installations she examines aspects of the politics of the sexes and body using performative manipulation of her own body. Using painted texts of fragmented shreds of recollections from her childhood, Tracey Rose takes us back into the Apartheid period in South Africa and recounts personal dramas.

Berni Searle (1964, South Africa). The work of Berni Searle is characterized by her identity as a colored South African with African/European/Arabic roots. During the Apartheid period, people with different origins were categorized into seven subclasses, depending on their genetic hereditary factors. By covering the body with sand, paints, spices or pigments, the body seemingly evades such a classification and also refers to the period in the history of Africa during which the Cape of Good Hope was the only trading route for the stream of slaves and spices from East India and to the artist's own ethnic origin.

Yinka Shonibare (1962, England). The son of Nigerian parents questions in his installations and photographs the fundamental claims of cultural authenticity as a construct deriving from the Colonial period. Yinka Shonibare lives in London and in Nigeria. *The Diary of Victorian Dandy* are five photographic panels showing a day in the life of a 19th century Dandy with Yinka Shonibare himself in the main role. A single day suffices to describe a life, to give it a format and meaning. As the Dandy, Shonibare is the person with a forged yet authentic identity and is thus one of the most disturbing phenomena of this time. It tempts Shonibare to implement a parodistic deconstruction of the categories of class, sex and taste that came with the birth of Dandyism.

The “The African Exile Museum” exhibition at the Migros Museum for Contemporary Art in Zurich is part of the project “NEXT FLAG – an African sniper project for European spaces”. It is the result of collaboration between the initiators of NEXT FLAG – Fernando Alvim and Simon Njami – and Heike Munder.


The following collections are participating in the exhibition in the Migros Museum for Contemporary Art:
- Hans Bogatzke’s collection of African contemporary art, Germany
- Costa Reis compilación de arte africana actual, Angola
- Collection de la Province de Hainaut, Belgium

The Migros Museum for Contemporary Art is an institution of the Migros Cultural Percentage.

*Tue/Wed/Fri 12 noon – 6 p.m.*

*new: Thurs 12 noon – 8 p.m.*

*Sat/Sun 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.*

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