

Nadine Hutton

*Hobbs / Neustetter*

James Webb

**Robyn Nesbitt & Nina Barnett**

**Cameron Platter**

EDUARDO CACHUCHO

**Bernie Searle**

*Jessica Gregory & Zen Marie*

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NANDIPHA MNTAMBO

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BEK  
Maur Prosjekter  
and Stiftelsen 3,14  
present

# Contemporary Artists from South Africa

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## **Preface**

The project “South Africa 2010”, which culminated in the exhibition “Contemporary Artists from South Africa” at Stiftelsen 3.14 in Bergen, was our meeting with a handful of great artists. We were curious about the vital contemporary art scene in South Africa, where artists were gaining significance on the international art circuit. The exhibition was divided into two parts, combining a variety of practices by contemporary artists from South Africa.

The first part displays two projects realized through a dual artist residency in Bergen prior to the exhibition. The artists worked geo-specifically by exploring Bergen and surrounding areas and the results are embodied in different ways in the presented installations.

The second part is a screening of 10 video works selected in partnership with ISIS Arts in Newcastle. The videos show work by both experienced and newly established South African artists. In addition, 4 animation videos were presented in an old elevator inside the gallery.

Through word and image, this catalogue provides an idea of the art as we experienced it and of the process that lead to the final exhibition. Stiftelsen 3.14, Maur Projects and BEK want to express our profound admiration and gratitude to all of the participating artists. We would also like to thank our funding partners who made the realization of this project possible. We sincerely appreciate the generous support from everyone involved in the exhibition “Contemporary Artists from South Africa”.

## **Curatorial connections**

Stiftelsen 3.14 has a long history of presenting non-western art. The gallery joined forces with artist and curator Maia Urstad from Maur Projects and BEK (Bergen Centre for Electronic Arts). Maia Urstad visited and exhibited in Johannesburg prior to the Bergen project, whilst BEK, after being introduced to contacts in Africa, wanted to investigate further into the field. Our aim was to expose a little of the contemporary art scene as found on the southern tip of Africa. This is a brief overview of the starting point for the “South Africa 2010” project.

## **Embodied Practices - Twenty-Five Years of Pan-African Encounters**

*By Bjørn Inge Folleavaag - curator/former manager of Stiftelsen 3,14 and Malin Barth - curator and director of Stiftelsen 3,14.*

Stiftelsen 3,14 is a non-profit art institution centrally located in Bergen, Norway. The gallery works almost exclusively with international exhibitions and partnerships. The emphasis is on contemporary art beyond the very western, centralized discourse.

Stiftelsen 3,14 has global vision and a will to globalize. The gallery is committed to knowledge-production, presentation and interpretation of innovative artistic work in all media promoting creativity and artistic exploration. Through our program we aim to reflect upon the complex nature of international, contemporary art and different contemporary issues. During the last few years 3,14 has emphasized international projects that enable local understanding of global issues. Our ventures into African art practice are not motivated or justified by any search for the exotic, but are rather based on a wish for dialogue with our African colleagues. The gallery's efforts in the field were sparked by adventure and curiosity, and have been rewarded with knowledge. Acquired knowledge has been a feature of all our exhibitions throughout the years.

Work began in 1985 with an exhibition of Kenyan and Tanzanian artists at the University Library in Bergen. This was followed by a whole series of exhibitions covering Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Congo, Mali, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, the North African countries and South Africa. African art is not only indigenous to all of these countries but is also influenced by a colonial legacy; each nation represents a miniature cultural version of the former ruling entity.

In "Asymmetry of Conflict in the Art World", Vera Zolberg argues that the sources of innovation increasingly stem from the margins; they are borne by agents who, rather than being central to the most important institutions of culture, arise in their peripheries. But what is periphery? Western art institutions and museums have been Eurocentric or americanized - either in terms of academic traditions or ethnicity. Thus, all art-practices beyond North America and Europe have sadly often been considered as inferior and referred to ethnographical institutions rather than art galleries. Jean Kennedy suggests that these obstacles indicate that whatever direction artists choose, there is danger ahead.

Many contemporary African artists have been criticized for either leaving traditions behind, or for embracing traditional elements. Elevating past achievement as the epitome of artistic endeavour is a heavy burden for any creative artist. Africans who study abroad and avoid "African subject matter", or employ a style that is not recognizably "African", are sometimes considered betrayers of their inheritance. Clearly this attitude is unnecessarily limiting.

Our vision today is to ensure that world-art avoids becoming a backdrop to our own geographical periphery. We need to be open-minded in our approach, investigative in our method and critical to our own provincialism within the global context. These are the crucial perspectives and issues we communicate to the public which, in a broader sense, can perhaps widen and strengthen our perception of self.

## **An opportunity to meet**

*By Maia Urstad, artist and curator, Maur Projects*

In the autumn of 2008 I was invited to participate in the exhibition "Disturbance - Contemporary Art from Scandinavia and South Africa" at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. This was clearly an opportunity to establish an art exchange between Norway and South Africa. At the same time, BEK and Stiftelsen 3,14 were working on the possibility of exhibiting contemporary, South African artists in Bergen.

My journey to South Africa was the starting point of the collaboration between BEK, Maur Projects and Stiftelsen 3,14. My stay in Johannesburg was long enough to travel and establish contacts towards a future collaboration. The curator group wanted to investigate movements in the new media field and invite artists to interact with the art scene in Bergen. It was important that the artists could participate in dialogue over time. The artists were provided with an opportunity to develop work in Bergen / Norway / the Northern Hemisphere. Participation would be based on what the artists found of interest in the area, with their individual background, experience and references

as a basis. Our desire was to achieve something both the artists and their northern counterparts could learn from while getting to know each other. A meeting with, amongst others, Marcus Neustetter and James Webb in Johannesburg convinced me that collaboration was possible. Neustetter and Webb, together with Stephen Hobbs, were invited to Bergen on a research trip and to give an artists' presentation in the spring of 2009. On the basis of this meeting with the curator group, Bergen and the local artist community, we laid the foundation for further development of the project and a future exhibition.

While in South Africa it became clear to me that video is a strong artistic medium in contemporary, South African art. To cover this specific field, the curator group agreed to establish video screening as an integral part of the project. To reach a wider public we decided to collaborate with a former English partner, ISIS Arts in England. Together we selected a variety of video work for exhibition in Bergen and Newcastle, with the open possibility of other venues.

## **The international and the local**

*By Lars Ove Toft, director of BEK*

BEK staff member, Trond Lossius, was resident in Namibia in the late 90s. This sparked an interest in the emerging new media-art scene in southern Africa. A blog by Nathaniel Stern, at that time teaching Digital Arts MA at the University of the Witwatersrand, proved a particularly valuable resource for exposing the exciting development of contemporary art in South Africa. Research on globalization and contemporary art by former BEK-employee Mayra Henriquez, for her MA thesis in art history, served as another point of departure for a more systematic research of information and contacts.

The focus on local production was another key to this project; we wanted to find artists who would be interested in coming to Bergen to work. At the same time, we had a persistent goal of presenting an exhibition of electronic art that did

not appear as a separate niche or genre. Our aim was to emphasise overall artistic quality. Some of the works, not necessarily all of them, were to utilize new media. Since the project depended on accessible lodging and workspace for the visiting artists, we cooperated with the visiting artist program at USF in Bergen.

A short period of one week was available for a residency in 2009, with an additional longer period of two months in 2010. This gave Stephen Hobbs, Marcus Neustetter and James Webb the opportunity to develop works in Bergen in collaboration with BEK and the curatorial team. The artists had access to flats, studios and BEK facilities during their stay, and the opportunity to adapt to the particular premises of Stiftelsen 3,14.





HOBBS  
/ NEUSTETTER



# Depth Threats

Ancient, unwritten Norwegian laws protect free public access to sea and sky. These laws include such topographical features as “woods, fields, mountains, rivers, lakes and skerries, irrespective of who owns them”. To Johannesburg-based, city-bound cultural producers Hobbs and Neusetter, this protection of free public access seems a Utopian fantasy and challenged the duo to develop a project that both interrogated and, through experimentation, intervened in this notion of public rights and freedom to traverse land and sea.

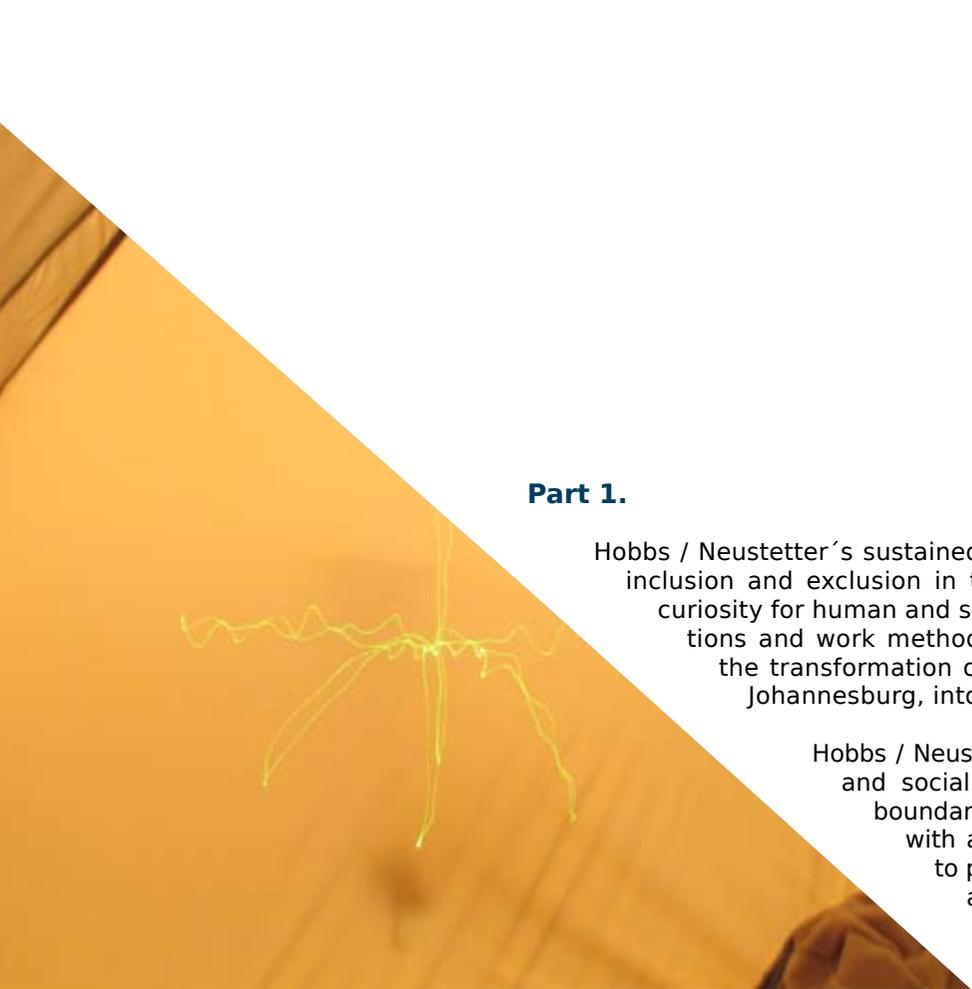
Hobbs and Neusetter’s approach was developed in two parts. The first part involved navigating and camping on a number of islands in the Austevoll region, southwest of Bergen, while the second part focused on the translation of this experience into the gallery space of Stiftelsen 3,14 in Bergen.





The immersive nature of the first part was at particular odds with the second part. This will be unpacked in more detail later, but it is necessary to mention that Hobbs / Neustetter were perhaps not quite prepared for the additional surprises that the process of critically reading this “right to access” would hold. Mapping the seas, locating camp sites, preparing meals and general play were all crucial parts of the critical engagement process. These activities also turned out to offer an element of seduction in its own right.





## Part 1.

Hobbs / Neustetter's sustained preoccupation with personal encounters of inclusion and exclusion in their city, Johannesburg, has whetted their curiosity for human and spatial connections evident in their collaborations and work methodology. The preoccupation is heightened by the transformation of Hillbrow, the artists' original birthplace in Johannesburg, into a sub-Saharan immigrant ghetto.

Hobbs / Neustetter invest heavily in immersive, interactive and social mapping processes, employed to test the boundaries of unfamiliar or transformed territories with a view to making connections. The invitation to participate in a group exhibition in Bergen had again highlighted these very concerns.

Compared to the artists' more common experience on the continent of Africa, and South Africa in particular, Norway in general, and Bergen in particular, represents a completely antithe-

tical social and political framework. Hence their strategy to naively 'self-orientate' within a group of islands with the assumption that boating, docking, sitting, camping, walking, tracking and having encounters in 'public space', would bring about a more refined understanding of the 'ancient, unwritten rights in Norway and of the duo's related spatial practices in South Africa. Hobbs / Neustetter's six-day exploration of the islands of Austevoll started out as a process initially shrouded by the pursuit of basic necessities, such as having to navigate visible and submerged land-masses in relation to maps and tidal movements. This initial process was further shaped by their search for suitable campsites, the constant monitoring of petrol levels and having to assess their proximity to petrol stations and food supplies. The gradual mastering of these functions and learning to manage basic necessities, created a new space for a kind of intoxicating play, in a unique experience of water and land.



On their second day of camping, as they were docking at Bekkjarvik, a mild-mannered Norwegian called Lars confronted them. Dressed in yellow oilskins and sipping freshly made coffee aboard an expensive-looking yacht, he wanted to know what they were up to. On hearing their explanation, he retorted:

“So we are witnessing your performance?”

This comment forced the artists to consider their actions more critically, which up until that point had taken place in relative isolation.

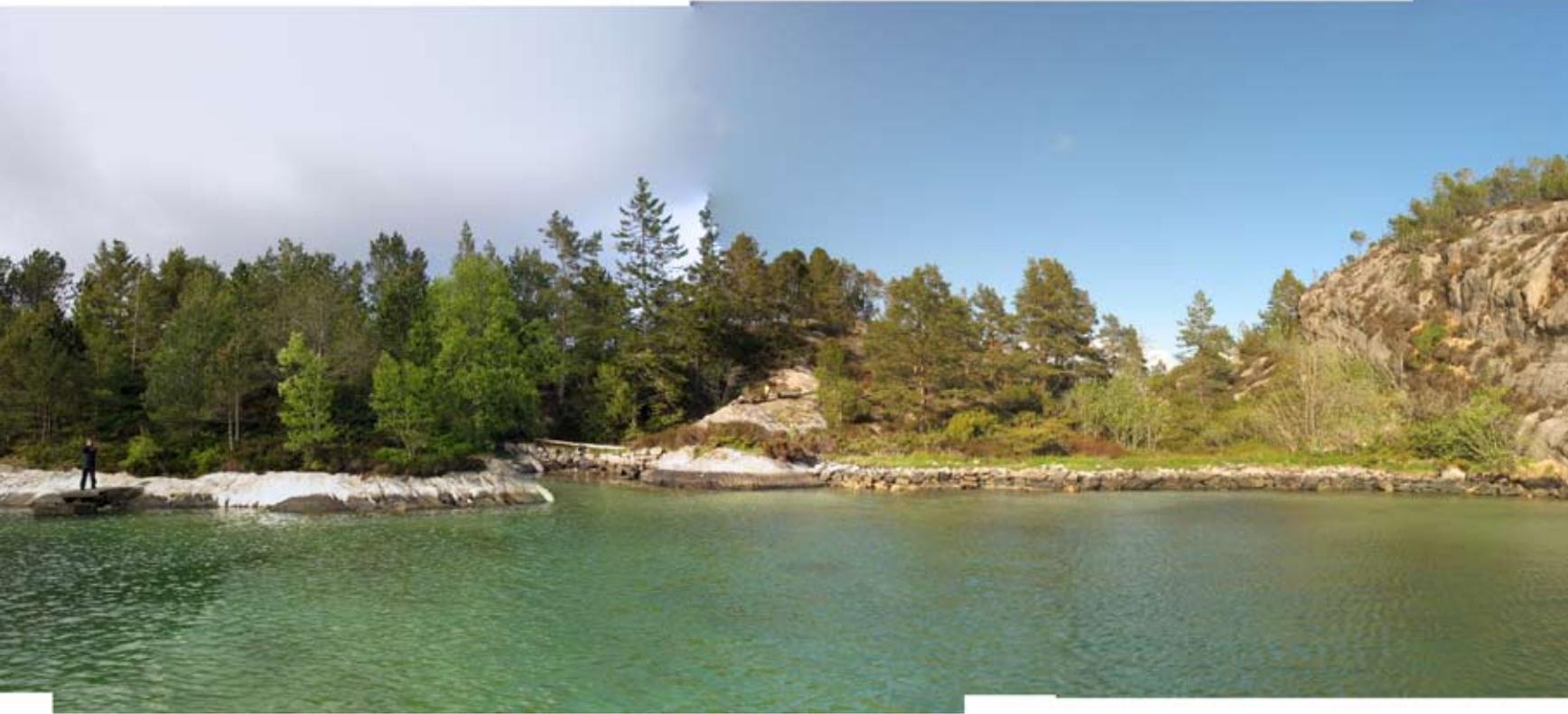
The artists’ experience with Lars was further informed by a second significant encounter the following morning. They woke up to the complaints of a group of strident islanders on their regular walk. The islanders were quite irritated by the fact that the artists had set up camp in the middle of a narrow footpath. With the closest inhabitants hundreds of metres away, and having pitched their tent in what was actually a designated camp-site, the artists were left feeling not only baffled and confused, but also highly amused and intrigued by the incident.

Reflecting on these encounters led to a more acute self-consciousness, which in turn allowed issues of ownership, territory and surveillance to surface more clearly in their critical reading of the space. It became clear that so-called free access, in contemporary terms, in fact requires a very particular kind of awareness that is crucial to the successful navigation of visible as well as invisible boundaries, where common sense is at times at odds with the culture of the place.

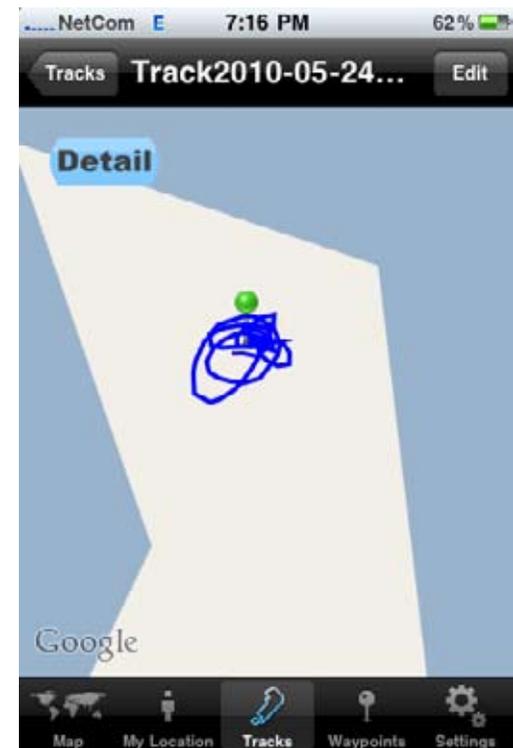
To this end, the artists’ increasing awareness of their bodies in and on water and on land prompted a number of orientated way-finding experiments:

- Walks on the islands to track private property boundaries
- Google Maps live-tracking drawings on an iPhone, conducted on land and water
- Long-exposure tent drawings
- Boat-mapping collages





These experiments were motivated and informed as much by play as by Hobbs / Neustetter's attempts to orientate themselves in vast open spaces. The experiments served as an archive of actions from which Hobbs / Neustetter could compare and relate to other ephemeral, performative drawing and mapping techniques from previous projects, as well as a record from which a potentially more formal exhibition 'product' was to be created in Part 2.

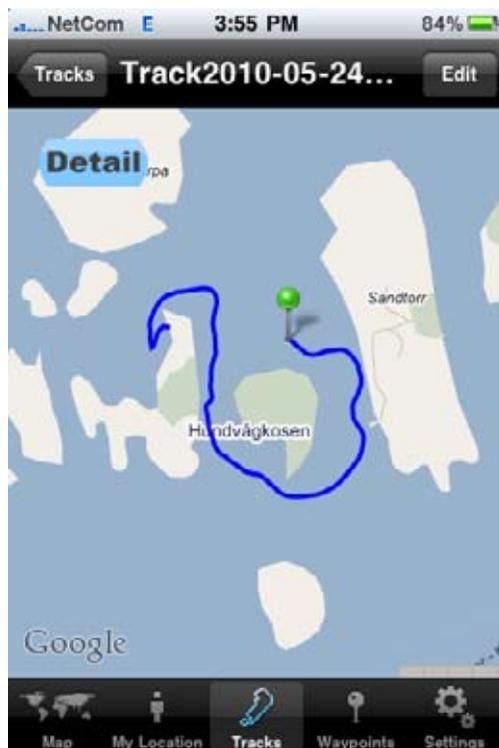




## Part 2

Spending six days away from Bergen in a setting far removed from anything familiar had led Hobbs and Neustetter to experience a strange degree of disorientation. Upon returning to Bergen they opted for a 24-hour 'decompression period' to help them regain their sense of orientation. By setting up a tent in their studio, from where they were able to look out over the harbour, they managed to contain themselves and their recent experiences for long enough to start processing a way forward.

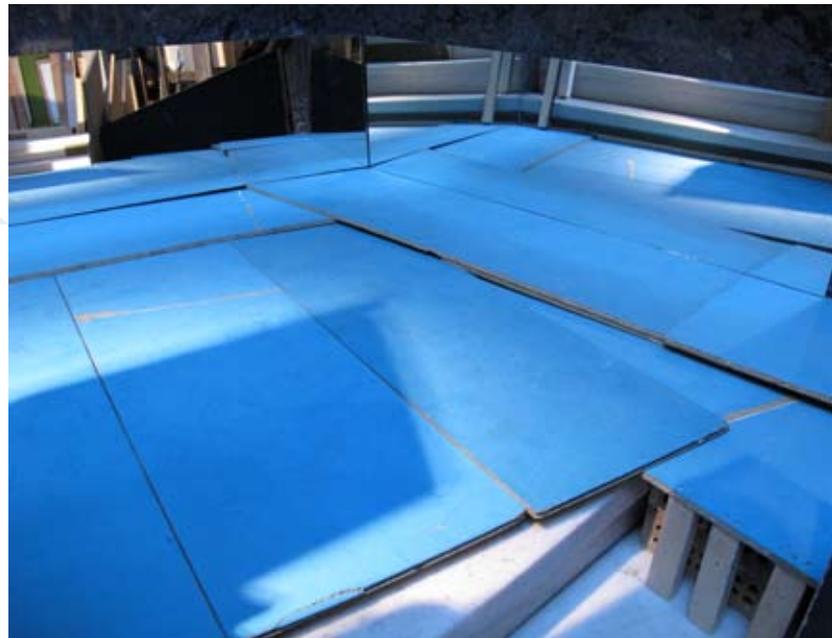
Their return required a sifting, distilling and packaging of ideas and interactions, which in effect remained rooted in memory as well as in Austevoll. While anticipating how an audience might interpret such a site-specific engagement with 'place', and particularly within the framework of the Baroque-period 'bank' architecture of the gallery, Hobbs / Neustetter were faced with the challenge of translation, where experience was given form for the benefit of an audience.





Following an intensive feedback session with curators, guests and friends, the artists decided on simulating a number of cognitive equivalents of the mapping experience in Austevoll.

The artists re-orientated viewer access to the gallery by creating a makeshift obstacle course. A 'pretend' landscape was assembled up the stairway to the gallery door, using a combination of selective lighting, inserted mirrors and multiple layering to distort viewer perception of depth, contour and distance. The disorientated viewer had to weigh up a number of options and strategies in order to make it to the top.





As is the case with many such projects, where the outcome is informed by an experiential component, there is a tension between documentation as the stand-in for the experience and the experience itself. Hobbs / Neustetter believe that a decision to foreground documentation in an installation lies somewhere between sentimentality and meaninglessness, insofar as the experience was more or less confined to their collaboration on all aspects of the 'voyage'.

In this sense the installation in the gallery, accompanied by a short text, forced viewers to project, imagine and contemplate the experience while rooted within the context of their primary experience of the gallery space itself.



## The freedom to lose oneself - Navigating and negotiating in Dakar

*A conversation between Sissel Lillebostad and Stephen Hobbs.*

**Stephen Hobbs and Marcus Neustetter use art-projects to address social change in urban spaces. Based in Johannesburg, Hobbs and Neustetter established the art-project group «The Trinity Sessions» in 2001 and have since developed a digital and social network, structured interdisciplinary art-projects in South Africa and cultivated strategies for exchange between art and business. They have collaborated with and completed commission work for UNESCO, IBM, Apartheid Museum and Greenpeace, and larger areas of Johannesburg; Soweto, Sandton and Hillbrow, have all been arenas for their public art-projects. In these projects they gladly include school children, researchers, illegal immigrants, business people, city developers, artists, global organizations and local neighbourhoods.**

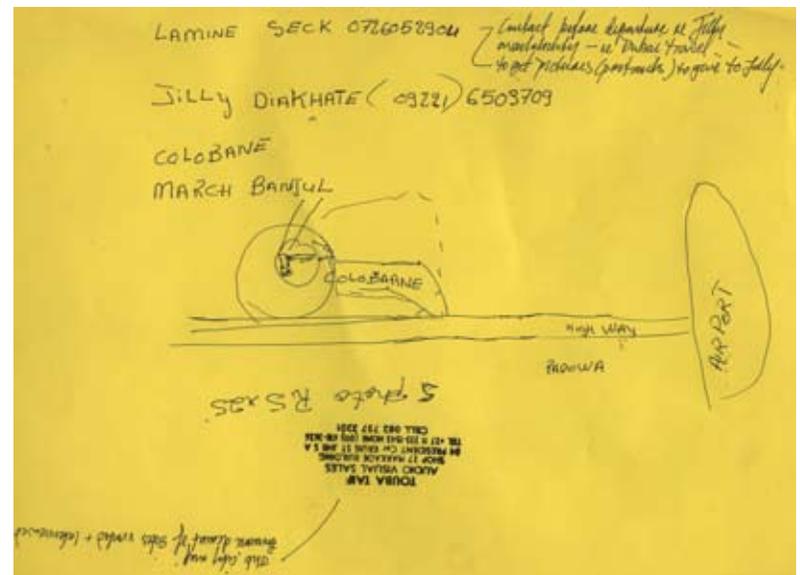
- *Sissel Lillebostad: One of your projects, «UrbaNET - Hillbrow/Dakar/Hillbrow» - is based on a combination of drawings and information you obtained from Senegalese immigrants living in Johannesburg. The walks you carried out in Dakar afterwards follow the same drawings, this time used as a map. The project highlights the inherent condition of being an immigrant or emigrant; how the familiar and personal image of home sticks in the mind while geography steadily changes. It also touches on important themes like mapping of territories and the defining power of space. What was the background of this project?*

Stephen Hobbs: This project was conceived for the Dakar biennial of 2006, but the circumstances that lead to its conception happened three years prior. We were nearby the Constitutional Court on the outskirts of Hillbrow, a district in Johannesburg, busy documenting a site for a future public artwork programme. Two immigrants confronted us; in French they warned us not to enter Hillbrow with our cameras. We were amused by this warning and thanked them for their advice. It dawned on us later that they - who were also foreigners - had thought we were tourists. It was this reflection that made us engage a group of Senegalese in Hillbrow

to explain to us how to get around in Dakar. Indeed notions of foreignness, citizenship, and neighbourliness are critical definitions to unpack, and in some instances dismiss, in our current cultural and political climate in South Africa.

It is precisely the perceptions of foreignness subsuming Hillbrow that make it seemingly hostile and undesirable to the average South African. And despite its infamous decay and crime, Hillbrow still remains a place of fond memories as both our and our parent's generation at a point thrived there.

The original idea was that based on the activity of the project in Dakar, we could map Johannesburg and vice versa.



*"From the airport, there is one main highway that will lead you into the city. Next to the highway you will see a large car spares market, called Colobaane. I will give you a number for a friend of mine - he will show you around..."*  
Lamine Seck, interview conducted in Touba Taïf - Audio Vision, President Street, Johannesburg, April 2006

We wanted to create subjective readings of the two cities' geography using social strategies, for example conversations with people we met during our navigations of the two cities. As a result our navigations function as «deep-diving» in the urban form of both the cities. Now - after the project in Dakar is concluded - we know that it can't be done the same way in Johannesburg.

- How did you experience being at the mercy of the information provided by the maps?

Since «UrbaNET - Hillbrow/Dakar/Hillbrow» examines the digital boundaries on the African continent, the creative process of making useful maps of unknown territory through interview became a rather ironic deconstruction of the GPS system. On the other hand, the interview process and the maps worked as bridge-builders in communication - as pathfinders both for those we interviewed and us. When we arrived in Dakar, we searched for a high-rise building to get orientated to the city, because the maps that were drawn for us were extremely generalised and made very little reference to common co-ordinates or landmarks. The maps were generally constructed horizontally, with references to well known motorways, roundabouts and markets; characteristics that were less recognizable before we accidentally met them on our walking tours.

- This process of making maps seems to unite a variety of different levels of information. Empiric material normally translates to legible information, however in this case it became a personal experience; both from the draughtsman's hand and in your reading of the same information. In the connection between Johannesburg and Dakar you functioned as some kind of translator, but how did you send or communicate the emotional information to and fro between those involved?

To make the maps more effective, more specific, we asked the interviewees to make maps that would lead us to friends and family. Some also tried to pinpoint people they'd lost contact with many years before. Ali, our Gambian contact in Hillbrow, drew a map of Goree Island in Senegal where his friend Richard worked as a gardener. The map Ali drew was so precise we located Richard and exchanged Ali's details with him. Some months after our return we arranged a presentation of our findings in Dakar at a Congolese nightclub in Hillbrow. The video and photographic material we presented in many instances struck an emotional chord for the audience. At the time we had not anticipated the extent to which this event and some of the material presented would elicit such identification with home.

- When you navigated by the individually drawn maps, your interpretation also became part of the mapping? How does

this experience reflect in the reproduction, or recreation of Dakar?

In the development of the maps' function as a link to families and networks in Dakar, they also became catalysts in the documentation of the city. Walking Dakar, which became our dominant practice while there, served not only as an immersive physical mapping process but also as a useful means to see and document our experiences of the city. However, we must remember that the original drawings were based on specific questions asked during a series of very short meetings. In the beginning it wasn't easy to establish any form of affiliation to our interviewees. To them we were foreign.

The first reaction during the presentation at the nightclub was surprise that we'd in fact traveled to Dakar and completed the project. The audience didn't immediately catch the

connection between the maps drawn and the documentation presented. The connection grew clearer as we grew more specific, as in the case of Richard the gardener. First they were shown a picture of the map Ali had given us of where Richard might be living, and then a photograph of Richard - to Ali's great delight. I believe it was at this point that an emotional connection with the maps arose.

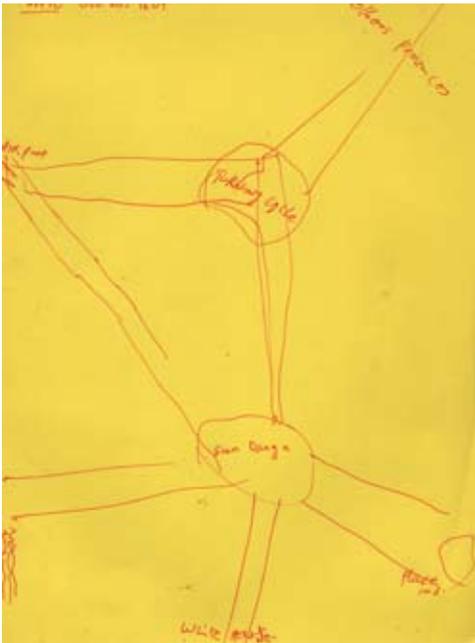


"You get to the turning circle from the airport and take the big road straight - you will get to another main turning circle. Pass a taxi station from which you can take a taxi to different parts of Senegal and arrive at San Diaga. From there the roads can take you to different destinations. Turn left to get to the main square, Place de l'indépendance, straight to the presidents building - lets call it the White House - or the next road to the beach, past the rich houses. If you turn right at the circle you can visit the place where I learnt how to sew - I was a tailor before I traded in this market. Past the Medina post office, left and then right you will see the place where I was taught. It was a long time ago that I was there. If you are not sure where to go, just ask anyone and they will tell you."

Mbaye, interview conducted at Rosebank Craft Market, Johannesburg, April 2006

Their drawings also influenced our own drawings based on the first trip. For the exhibition in «Ker Thioissane Residency Space» in Dakar 2006, we made a memory map of the first 40 kilometers of our trip, where we retraced our own coordinates, for instance a mosque or a skeleton of a bus used as a waiting room. We drew directly onto the wall in a similar style, rudimentary and with bits of info like telephone numbers etc. However our maps also describe the navigation as a desire to *lose one's way*, a desire that later became quite conscious. We wanted to meet people incidentally and somehow connect with them. The walk became an immersion and an exploration, not a search to get close to a source.

*- This level of trust is intriguing, as initially the Senegalese were sceptic to the project. Do you think this also concerns reciprocity - where they on their side requested trust by providing you with very personal information for navigation? Then, in Dakar, when you used this knowledge to lose your way and gain deeper understanding of the city, you reciprocated trust. What does trust mean to the completion of your project?*



Mbaye, interview conducted at Rosebank Craft Market, Johannesburg, April 2006

To the average immigrant in Johannesburg, the portal is Hillbrow, and the gatekeepers are either evangelists or the drug lords. To move around in the area as if you had a social network is totally impossible. When you arrive as an outsider, people watch you, not necessarily with aggression, however you have the feeling that you're in the wrong place. We've produced a series of art projects in Hillbrow, and when in the area we wear some kind of imaginary, bulletproof vest. Now and then we meet people

who remember us from earlier projects and they welcome us. This creates connections that make it possible for us to move around in the area. Trust makes the area more accessible. However this concerns individuals, not Hillbrow as a social structure. Therefore the maps drawn for us by the informants became the strategy to create new social networks in a district that's totally different from the one we once knew as Hillbrow.

Another interesting Hillbrow phenomenon is that the various immigrant environments refer to themselves as «a black nation». Yet, when the xenophobic attacks started in South Africa, it was black immigrants being attacked by black South Africans, rebelling against the immigrants working for less pay. They considered any acceptance of lower pay dishonourable after contributing to the liberation of South Africa. In the meantime, global competition is ruthless and our local politicians do nothing to change the conditions. It is a very complex situation, with equal amounts of distrust in all directions. Yes, so the issue of trust is essential.

*- This project consists of a series of fused layers, however one layer seems to be missing: It seems to lack an empirically based short-cut to information?*

We wanted to create a method for tracking. Ours was a conscious decision not to take the shortest route to information, rather we would take the longest route if necessary in a way it's a metaphor for life.

If we'd done this with an ordinary map, the project would've been over in a couple of hours. As it is, we took detours, lost our way and discovered things we never thought possible. This makes it all rather romantic but ultimately alive. It's very fulfilling to be lost in an urban landscape, meditate and become physically tired. It was a refreshing experience of another African city, totally different from Johannesburg.

*- You could have chosen a variety of methods to discover Dakar. You could, for example, have chosen to use a map from, say, 1896. Or you could have dropped the whole idea of a map and let coincidence guide you round the city?*

But you do have to have a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Otherwise the pure drifting would have produced an uninteresting outcome.

- So the stories and sketches from the Senegalese in Hillbrow became your restriction?

Absolutely. It was a conscious decision. In Beckett's play *Endgame* the characters spend their time looking for the centre of the room. The mathematical equivalent of this is "tending towards zero". The closer you get to zero, the more fractions you have. Zero is unattainable; there is no centre. We used the sketches to search - as in the case of Richard the gardener on Goree Island, or the tailor we never found - was our "tending towards zero".

- You don't want to repeat the project "UrbaNET - Hillbrow/Dakar/Hillbrow". Why not?

The reason we can't make a new Dakar-project is very simple: The beauty of the project was the accidental meeting in Hillbrow with the immigrants who thought we were tourists. What sparked the project was looking back on the incident as an interesting way of thinking about foreignness through the structural form of the city. The project became a conscious exercise in surrendering oneself to an *unknown*. Not the *unknown* of mythological creatures outside of the world as we know it, but the surrender to feelings of insecurity, parallel to the feeling of freedom, to the uncertainty of the journey ahead. Then there's the philosophical perspective; of navigating the world and getting to know people.

Migration for many isn't simply a challenging voyage to faraway places, it is something motivated by yearning for future happiness combined with total uncertainty.

- Johannesburg seems like an economic engine with high turnover. However, the city's recent history reflects western culture's ruthlessness, which, after apartheid, is found in the increasingly globalised economy and rapid change; whole districts are transformed with inhabitants, economy and structure. Why couldn't you discover Johannesburg like you discovered Dakar, by abandoning yourselves to the social space and losing yourselves in it?

Such a project in Johannesburg would have a high risk factor. The chances of finding a guide in a city like Johannesburg are slim - I'm not saying it's impossible, one might be lucky and find the way in and out quite quickly. However, letting go and abandoning oneself to be lost - I wouldn't do

that. We're afraid and it is this fear that prevents us from creating unity in South African society.

Just like "the townships" and various social groups, Johannesburg is restricted by too many myths. There is a lack of humanity; too little empathy and care for each other. We fail to ask essential questions about each other. There is curiosity but also paralysis. We are unable to enjoy curiosity because of the myriad stories about the consequences of curiosity. We'll be attacked. We'll be raped. Our society is far from healthy - the patterns of segregation still exist, and that creates a lot of work for artists. If artists want to preserve originality and creativity, they have to preserve their curiosity. Curiosity can be developed through approaching questions on an intuitive level, something we need to increase, as a cultural condition and phenomenon in South Africa.

An interesting alternative to the Dakar-project could be a journey through South Africa, finding stories about Johannesburg and mythology created about the *southern gateway to hope*.

(First published in *Kunstjournalen*, B-Post 2009)



"With some African airlines you make three stops: one in Douala, one in Abidjan, one in Bamako - and then you land in Dakar. But with SAA you can get there direct in about eight hours."

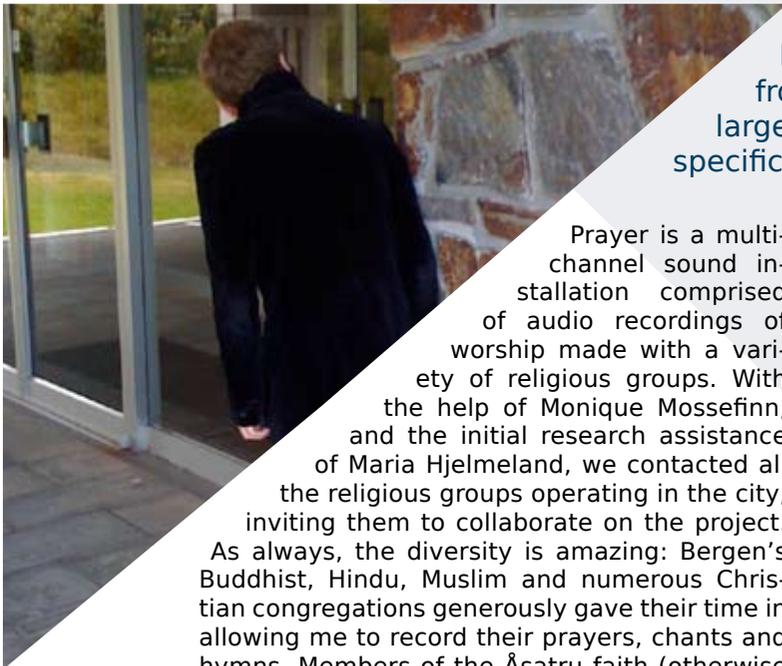
Ali, interview conducted at Rosebank Craft Market, Johannesburg, April 2006



A photograph of a room with blue carpeting. Several black, oval-shaped speakers are placed on the floor. One speaker is in the foreground, and others are scattered in the background. The room has light-colored walls and a door with a window in the background.

JAMES WEBB

# Prayer



For the exhibition, “Contemporary Artists from South Africa,” I chose to rework my large artwork, “Prayer,” by creating a version specific to Bergen.

Prayer is a multi-channel sound installation comprised of audio recordings of worship made with a variety of religious groups. With the help of Monique Mossefinn, and the initial research assistance of Maria Hjelmeland, we contacted all the religious groups operating in the city, inviting them to collaborate on the project. As always, the diversity is amazing: Bergen’s Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and numerous Christian congregations generously gave their time in allowing me to record their prayers, chants and hymns. Members of the Åsatru faith (otherwise known as Scandinavian Paganism) also contributed to the project, as did the strong Baha’i and Eckankar communities.

Prayer casts a wide net, as faiths dating back to the earliest settlers as well as recent immigrants are documented. Recordings were made in Norwegian, as well as in Arabic, English, French, German, Igbo (Nigerian), Hindi, Persian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Turkish, Vietnamese and Ugandan.

The prayers were left unedited and broadcast simultaneously from 12 floor-based speakers in the gallery.

The resulting installation allows the audience to listen to the collected prayers as one - in the style of an orchestra of many voices - or alternatively spend time with each individual speaker transmitting just one of the prayers. Due to the multitude of languages used, the experience of

the work is at any time both informative (information accessed in a language familiar to the listener) and aesthetic (sound in the form of a language not understood by the listener). The recordings, amounting to several hours of footage, were set on an asynchronous loop, allowing many different combinations of voice and melody to occur.

As it opens both anthropological and sociological opportunities, the process of gathering the vast amount of material is a very important aspect of this project. Religious groups need to be approached and befriended, the project needs to be explained in a rational way, and negotiations need to be set up in order for the recordings to take place. The recording sessions are never ordinary; each group has its own nuances, stories and questions to be answered. This element of the work is a fascinating and enriching one. I am grateful for the assistance and company of fellow artists Ricardo del Pozo and Svein Kirkhorn, who joined me on many of the recording sessions. We met remarkable people and learnt a great deal about the many communities and individuals that make up contemporary Bergen.

In bringing all the faiths together in the gallery, the audience is accessing a political space. They are confronted by statements of belief, as well as the diversity of community, culture and philosophy present in the city. The audience is in a position to listen and consider other people’s points of view, and draw their own maps and connections through the geography that the recordings create.











## The Walks

“The Walks” were the result of an invitation to do a workshop in Bergen. With my residency drawing to a close and having already created a city-specific installation along with 2 artist talks, the idea of a workshop seemed slightly overkill. Importantly, I was aware of Bergen’s existing and very formidable, tradition of media and electronic art, and that my own techniques might appear positively rudimentary in comparison.

With the summer sun in mind, I elected to invite people for walks around the city and the neighbouring environs. I made my local phone number available with an open invitation to join me for a wander. The routes were seldom planned and the events lasted between one to three hours.

In total, there were 15 walks. A variety of people joined me to meander the streets of the city, hike the mountain and explore the parks. On the one occasion that it did rain we perambulated around the museums. Walking became the basis for meeting and conversation. The route would lead to discussions about the history and present use of the area, inviting topics as varied as immigration, personal history, local graffiti and inevitably the World Cup occurring at that time in my home country of South Africa.

The opportunity to meet people and share a walk through their city privileged me with new insights into the space I was visiting. It was a form of field research, as well as an open laboratory where I could discuss my ideas and impressions. The sessions, with the added bonus of oxygenating the brain through moving the feet, became small, therapeutic events for both the guest and myself. Together we participated in private time in public space.

As I got to know the city more I managed to act as a kind of tour guide, instilling my outsider opinions into the explanations of the encountered spaces and incidental routes. I collected stories and observations and passed them on to others. I started to chart my own ways through the city. Notable findings included the Heksesteinen, a recent memorial to 350 people executed as witches in the period 1550 - 1700. Erected as a national monument in 2002 and situated next to the aquarium, the memorial stands solitary on a small mound of grass and the striking stone stele is a reminder of a very different time in our world’s history.





Another interesting discovery was the unicorn at Bryggen. The sculpture springs from the façade of one of the old houses. The beast has a calm, almost dopey, expression on its face. What is not immediately apparent is that apart from its mythical horn, it is possessed with a rather large, biologically sound, ejaculating phallus. This appendage to the sculpture came as quite a shock to the local people when I pointed it out on the walks. Its seeming invisibility suggested a hidden history.

One final discovery worth mentioning was pointed out to me by Anne Szefer Karlsen. A shop sign in Nygårdsgaten advertising "PELS," with each letter emblazoned on a cube, was otherwise nondescript until one carefully read all the sides of the blocks. The first 3 facing the street clearly say "PELS", whereas the final side facing the wall declares, rather confusingly, "PLES."

These incongruities and breaks in the veneer of the city were of great interest to me as they opened my involvement to the unknown. This commitment to being available and submissive, allowing chance to pervert the norm, is a significant part of the creative process, and if it allows you to befriend strangers and explore new terrains then it is of critical importance.

Both projects detailed here propose ways of creating networks and engaging with the city and its communities, allowing for experimental possibilities to be imagined and unexpected happenings to occur.





screenings

co-curated by ISIS Arts

## **Bridget Baker - Steglitz House (2009-2010)**

*Sound design by Braam du Toit. 9 min.*

Steglitz House was filmed in a miniature construction of a 1930's West Berlin suburban home. Considering the imminent collapse of domestic sanctuary in pre-WWII Germany, Baker creates an ambiguous narrative by overlaying autobiographical mythologies in the space. This reflects a threat to the calm in Baker's family home in South Africa when her father died in 1977.



**Berni Searle - Gateway (2010)**

*4 min.*

This is the second of a trilogy of videos which forms part of the 'Black smoke rising' series. This series was conceived at a time of a growing and pervasive 'air of discontent' in South Africa, which has recently been beset by union protests and mass demonstrations against poor service delivery and the lack of the provision of housing. Frustrations and levels of desperation continue to grow, creating simmering tensions that have the potential to erupt.



## **Bongani Khoza - In Transit (2007)**

*Video Interview 12:14 min. / Video "In The Train" 11:43 min.*

"In Transit" compares human interaction and dialogue between one's personal or private space with the individual decision to transgress these imaginary boundaries. Metro-rail coaches no. 6 and 7 are the common meeting places for a particular type of religious congregation. Mafakude is a single mother who despite the hardship of being a domestic worker turns her situation around, focuses on the positive, and spreads the gospel by preaching to others on her journey to and from work everyday. Khoza was allowed to film her sermons as well as interview her at home.



**Nadine Hutton - Ignore Me (2009)**

2:29 min.

How often have you deliberately locked your eyes forward to avoid the person trying to catch your eye at a traffic light? This is their story.



## **Eduardo Cachucho - Water (2008)**

*1:53 min.*

A man dreams of drowning in 'himself'. His own bodily fluids have overtaken his body. Like a nightmare he tries to wake up but has no way of doing so. He must succumb to the fate his body has placed him in. As water gushes out of every orifice, he thrashes about trying to dislodge himself from his reality.



## Hasan & Husain Essop - Visiting the Revolution

(2010)

3:10 min.

Through this work the artists explore with the role of the individual in society, in particular the space that Muslim youth negotiate in a secular environment.

In Islam, the rendering of the human form is considered haraam or forbidden, and the artists are careful about limiting this representation to their own bodies and assuming responsibility for it. They are not interested in making objective statements. The questions they ask are personal and intimate, and they perform these questions, and the search for answers, with their own bodies.

The work occupies a space fraught with tensions, between documentation and narrative, between the spontaneous and the staged and between overt expression and what is left unsaid.



## Jessica Gregory & Zen Marie - The Perfect Leader (2009)

4:31 min.

The Perfect Leader is a short film that questions political leadership. Specifically, the film addresses the controversial dynamics of the leader as a person, a human being with dreams and desires but also a human with faults.

In part, the film pays homage to Jorgen Leth's *The Perfect Human* (1967), which is a surreal and (subtly) cynical look at the idea of a perfect human. The film updates Jorgen Leth's original and uses it as a vehicle to pose questions about the cult of the individual that is dominant in contemporary leadership practices. Taking both formal and conceptual cues from this iconic film, *The Perfect Leader* addresses leadership as an ambiguous and problematic space.

*The Perfect Leader* dissects the physical body of the leader (played by Darius Rasekhula) as it asks the audience to reconsider what leadership means. Besides being relevant to a contemporary critique of political governance, the film is a meditation on leadership as space that is paradoxically both private and public.



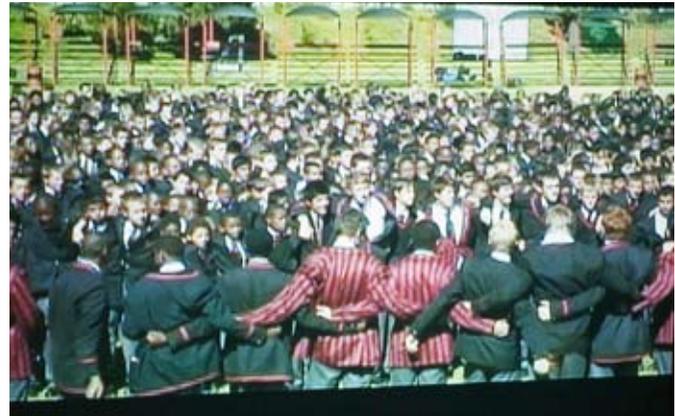
## **Robyn Nesbitt & Nina Barnett - Warcry (2008)**

*Dual screen video projection*

*2 videos 0.40 min.*

A school war-cry is a South African high school tradition, a chant that expresses the energy and strength held in the organism of the school. The pulsing sound of hundreds of school children shouting in unison is exhilarating for both the performing students and those witnessing it. In this dual screen video installation, two schools perform their war-cry at each other – the combined roar is fearsome and thrilling. The polarities of the school groups are clear in their gender, uniform colour and performance style. The boys perform in a fierce, combative manner while the girls are more playful and joyous in their expression. This installation evokes the exceptional qualities of large group action. It is vigorous, dynamic and ultimately celebratory. It brings to light the peculiar, singular, war-cry tradition that permeates the South African school system.

With thanks to Parktown Girls and Parktown Boys.

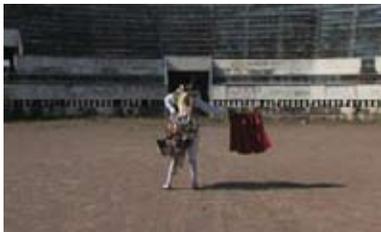


## Nandipha Mntambo - Ukungenisa (2008)

2:30 min.

Fascinated by the ritualised action, public spectacle and charged emotion of the bullfight, Mntambo describes the project as ‘the practice of my future”, a tentative ‘feeling out’ of the territory. The video, *Ukungenisa* (indicating the mental and physical preparation for a fight, and the opening of a path to allow something to happen), captures the artist literally rehearsing the steps of a bullfighter whom she filmed in Lisbon, juxtaposed with footage of the fight and the crowd of spectators.

This attempt to take on the persona of the bullfighter represents a shift for Mntambo, whose previous work effectively invited the viewer to take her place, to step into the outline of her body as defined by the moulded cowhide. In the course of the project Mntambo envisages being trained as a bullfighter and staging her own fight in the abandoned Praça de Touros in Maputo, the arena where black Mozambicans once fought for the entertainment of the colonial Portuguese. To this end she has made herself a bullfighter’s jacket from her signature cowhide, a means to ‘interpret and take ownership of the tradition’. The cows’ ears that form the rear of the jacket introduce the idea of an imaginary crowd bearing witness to her performance.





# CAMERON PLATTER



## **Cameron Platter**

Born 1978 in Johannesburg, lives and works in Shaka's Rock, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Studied at Michaelis School of Fine Art, Cape Town (BAFA).

His work is an intoxicating vision of Good vs. Evil, documenting contemporary morality through the telling of simple stories drawn and appropriated from the media, TV, films, art, history, pornography, battle scenes, politics, music and religion.

Platter works with the time-consuming medium of drawing, video animation, and hand carved sculpture to create comedy-noir interactive installations filled with sex, irony, cynicism and approaching love.

He has been called, amongst other things, "the delinquent love child of Quentin Tarantino and Dr Seuss", "the undisputed king of Afro-bling" and "an agent provocateur with a sinister agenda".

Recent projects include: I Am Lonlyness, Hilger Contemporary, Vienna, The Old Fashion, Volta NY, New York, Black Up That White Ass II, Youngblackman, Cape Town; Dak'Art, Biennale de Dakar, 1910-2010: Pierneef to Gugulective, South African National Gallery, Rio Loco Festival, Toulouse, France; Clair Obscur Film Festival, Basel Switzerland and Art 39 Basel, Switzerland.

In 2010 he has be exhibiting in Vienna, New York and Cape Town. Platter was recently awarded a residency at the Foutainhead program in Miami for 2012.

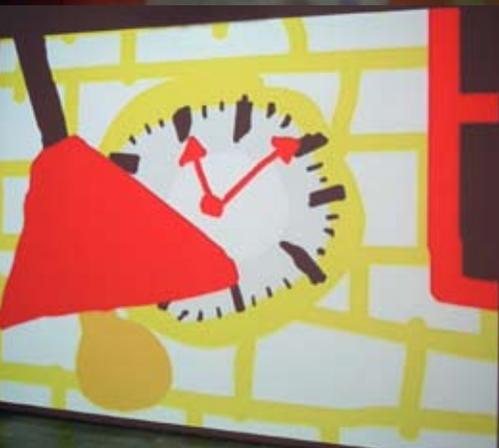


## Beware the Curves (2006)

*Video animation. Duration 1 hour 35 sec, colour, sound.*

"Beware the Curves", an hour long animated film, is a tale of good and bad in South Africa. Loud, darkly humorous, graphic and confrontational, the stop-animation lurches and flashes, pulling out numerous simple conventions to depict action, movement and narrative. Using a film-noir voice and a severely disjointed dialogue, "Beware the Curves" relates the trials and tribulations of an odd assortment of protagonists. The video is absurd, tragic and convoluted.



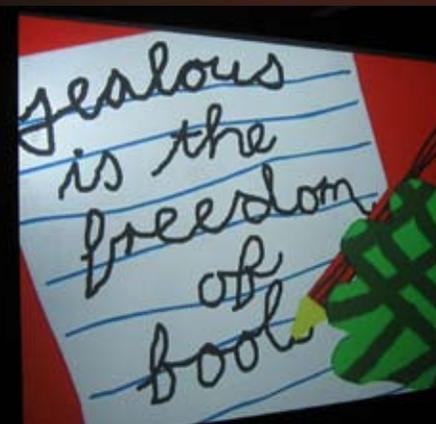
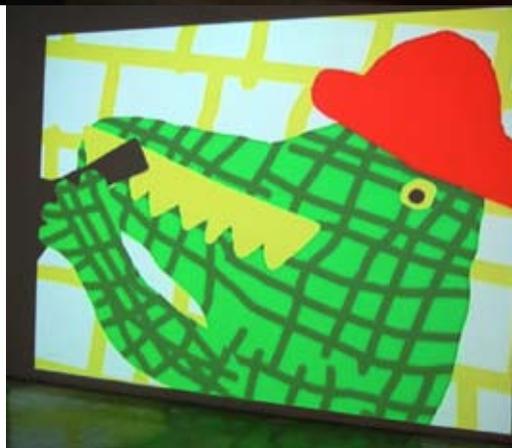


### 3 Stories (2008)

*Video animation. Duration variable, colour, sound.*

"3 Stories" is made up of three different, cyclical, and interlinking, stories, all of varying lengths. Each story was designed for cinema-size projection onto separate walls and high volume.

"3 Stories" contains a martini-slugging, sports-car-crashing crocodile, journeys to and from the underworld, a stripper rising from the grave, a cursed lion who can't decide whether he's good or bad and loves to pleasure himself, God as a deceased American Rap star with a designer-shoe-fetish, Zebras from Outer Space, cities throbbing with sleazy strip joints, all-night bars and possible redemption, a man who turns into an elephant who makes love to a leopard, golden briefcases, a spaceship that may or may not save the world, a boat that provides an escape route from a sinking planet and Hell as a very nice place.





## Black Up That White Ass II (2009)

*Video animation. Duration 26 min 55 sec, colour, sound.*

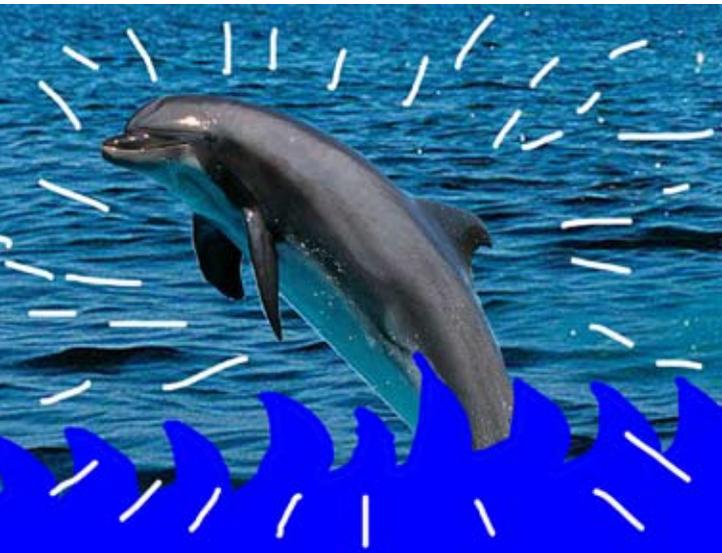
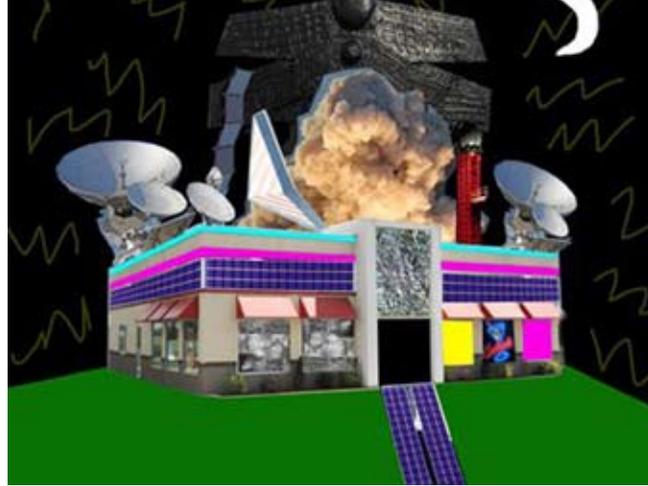
“Black Up That White Ass II”, a Good vs. Evil story of contemporary life in South Africa weaved through erotic pornography, historic battle stories, biblical parables and psychedelic dream sequences.

Influenced by the tradition of storytelling in the medium of woodcuts, Slasher gore, Z- grade gangster films, local politics, witchdoctors, kids cartoons, MTV, penis extension machines, arcadia, strip clubs, tabloid horror stories and the lure of casinos, this film speaks to us about the universal themes of sex, love, violence, beauty and things falling apart.

With the meticulous appropriation of John Mufangejo, Big Wet Asses III, the Battle of Rorkes Drift in KwaZuluNatal, the parable of the Good Shepherd, Shepherd and the Coen brothers’ Big Lebowski, Platter creates an ultra primitive, anti-aesthetic take on what it means to be alive today in South Africa.

Platter works with the time-consuming medium of animation, with each sequence labouriously laboriously, digitally handmade. The film has an especially composed soundtrack by Platter’s frequent collaborator Captain Asthma and includes shades of Death Metal, Rozalla Miller’s “Everybody’s Free”, Kenny Rogers, South African Maskanda, and New Age Afro Blues Psychedelica.





### **The Old Fashion** (2010)

*Video animation. Duration 15 min 23 sec, colour, sound.*

“The Old Fashion” is a reaction to the franchise, depoliticized nation South Africa is fast becoming. It is a work in darkly humorous nihilism. Using the Third Man, Prince Barrack Hussein’s sports water/ penis combo, dance montages, an underwater hide-out of a deranged Charles Taylor cat (obviously bent on world domination), a latexed-up lion and a fast food restaurant on Asstropolis; all vehicles of his satire. The soundtrack, directed by Platter, is the work of his good friend and frequent collaborator, Captain Asthma.







## Curators

**Stiftelsen 3,14** is a non-profit art foundation in Bergen, Norway. The gallery is almost exclusively working with international exhibitions and partnerships, with an emphasis on contemporary art beyond the very western centralized discourse.

Stiftelsen 3,14 is committed to knowledge-production, presentation and interpretation of the work of innovative artists in all media promoting creativity and artistic exploration. With our program we aim to reflect upon the complex nature of international contemporary art and different contemporalities, served to a diverse audience.

[www.stiftelsen314.com](http://www.stiftelsen314.com)

3,14



**MAUR Projects** is a small artist-controlled organization run by Maia Urstad. The purpose is to initiate and carry out artistic projects, interact with other artists and curators, and generate events of interest that is not covered by other actors.

The projects are primarily motivated from a personal point of view, with a special interest in artists who work in fields such as sound based art, spatial installations, site-related art, and development of art works with the use of various forms of technology.

[www.maia.no](http://www.maia.no)

**Maur** **Prosjekter**

**BEK, Bergen Centre for Electronic Arts**, is a non-profit organization situated in Bergen, Norway, which main aim is to be a resource centre for work within the field of arts and new technology.

BEK works with both artistic and scientific research and development and puts into practice an amount of mixed artistic projects. Activity at BEK is mainly aimed towards professional creative artists, focusing on and encouraging cross-disciplinary art practices. Advanced, innovative and critical artistic use of technology is at the core of the activity, with a particular emphasis on real time art practices. BEK also practices an educational program that includes courses, workshops, talks and presentations.

[www.bek.no](http://www.bek.no)

**BEK**

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NORSK KULTURRÅD  
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