

SOME THING WE AFRICANS GOT



AFRICA
ARTS
CRITICAL
THOUGHT

#10

QUARTERLY
TRIMESTRIEL
WITH ENGLISH TEXTS

COVER OUMAR LY

CFA
ZONE
25000 FCFA

NGN
NIGERIA
15000 ₦

ZAR
SOUTH
AFRICA
400R

MAD
MOROCCO
350 م.د

GHS
GHANA
200¢

30€
25£
35 USD

GUCCI



ABOUT

adji dieye
mara sánchez renero
collectif orchestre vide
tola odukoya
bisi silva
oumar ly
antwaun sargent
aloyse diouf
baba diop
laboratoire agit'art
saliou diop
rafael rg
n'dary lo
ousman sow
cheikh ndiaye
soulages
soly cissé
serigne ibrahima dieye
aliou diack
achille mbembe
felwine sarr
souleymane bachir diagne
el hadj malick
caroline gueye
marie caroline camara
revue awa
cheikh anta diop
ery camara
frida khalo
francisco berzunza
jo ractliffe
elvira dyangani ose

ARTISTS

nabeeha mohamed
emmanuelle andrianjafy
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mara sánchez-renero
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santu mofokeng
camila falquez
eric gyamfi
tyler mitchell
jalan & jibril durimel
charlotte yonga
mohamed bourouissa
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tshepiso mazibuko
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arielle bobb-willis
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tola odukoya
singarum jeevaruthnam
michel papami kameni
oumar ly
marcus brutus
bili bidjocka
sakia traoré
soly cissé
aliou diack
omar ba
sidy mohamed kandji
babacar mbye diouf
sambou diouf
camara gueye
cheikh ndiaye
alun be
djibril dramé
birame ndiaye

serigne ibrahima dieye
sambou diouf
jean-baptiste joire
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saliou diop
rafael rg
n'dary lo
ousman sow
soulages
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ayana v. jackson
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bumi thomas
cassi namoda
pieter hugo
jo ractliffe
jabulani dhlamini
james barnor
sabelo mlangeni
francisco toledo



Nabeeha Mohamed
Self Portrait
(A Very Serious Artist), 2019
Courtesy of the artist
& Smith Gallery
Cape Town Art Fair 2020



Aliou Diack
Crocodile
Courtesy of the artist
& Sitor Senghor



Sambou Diouf
Le pèlerin
Courtesy of the artist



Francisco Toledo
Peineta esclavos
Courtesy of the Estate



Ayana V. Jackson
Courtesy of the artist

MEXIQUE
MEXICO



xxxxxx
Courtesy of the Estate



Francisco Toledo
xxxxxx
Courtesy of the Estate



Milena Carranza Valcárcel
Waiting for the Peoncita
El Carmen - Chincha, Ica - Perú 2014
Courtesy of the artist

latino
américa
también es
africana
y viva
méxico
cabrones!

texto

MILENA

CARRANZA VALCÁRCEL

fotografía

La historia de África y de América tal y como la conocemos ahora no existiría la una sin la otra. Es increíble cómo un puñado de españoles cambiaron el rumbo de la historia para siempre y sin imaginárselo. Mientras en África Mansa Musa seguía siendo el rey más rico que el mundo ha visto, en lo que ahora conocemos como América, en el actual México, los mexicas acordaban la Triple Alianza, conformándose en el que sería el futuro gran Imperio Azteca. En el otro extremo, en el actual Perú, le rendían tributo al sol los Incas, quienes lograron luego tener el imperio más grande del continente, el del Tahuantinsuyo, que reunía parte de lo que hoy es Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile y Argentina.

Estos dos puntos, en Norteamérica y Sudamérica respectivamente, los más poderosos de su época, fueron después lógicamente los dos centros principales de la colonia española. Ambos imperios vieron a los españoles llegar y cayeron a manos de ellos, y fueron repoblados luego, junto a todo el continente, de africanos subsaharianos, los mismos que reconfigurarían la identidad de esta tierra de formas inesperadas.

“México, tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de Estados Unidos”

– Palabras del presidente Porfirio Díaz, convertidas en dicho popular.

Cuando en Europa se habla de la diáspora africana se suele hacer referencia a los migrantes que han llegado en los últimos tiempos. Si vamos más allá, aquello que predomina en el imaginario popular es la gran influencia de la cultura negra de los Estados Unidos y generalmente se conoce un poco de Haití, Brasil o Cuba. Pero cuando en Latinoamérica hablamos de “diáspora” nos referimos a todos los afrodescendientes en el continente americano, desde Canadá hasta Chile, del Pacífico al Atlántico. Sin embargo, esa huella indeleble y profundamente viva no es del todo conocida ni siquiera por los mismos países latinoamericanos, ni por Estados Unidos o Europa, y mucho menos por África.

Y cuando en el mundo se habla de Latinoamérica lo primero en lo que se piensa generalmente es en México. Ícono de la América indígena, que además cobra revuelo por su historia ligada al país más poderoso del mundo, su vecino. Pero a nadie se le ocurre que la tierra del maíz, del xocolatl, de calendarios perfectos y majestuosas pirámides, del dios serpiente emplumada Quetzalcoatl, de los murales de obreros y líderes sociales que debieron cambiar el rumbo de la patria, de Frida y de exiliados con nuevo hogar, de Buñuel y Chiapas, de tequilas, narcos y mariachis, lleva también en sus orígenes, los de aquella nueva identidad mestiza forjada a la luz de la destrucción, sangre africana. Sangre mandinga, congo, wolof, biafra, bran, zape, banyun, berbesi, guinea, agbenyau, manicongo, terra nova... desgajando minas y sembríos mexicas para los reyes de España.

Entre finales del siglo XVI y comienzos del XVII, ciudades como Taxco tenían una población 70% africana. Fenómeno recurrente. En esa época la lengua más hablada en la zona terminó siendo el

bantú. Según datos oficiales, diez millones de africanos en promedio fueron llevados a habitar el continente de los “indios”. A México llegaron entre 250 000 y 400 000, asentándose en el sur en los actuales estados de Guerrero, Oaxaca y Veracruz. En ese entonces se trataba de nada menos que del virreinato de Nueva España, luego declarado oficialmente como los Estados Unidos Mexicanos gracias a la Independencia.

Casi 400 años después, en el 2018 apenas, el Senado aprueba la Ley del Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas, que le otorga plenos derechos constitucionales al Pueblo afromexicano. Aunque la abolición de la esclavitud se haya firmado 197 años antes, en 1821. Actualmente son 1.4 millones los afromexicanos que se reconocen como tal, el 1.16% de la población total del país. Cuántos más habrán que siéndolo no se identifican o no lo saben.

“La cucaracha, la cucaracha, ya no puede caminar, porque le falta, porque le falta, alitas para volar”

- Canción popular de origen afromexicano.

El camino ha sido más que árido, nadie cede así nomás su libertad. Todo ese periodo de la historia ha estado marcado de incontables rebeliones e intentos de revolución. En México, Nyanga, esclavizado de origen de Ghana, logró lo imposible: conformar un palenque -comunidades de esclavizados que huían para liberarse, llamados cimarrones- que, a pesar de la gran lucha por destruirlo, llega a ser declarado con el tiempo como libre e independiente por el mismísimo Virrey. Pasa así a ser la comunidad de San Lorenzo de los Negros en 1630. Hoy en día el pueblo lleva su nombre y su estatua la siguiente inscripción “Yanga, negro africano, precursor de la libertad de los negros y fundó este pueblo”. En Brasil, el icónico Zumbi dos Palmares no corrió la misma suerte. El quilombo que lideraba (como se llaman allá a los palenques), el más grande del país, fue destruido y él mismo asesinado, después de casi 130 años de sobrevivencia.

La mayoría de revueltas terminaron muy mal. Los patrones tenían armas de fuego y ellos no. Pero sobre todo tuvieron a la Santa Inquisición. Como eje transversal de la dominación fue usada la fe, a cargo de la Iglesia católica, presta a extirpar idolatrías. Y si bien se esforzó bastante en lograrlo, de hecho los países latinoamericanos son de los más católicos en el mundo, lo interesante es cómo la historia demuestra que eso que somos no puede ser completamente borrado, que puede difuminarse pero que lo esencial se transforma, no se pierde, se amalgama, sincretizándose.

Así fueron naciendo nuevos credos, nuevos santos, nuevas danzas, nuevos cantos y tradiciones. La mayoría forma parte ahora de nuestro folklor y muchas han sido ya declaradas como Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial de la Humanidad por la UNESCO. Por ejemplo, las numerosas danzas de Diablos o Diablitos. En México la danza de los

Diablos de la Boquilla de Chicometepepec nace como ritual para superar las condiciones de esclavitud de los náufragos de un barco negrero en sus costas. Otras nacieron como parte de la ceremonia católica del Corpus Christi, y aunque los diablos no fueron ellos, los africanos fueron obligados a representarlos, dando fruto a los Diablos Danzantes del Naiguatá en Venezuela o al Son de los Diablos en Perú.

Uno de los casos más impresionantes es el del legado del pueblo Yoruba, uno de los últimos en ser esclavizados, original de los actuales Nigeria y Benín. A pesar de todo lo sufrido, su espiritualidad se mantiene viva, principalmente en países como Brasil, Cuba y Trinidad y Tobago, y con ella sus cantos, danzas, ritos y valores. Y aunque las prohibiciones y prejuicios la transformaron, y cada divinidad tuvo que identificarse en secreto con un santo católico, hoy en día esta fe no hace más que crecer y atravesarlo todo, especialmente desde el arte, peculiarmente impulsada por ejemplo por la timba en las últimas décadas, conocida como salsa cubana. Siendo la salsa otra hija que Cuba parió gracias a su africanía y que influyó al mundo entero. Así como la batucada, de Brasil, cuya versión más conocida para el carnaval lleva el toque religioso para Oxum –el que hace el agogô- (en Cuba “Oshún” y en Nigeria “Ọṣun”), la diosa de la femineidad. Lo increíble es que cuando muchos la danzan no son conscientes de que están bailando para una diosa de un río de Nigeria que llegó en barco con la esclavitud.

A Brasil incluso han llegado grandes líderes espirituales desde Nigeria -en donde esta tradición es fuertemente discriminada y pierde territorio gracias a la influencia católica y musulmana-, como el Ooni -rey- de Ife en el 2018, para hacer intercambios sin precedentes con las comunidades religiosas de Salvador de Bahía o Rio de Janeiro. Estamos ante un fenómeno revolucionario que ha sido y sigue siendo una influencia clave para la identificación de millones de personas con esas raíces perdidas, tanto así que hasta Beyoncé emuló a Oshún, en su videoclip “Lemonade” y en el Grammy Award 2017, como símbolo del empoderamiento femenino y del retorno a su espiritualidad ancestral.

“Pies para qué los quiero, si tengo alas para volar”

- Frida Kahlo.

Nuestras identidades cambiaron radicalmente en el punto de no retorno y al mando de tres carabelas. No es posible entender el continente americano sin la diáspora africana, ni cada población afrodescendiente de cada país de América fuera del contexto de la diáspora. Sin embargo, seguimos buscándonos y encontrándonos. Es bastante significativo que ni siquiera hayamos podido autodenominarnos. “América” viene de Amerigo Vesputio, en homenaje a este italiano que tuviera un rol protagónico en la conquista del mal llamado “nuevo mundo.” Y “América Latina” se refiere a los países americanos en donde se hablan las lenguas europeas con raíz en el latín,



Cochecho and the Pallitas
 El Carmen – Chincha, Ica – Perú 2012
 Courtesy of the artist

español y portugués. Irónicamente podemos decir que nosotros no somos romanos, sin embargo hoy en día somos conocidos como los “latinos”.

Sacándole justamente la vuelta a este término se inscribe un potente movimiento cultural que ha empezado a emerger con fuerza en los últimos años, el “Afrolatino”, sumando iniciativas individuales, colectivas e institucionales, dándole nombre a esta doble identidad no comprendida. En el 2012 se realiza por ejemplo la importante exposición “Afrolatinos” en el Museo de Arte de Caguas en Puerto Rico, gracias al marco que diera la ONU al conmemorar el 2011 como el año de los Afrodescendientes, y desde hace ya siete años el Afro-Latino Festival de Nueva York viene compartiendo lo mejor de la escena musical afrolatinoamericana en Estados Unidos, promoviendo el sentido de comunidad. Se refresca así, y se reivindica, un debate identitario que, en Latinoamérica,

gira principalmente en torno a la problemática indígena y mestiza. La discriminación es tan insólita que lo afro ha tenido que vivir incluso relegado por no ser población originaria y siempre bajo el estigma de lo “folklórico”, sin que se haya valorado realmente que con sus manos se han construido también nuestras naciones, con su sabiduría se reformularon nuestras culturas y que su sangre corre en todas nuestras venas.

La ONU declaró además el Decenio Internacional de los Afrodescendientes del 2015 al 2024, exhortando así a los gobiernos a llevar a cabo acciones favorables para el desarrollo de sus poblaciones afro, que generalmente viven con altos índices de pobreza y oprimidas por todos los factores históricos respectivos. Y aunque existen grandes iniciativas como estas, lo que se viene logrando a nivel político va lento. Pero desde donde indefectiblemente se sigue transmutando todo, es desde el arte.

En el arte siempre podemos confiar, ese que poco a poco va develando la verdad, que en este caso habla de realidades coexistentes que, teniéndose como referente idílico y lejano, no han unido aún lazos concretos en sus cotidianos, mucho más hermanados de lo que imaginan. Como la revolucionaria película “La Negrada”, recién estrenada el año pasado, que ha causado revuelo en el mundo entero por dar a conocer lo inimaginado: hay afrodescendientes en México. Claro, hay afrodescendientes en toda Latinoamérica. Latinoamérica es también africana.

Milena Carranza Valcárcel



Milena Carranza Valcárcel
The Pallita
 El Carmen – Chincha, Ica – Perú 2012
 Courtesy of the artist



Milena Carranza Valcarcel
The Howard Gospel Choir
El Carmen - Chincha, Ica - Perú 2016
Concert of the Howard Gospel Choir for the Black History Month in the town of El Carmen, in Chincha, department of Ica in Perú.
This is the Gospel Choir of the Howard University, the black university more important of the EEUU, based in Washington DC.
Courtesy of the artist



ayana v.
jackson
african
by legacy,
mexican
by birth

text
MARCO VILLALOBOS

photography

Founded in 1608 as San Lorenzo de Los Negros, the present day town of Yanga is named for the maroon leader who established the town in the face of Spanish colonialism. Gaspar Nyanga, a native of Gabon, West Africa, Nyanga, or Yanga, was brought to Veracruz, Mexico, as one of hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans shipped to the country's gulf and pacific coasts to work the sugar cane fields and mines controlled by the Spanish crown during the mid 16th and late 17th century.

As with other instances of slavery throughout the new world, no sooner did the initial ships disembark in 1537 that the first uprisings began on Mexican Soil. Throughout Mexico, Africans and Indigenous alike escaped from mines and haciendas to create "maroon" societies in the mountains.

After one of Mexico's most brutal rebellions, it was to the mountains of Veracruz that Yanga led 500 other self-liberated peoples. For more than thirty years this community lived off goods secured through raids on caravans in route to Mexico City. As the community grew and the raids became more frequent, Yanga and his community became increasingly hunted. So fierce was this hunt that eventually over 500 armed men were sent to destroy the maroon colony.

Yanga and hundreds of men living in the highlands of Veracruz battled against the

troops sent to capture them by order of the Spanish Crown. With hopes of causing enough destruction to force the Spaniards into negotiations that would help protect his people, Yanga sent a message via a prisoner captured by his men. This message asked that a free homeland be granted upon fertile soil for his community of self liberated Africans and African descendants to settle.

At the end of a battle that suffered many casualties on each side, Yanga and those under his care arranged a move to the lowlands of Veracruz. All African descendants and their offspring who had liberated themselves prior to 1608 were granted legal freedom to settle in this town, San Lorenzo de los Negros. In exchange, Yanga assumed the position of mayor and agreed to pay taxes to the Crown. Thus, Yanga and his townsmen became the settlers of the first free town for Africans in the western hemisphere.

Based on existing historical research and personal field research, the proceeding text from *African by Legacy, Mexican by Birth*, recounts this story through fictionalized letters written in the voice of Gaspar Nyanga, addressed to a contemporary African American woman living in North America. The images that accompany were photographed in the town of Yanga, as well as in parts of Guerrero, and Oaxaca on the Pacific Coast of Mexico.

Yanga's First Letter, In Which He Proclaims His Self-Liberation

Querida Amiga:

Yo soy el mero negro Yanga y te escribo del primer pueblo libre de todo las Americas.

Yes, I in fact am Yanga, that same African stolen from my homeland some years ago and now escaped from captivity in Veracruz, Mexico, where those of us who so desire have once more secured our undeniable right to self-government.

On behalf of the men and women who have struggled alongside me here, I deliver to you our successes, hoping to pass unto you the spirit of our free town, indeed the first recognized free town for African peoples in the Americas, established with much hardship and endurance in the year 1608 in this place now called San Lorenzo de los Negros that occupies the hilltop territory outside Cordoba, amidst the haciendas of 9 wealthy men who now understand the seriousness with which we African descendants consider our liberty.

It will be some time before history begins to recognize our achievements in this land where the indigenous struggle will occupy the romanticism and politics of artists, scholars, and guerillas for centuries to come. Few are aware of us Afro Mestizos-- African by legacy, Mexican by birth and culture-- yet these enlightened few signal an interest both profound and intense in its nature, leading me to believe that one day our story as New Americans will prove invaluable in understanding how it is that Africa takes shape in the Americas as well as understanding exactly what it is that these Americas can be.

Our narrative here, while it is in some respect similar to those Brazilian, Haitian, and larger Caribbean and American narratives of liberty, is altogether different. Our interaction with the native and colonizing European populations appears to me distinct from their interactions with Africans elsewhere in this hemisphere-- perhaps this is why our presence is slow in gaining attention. So it is with this thought that I reach out to you now, wondering exactly what of our legacy has made its way to your attention, if any, and to what degree you have attained liberty under northern rule.

If it interests you, I can send you a more detailed account of our own path to greater self-rule here in Mexico. It is with this thought in mind that I wish unto you the best of light while awaiting your word here in the spirit of true freedom.

Ever your brother by birth,

Gaspar Nyanga
Veracruz, Mexico

Yanga Second Letter, In Which He Conveys His History

Dearest Northern Sister, Keeper of Liberty's Faith:

Born into princedom in Gabon, I was stolen from my fatherland at a young age by men consumed with commercial gain. My days following that removal are a tempest of muscles seizing in anguish, a swift stream of tears hidden by night, and vengeful vows made in the daylight presence of my captors-- all activities that afforded me a strengthening self-assurance as to the ultimate justice of my fate. Like all other new world sons born of ship bellies onto foreign soil, my experience in transit is both horrible and common, with little variation in detail other than the accent of my captor's dialects and the port of their destination. My story takes no distinction until reaching the shores of Veracruz, Mexico, from where many of New Spain's enslaved Africans are dispersed.

I arrived following the emancipation of Mexican Natives due to their swift decline at the hands of European disease and labor demands. The enthusiasm and greed with which Spaniards consume this land mandates a work that is as abundant as it is constant. Indigenous and Africans are worked to death at such accelerated rates that rivers here overflow with the disposal of corpses; over 7 million indigenous lives have been extinguished and nearly half a million Africans have been enslaved to replenish the labor force.

Now the displaced African population easily surpasses that of the colonizer, a detail that causes much worry to the latter who in suffering their insecurity seek to smother our spirits in every way: the valor and genius of the African is repressed, our customs punished on sight, and our religious creeds persecuted to no end. We are forced to adopt Christianity to such a degree that our generations will know little of their origins-- indeed, it is our very memory of Africa that these colonizers seek to destroy. Music, dance, gods: all are made to disintegrate to the click of Spanish heels. But I assure you, we have ways of guarding our lives and culture, and the fright with which our resistance is feared has made way for legislative assurance of lashings, imprisonment, castration, and death for those of us who think freedom.

Of course some of us seek liberty by any means, fleeing from bondage by stealth or by force as soon as the moment permits. We favor steep lands in uninhabited regions and establish palenques where inaccessible but hospitable soil permits us. For 30 years now, I've been a fugitive, inhabiting with my rebel group an isolated section of mountainside between the peaks of Orizaba and the coast of Veracruz. Each day here feeds our dignity and each year our number rises and so to does our spirit.

In this way my heart grows big enough to share with each of my people, and in this way I send you word as time permits.

Gaspar Nyanga
Veracruz, Mexico



Ayana V. Jackson
Aguadulce I, 2014
Courtesy of the artist



The Cimarron and the Fandango
Courtesy of the artist



Mara Sánchez-Renero
The Cimarron and the Fandango
Courtesy of the artist



Frida Duality, Re-imagining Frida
In collaboration with Minna Salami,
Pia Cabble, Katherine Ferdinand
Courtesy of the artist



Bumi Thomas
Frida Trinity,
Re-imagining Frida
In collaboration
with Minna Salami,
Pia Cabble,
Katherine Ferdinand
Courtesy of the artist



Three Maria not so new in the city, 2019
Acrylic paint on canvas
Courtesy of the artist



Maria's second week in the city, 2019
Acrylic paint on canvas
Courtesy of the artist



Cassi Namoda
Maria's first night in the city, 2019
Acrylic paint on canvas
Courtesy of the artist

Oaxaca is a place of rich history and tradition in art- the dovetail between architecture, food, music, and spirituality is what feeds the narrative behind society and helps to produce a more thoughtful community. Hence why I felt my experience in terms of making work there was such a fluid one.

The idea behind the tryptich of works is followed by my lifeblood character Maria. Maria, a striking figure full of opposing forces, that crops up again and again in my oeuvre. I decided to paint this figure specifically for a group show in Brussels to give homage to that history of character. That I feel like I have explored in painting before – like, when I think of George Grosz's work- the desperation, humor, and darkness, the palette that becomes so thematic. The essence of drawing. One painting has the three Marias co existing at a bar table.

Inspired by my Bar Texas paintings, paintings that stem from downtown Maputo, Mozambique red light district, Rua Araújo and the work of late photographer Ricardo Rangel series "Our Nightly Bread". I've given those documentations a new life force in the medium of paint paying respects to Rangel. I created Maria as an ode. She is a dualist character. I feel she is important to telling a narrative that is often missed in African narratives or female narratives. She's also a metaphor for the oppression of colonization. Maria is a free character, she does what she wants- and behaves the way she chooses to. This is a metaphor for a freed people. The war really created this reality for the women of Mozambique today.

Cassi Namoda

hacer noche crossing night

texte
STEF YAMB

contemporary art

Relations à la Mort en Afrique Australe et au Mexique.

Dialogue Sud/Sud à Oaxaca. L'État de Oaxaca, au sud du Mexique, est une terre à majorité Zapotèque et Mixtèque. Oaxaca abrite de nombreuses cultures distinctes, chacune ayant langue et traditions propres. Au milieu du XV^e siècle, les Aztèques établissent des avant-postes dans la région jusqu'à l'invasion espagnole au début du XVI^e siècle.

En 2016, la ville de Oaxaca va devenir le lieu symbole de la résistance civile au Mexique. À son origine se trouve le corps enseignant, rejoint par un mouvement civil de grande ampleur, l'APPO ou *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*. Cette lutte syndicale va tourner en insurrection populaire et se cristalliser contre le Gouverneur de l'État: Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. Des centaines de barricades, gardées jours et nuits, sont érigées par la population qui prend d'assaut les radios locales, les faisant fonctionner au service de la rébellion. Insurrection populaire, barricades, pratique de la démocratie directe, certains parlent de la Commune de Oaxaca faisant référence à la Commune de Paris. Durant tout le second semestre de 2006, Oaxaca sera le lieu d'expression de révolte de nombreux mouvements autochtones et féministes. À l'issue de cette insurrection, de cette "prise" populaire de la ville de Oaxaca, de ces luttes et de ses morts, le gouverneur de l'État restera en place. Oaxaca est une ville rebelle, dans un État qui a le plus haut pourcentage de population natives (65.73%) avec le Yucatán et les États voisins de Guerrero et du Chiapas (36.15%).

Ces préambules sur Oaxaca sont essentiels pour comprendre que le choix cette ville de Oaxaca plutôt que Mexico pour l'organisation de l'exposition *Hacer Noche*, s'inscrit dans la philosophie même du projet. Il s'agit de faire dialoguer des aires postcoloniales, laisser dialoguer les Suds et décentraliser la programmation culturelle publique du Mexique. « Cette initiative reconnaît l'importance des diverses économies, des façons d'utiliser l'espace et des pratiques d'organisation de la communauté » énonce *Hacer Noche*. La relation à la mort sera le thème central de ces expositions, résidences d'artistes, ateliers pédagogiques, programmes de conférences : « Le projet examine les relations sociétales avec la mort et le décès en Afrique

australe et au Mexique : la relation entre la violence et la mort, l'éthique dans nos rapports avec les cadavres, nos rituels liés à la vie, la mort et l'au-delà, nos liens avec nos ancêtres. Il s'agit là d'un point d'entrée vers une recherche plus large d'une relation commune à l'histoire du présent dans ces deux régions postcoloniales. *Hacer Noche* aborde la fragilité et la finitude de l'expérience humaine, et comment notre volonté de faire est en fin de compte une volonté de perpétuer, *to be remembered*. »

Hacer Noche a été organisé du 4 novembre 2018, au 10 février 2019, par Francisco Berzunza (coordinateur général), Paloma Porraz, Dario Yazbek, Anthea Buys, Josh Ginsburg, Ery Camara et Piet Pienaar. *Hacer Noche* va se déployer dans différents lieux et c'est plus de trente artistes d'Afrique du Sud, d'Angola et du Zimbabwe qui sont mis en dialogue avec le contexte culturel mexicain : Tiago Borges, Steven Cohen, Marlene Dumas, Dumile Feni, Kendell Geers, Jare Ginsburg, David Goldblatt, Georgina Gratrix, Haroon Gunn Sallie, Dan Halter, Nicholas Hlobo, Jackson Hlungwani, Pieter Hugo, William Kentridge, David Koloane, Moshekwa Langa, Kemang Wa Lehulere, Ernest Mancoba, Sabelo Mlangeni, Santu Mofokeng, Samson Mudzungu, Zanele Muholi, Simphiwe Ndzube, Antonio Ole, Athi Patra-Ruga, Jo Ractliffe, Robin Rhode, Cinga Samson, Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, Johannes Segogela, Penny Siopis, James Webb, Portia Zvavahera.

Cette liste d'artistes présents à Oaxaca est impressionnante. Un nom parmi les organisateurs retient particulièrement notre attention ce numéro 10 de la revue : Ery Camara. Le muséologue est précurseur et figure centrale de cette connexion Mexique-Afrique, le plus mexicain des sénégalais, le plus sénégalais des mexicains. En 1974, Senghor visite le Mexique et le Musée national d'anthropologie de Mexico consacré à l'héritage précolombien. Son concepteur est l'architecte Pedro Ramirez Vazquez. C'est un véritable choc pour Senghor qui a à l'esprit, depuis de nombreuses années, la construction d'un musée dédié aux civilisations africaines. En 1975, dans le cadre de ces relations sénégaléo-mexicaines, Ery Camara vient de terminer son premier cycle d'études et part à Mexico pour étudier la restauration des biens culturels. Vazquez ne construira pas ce musée, mais ce fut l'amorce d'un grand voyage pour Camara qui depuis 1975 vit au Mexique. Il a passé un diplôme en restauration et un master en Muséologie. Il a été conseiller technique du Musée Dolores Olmedo Patiño, directeur adjoint de la muséographie du Musée national d'anthropologie, directeur adjoint du Musée national des cultures populaires, directeur adjoint du Musée national de Virreinato, conservateur de l'Ancien collège de San Ildefonso. Il a également enseigné la muséographie en troisième cycle de maîtrise à l'Université Ibéro-américaine. Il est l'auteur de nombreux livres et publications et est aujourd'hui commissaire indépendant. Plus de quarante ans dédiés à l'art

au Mexique feront dire à ce fils d'une famille de forgerons : « Je ne suis pas cent pour cent sénégalais, ni cent pour cent mexicain. Je suis la somme de toutes mes expériences. » Sean O'Toole, journaliste, critique d'art et éditeur sud-africain dira : « La main de Camara était particulièrement évidente lors des deux présentations à grande échelle de *Crossing Night* à Saint-Domingue et à San Pablo. »

En 1979, le projet du Musée des Civilisations Noires de Dakar n'étant pas encore enterré (finalement inauguré en décembre 2018), le Palais des Beaux-Arts de Mexico a accueilli une exposition *Art Contemporain du Sénégal* avec un grand nombre d'artistes. Du 24 avril au 27 mai 1979, sous le patronage de Senghor et du président du Mexique José López Portillo, seront exposées des peintures, gravures et tapisseries. Cette exposition est l'un des premiers échanges culturels entre un État africain postcolonial et son équivalent dans les Amériques. Dix ans plus tard de 1998 à 2000, il y eu trois éditions d'une exposition intitulée *Cinq continents et une ville, Salon international de peinture*, (Cinco continentes y una ciudad : Salón Internacional de Pintura), au Musée de la ville de México. Ces différentes éditions ont tenté de montrer un panorama de la peinture mondiale : Afrique, Asie et Océanie, Amérique, Europe et Mexico comme lieux où s'articulait l'exposition. La section de chacun des continents fut confiée à un conservateur différent. La première édition est confiée à l'artiste Marta Palau, la seconde édition dirigée par le commissaire nigérian basé alors aux Etats-Unis, Okwui Enwezor (1963-2019) avec Godfried Donkor, Ellen Gallagher, William Kentridge et Yinka Shonibare CBE. La troisième édition est confiée à Olu Oguibe, un artiste et professeur de la diaspora (né au Nigeria), cette édition montra des artistes issus de la diaspora, Mary Evans, Odili Donald Odita et Julie Mehretu. La présence d'Okwui Enwezor à *Cinq continents et une ville* va s'avérer un véritable cheval de Troie. Cette exposition est d'une certaine manière aux antipodes des biennales d'art contemporain de l'époque. Le texte de Marta Palau pour *Cinq continents et une ville* est lié à un certain type de mysticisme transcendantal et à une vision de la peinture comme "première". Un caractère essentiel qui ne serait pas transférable, en qualifiant d'autres manifestations artistiques notamment les installations, de mode pure. En ce sens, la peinture serait un art supérieur. Dans son texte pour *Cinq continents et une ville*, intitulé "Impresionante perversidad", Okwui Enwezor va porter une double attaque contre ce statut de la peinture et contre l'articulation de l'exposition. « Il y a quelque chose de paradoxal dans la conviction de cette exposition à une époque d'ouverture comme celle dans laquelle nous vivons, dans lesquelles ils coulent, mais pas nécessairement, des réseaux en chaîne entre les idées, les pratiques, les lieux et les personnes, où l'on pourrait continuer à reproduire les multiples perspectives des pratiques artistiques actuelles en tenant compte non seulement de la notion géographique: *Cinq continents et une*

ville ; mais aussi de la spécification d'un langage particulier : la peinture. (...) Peut-être le même destin d'inutilité attend aussi cette exposition. Malgré tout, le contexte du Mexique, avec une vision historique particulière de la peinture, présente un défi intéressant. C'est peut-être là que réside sa raison d'être. » De la part d'Enwezor ce n'est pas une charge contre la peinture mais un décentrement vers un statut erratique de la peinture plutôt que comme la source première et grandiose. Il y a eu *L'Art Contemporain du Sénégal, Cinq continents et une ville* puis *Hacer Noche*, mais revenons à Oaxaca et... à l'Afrique australe.

Hacer Noche / Crossing Night, il s'agit bien là de la Mort dont on parle. Il y a cette phrase abyssale de l'écrivaine Marguerite Duras : « La mort baptise aussi. » Les mots du poète Octavio Paz nous amènent au Mexique, « Si l'homme est poussière Ceux là qui vont par la plaine Sont hommes », à un carrefour, « Cantate. Entre le jour et la nuit. » A l'entrée de l'exposition collective, sur le mur de l'un des deux anciens couvents, on peut lire ces mots de Bigaro Diop : « Les morts ne sont pas sous terre... les morts ne sont pas morts. » (*Le souffle des ancêtres*, 1960). Qui fera dire à Juan P. Fernández « une affirmation qui fonctionne à la fois comme une épigraphe et un texte d'exposition, disant tout ce qu'il y a à dire. » Voici un extrait plus vaste de ce poème connu de millions d'écoliers africains, « Ceux qui sont morts ne sont jamais partis Ils sont dans l'ombre qui s'éclaire Et dans l'ombre qui s'épaissit, Les morts ne sont pas sous la terre Ils sont dans l'arbre qui frémit, Ils sont dans le bois qui gémit, Ils sont dans l'eau qui coule, Ils sont dans la case, ils sont dans la foule Les morts ne sont pas morts. / Écoute plus souvent Les choses que les êtres, La voix du feu s'entend, Entends la voix de l'eau. Écoute dans le vent Le buisson en sanglot : C'est le souffle des ancêtres. »

L'intimité des Mexicains avec la mort est si grande que certains qualifient la

mort de "totem national du Mexique". Les *calaveras*, têtes de mort, dans l'art mexicain et le *Día de los Muertos* ou Jour des Morts, ont largement dépassés les frontières du pays. Paz nous dit : « Pour l'habitant de Paris, New York ou Londres, la mort est ce mot qu'on ne prononce jamais parce qu'il brûle les lèvres. Le Mexicain, en revanche, la fréquente, la raille, la brave, dort avec, la fête, c'est l'un de ses amusements favoris et son amour le plus fidèle. Certes, dans cette attitude, il y a peut-être autant de crainte que dans l'attitude des autres hommes ; mais au moins le Mexicain ne se cache pas d'elle, ni ne la cache ; il la contemple face à face avec impatience, dédain ou ironie : "S'ils doivent me tuer demain, qu'ils y aillent pour de bon". » Le philologue Juan Lope Blanch dans *Vocabulario Mexicano Relativo A La Muerte* (1963) a établi un lexique concernant le vocabulaire et les expressions idiomatiques relatif à la mort, le champ est vaste... Remontons dans le temps, sur le site de Tlatilco fut mis à jour une des plus anciennes représentations de la mort : un masque en argile dont la moitié droite figure un visage humain charnu tandis que la gauche est décharnée. « ... La représentations de crânes, d'os croisés, de divinités toutes ou en partie décharnées. Ces motifs iconographiques illustrent le pouvoir de régénération et le pouvoir fécondant de la mort. L'os est le noyau dur du corps, il est comme celui du fruit autour duquel se développe la chair et, comme lui, il est la semence du futur fruit/corps. » Si la mort induit l'expérience de la souffrance, de la suffocation et de l'agonie, de la perte... Elle est également une matrice, relationnelle. Il arrive que l'art ou le poème, comme expérience, soit la trace, le signe, d'un pas au-delà de la frontière dans l'espace liminal de la mort. Michel Serres nous rappelle que « le réel montre plus de relationnel que de rationnel. » L'existence est une co-appartenance à des modalités différentes. « La vie et la mort mandent l'homme à chaque tournant. Et leur jonction est organique. Pour l'artiste,

l'art est cette jonction même. Elle est dans le corps de l'œuvre comme dans le corps de l'homme : elle les articule. » (C. Mouze, *Le lion Chestov*). Santu Mofokeng, présent dans *Hacer Noche avec Eyes-wide-shut, Motouleng Cave* (2004), exprime cette jonction. Par les corps, les visages, les paysages, Mofokeng exprime l'histoire, la mémoire, le trauma... et les espaces d'où montent une prière cathartique, un hymne à la survie.

Il ne s'agit pas de description, on est dans une forme de déchiffrement. La chronique de la vie sociale et spirituelle sud-africaine noire se fait "métaphore vivante" en incluant le regardeur dans un "voyage cognitif". L'homme sur la photo *Eyes-wide-closed* est le frère de Mofokeng, Ishmael, atteint du sida et qui peu de temps avant sa mort se rend en pèlerinage dans les grottes sacrées de Motouleng à Clarens. Il y a dans *Eyes-wide-closed* quelque chose d'indéfini et d'insaisissable dira Silvia Mazzucchelli : « Ses yeux semblent fermés, mais c'est une impression visuelle qui nécessite une confirmation. Si vous vous rapprochez de l'image, vous arriverez à une révélation soudaine : les yeux d'Ishmael sont légèrement voilés, mais ouverts. Ici et maintenant, dans l'espace d'une vision rapprochée, la ligne imaginaire entre le regard de l'homme et celui du spectateur s'estompe. L'ombre dans les yeux d'Ishmael ne suggère pas la présence d'une absence, mais évoque quelque chose d'immatériel qui apparaît dans toutes les images de *Chasing Shadows* de Mofokeng : une invitation pour le spectateur à s'impliquer dans une expérience esthétique, une exhortation à se déplacer dans l'espace de la réalité pour combler le fossé du paradoxe, car les yeux ne sont fermés qu'en apparence et l'ombre est à la fois réelle et irréelle. » En Sésotho, la langue maternelle de Mofokeng, le mot *seriti* peut être traduit à la fois par "ombre", "aura", "charisme", "présence", "statut". Dans l'espace sacré, les ombres, les âmes, les présences, les esprits, les énergies laissent des traces dans le monde

tangible, plus que cela, ils co-forment le monde. Des chercheurs avancent que les expériences de mort imminente surviennent lorsque l'âme, formée par des substances quantiques, s'échappe du système nerveux pour entrer dans l'univers. Des phénomènes quantiques, comme l'intrication et la superposition d'états, sont impliquées dans le fonctionnement du cerveau, et surtout dans l'émergence de la conscience. Cette coexistence au-delà de la mort biologique me ramène à ces paroles de Bouddha : « Tu ne peux pas voyager sur un chemin sans être toi-même le chemin. »

Samson Mudzunga active un champ spécifique : les performances et actions ritualisées. La mort est centrale dans la pratique de Mudzunga, ses performances concernent l'enterrement et la renaissance, la disparition et la réapparition. Mudzunga ira jusqu'à s'enterrer et ses "Tambours" sont des "Tambours-Cercueils", certains sur roulettes, excavés pour accueillir le corps de Mudzunga. « *Reborn from the interior of his great tree drum/coffin carved in the shape of a rocket with fins of a woman and fish flanking it, Mudzunga emerged from the tail of the rocket through a small door without much ceremony or ostentation.* » Plus que dans l'objet fini du sculpteur, Mudzunga est un artiste de processus et de transformation. Où la matérialité, l'espace et le temps sont en relation, au même titre que les "Tambours Cérémoniels", le "Lac Sacré Fundudzi", et la présence des "Ancêtres". Il y aurait beaucoup à dire sur l'aspect hautement transgressif de Mudzunga. La fabrication des "Tambours" de sa seule initiative, l'entrée dans le "Lac sacré" sans l'assentiment des autorités traditionnelles, en défiant l'accord tacite Singo-Netshiavha sur l'accès au lac. Mais ce n'est pas qu'un acte transgressif, Mudzunga s'inscrit dans la tradition, il bouge des jeux de pouvoirs et s'inscrit dans la dialectique historique complexe entre les constructions de la tradition avant, pendant et après l'apartheid. Si Mudzunga transgresse plusieurs des lois ancestrales qui sont aujourd'hui entremêlées au pouvoir politique de la région, les emprisonnements qu'il a subis ne sont pas à isoler du fait que Mudzunga explore, mais d'une certaine manière aussi, fait exploser des pratiques liées à la tradition. Il y a une autre transgression, que certains nommeront liberté de l'artiste, dans le déplacement, la traduction d'un savoir lié au territoire rural du Nord vers le centre urbain de Johannesburg (et par extension aux centres urbains internationaux). Et plus précisément que l'instance de validation et/ou le commanditaire se déplace des structures religieuses et sociales locales vers la scène de l'art contemporain. L'art contemporain a soif d'intégrer de réelles pratiques ancestrales et cérémoniales. Le questionnement que cela ouvre, ces nouvelles instances de validation et ce déplacement, est assez vertigineux.

Partons pour les montagnes de San Agustín Etla, à 30 minutes de Oaxaca. Nous sommes deux jours après les célébrations du Jour des Morts. Etla dont Sean O'Toole nous dit : « Le village est réputé pour être l'un des meilleurs

endroits pour vivre les festivités pleines d'énergies du Jour des Morts au Mexique. Pendant cette pause de trois jours, qui débute chaque année le 31 octobre, les habitants de l'Etla s'habillent en costumes macabres avec des cloches et des miroirs. Fortifiés de mescal, ils dansent et défilent sur des mélodies de cuivres au rythme rapide tout au long de la nuit. L'ambiance fébrile des festivités est sous-tendue par un accent clairvoyant sur la mort. » L'installation vidéo élégiaque de William Kentridge, *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015), projection à huit canaux qui présente une procession grandeur nature de fanfare et divers acteurs portant des drapeaux et de lourdes charges, est présentée au Centre des Arts de San Agustín, une usine de textile transformée en centre d'art. « C'est fait pour ce contexte », dit Berzunza, « qui voit des similitudes entre la danse macabre de l'œuvre de Kentridge et les célèbres processions de San Agustín Etla pour les célébrations du Jour des Morts » (Tracy Lynn Chernaly). Sean O'Toole nous indique que « Pendant le déroulement de l'exposition de Kentridge, 'CaSa' a accueilli une exposition parallèle présentant le riche héritage des arts graphiques de Oaxaca. Bien qu'elle ne fasse pas partie de "Crossing Night", la présentation suggérait des croisements profitables entre la culture énergique de la gravure sur bois de Oaxaca - la ville compte plus de 20 ateliers de gravure actifs - et la tradition sud-africaine de la gravure sur bois et sur linogravure, dont Kentridge est un adepte. »

Dans ce dialogue instauré par Berzunza que l'on peut nommer "Glissant", "Poétique de la Relation", certains artistes de *Hacer Noche* ont ancré leur démarche dans une immersion mexicaine, facilitée par des résidences d'artistes. « L'art n'est pas un phénomène isolé. Il est produit dans un contexte particulier. Il serait dommage que nous importions à Oaxaca une exposition qui ne soit pas liée au contexte [du Mexique]. » *Hacer Noche* est conçu comme un catalyseur pour la création d'un dialogue Sud/Sud. En résidence, Penny Siopis, Georgina Gratrix, Jared Ginsburg et Tiago Borges ont tous produit ou adapté des œuvres pour *Hacer Noche* au cours de cette période. Sabelo Mlangeni y fera sa résidence plus tard dans l'année. Tiago Borges qui a grandi à Luanda, a mené un atelier de quatre jours avec sept étudiants et a produit un fanzine qui illustre sa vision du jardin d'Éden. A propos du zine Borges dit : « C'est de la poésie visuelle locale, une construction d'une réalité expérimentale. » Zayaan Jappie nous éclaire sur certaines implications de ce travail. « Le fanzine est conçu non seulement pour être exposé dans le cadre d'une exposition, mais aussi dans l'intention d'inclure le spectateur, en lui donnant la possibilité de devenir propriétaire - de prendre physiquement l'œuvre, d'acquiescer de l'expérience et naviguer sur ses thèmes à loisir. Il croit que le Mexique et l'Afrique australe ont partagé des expériences socio-politiques, notamment l'absence d'une identité unifiée, un accès inégal aux ressources et une politique non représentative. » Borges dit aussi : « J'espère que cette exposition inspirera les habitants de Oaxaca, en particulier les Afro-Mexicains qui sont oubliés (...) J'espère que l'exposition

inspirera une jeune génération de personnes sensibles à d'autres formes créatives de compréhension et de réflexion sur la communauté. »

A Oaxaca le photographe Pieter Hugo expose 12 nouvelles images au Centre Photographique Álvarez Bravo, toutes prises lors d'une immersion au Mexique à la demande de Berzunza, avec pour seule directive que le travail porte sur le sexe et la mortalité. Cette connexion avec le Mexique va s'amplifier pendant et après *Hacer Noche*. Hugo va faire quatre voyages au Mexique, couvrant chacun près d'un mois sur une période de deux ans. Il voyage du désert septentrional d'Hermosillo à la zone industrialisée de la ville de Mexico, et dans les états montagneux du sud, Oaxaca et Chiapas. Ce dernier corpus de 38 photos intitulé *La Cucaracha* a été présenté à la Stevenson Gallery du Cap en Afrique du Sud, en 2019. Laissons la parole à Pieter Hugo sur les liens qui l'unissent au Mexique : « ... rapidement devenu une obsession (...) L'énergie anarchique et viscérale du Mexique m'a aspiré. (...) La Cucaracha (...) Le refrain en forme de jingle, alliant humour et dérogation, est profondément lié à l'expression géopolitique, historique et pop-culturelle spécifique du Mexique – un endroit où l'hyper violence, le traitement joyeux de la mort, le machisme extrême, les points de vue élargis sur le genre, le catholicisme dogmatique, le respect pour les autocraties surnaturelles et cycliques, la fourniture de logements sociaux équitables, le désespoir chronique et une vision commune ont tous trouvé un moyen de coexister. » (Pieter Hugo, juillet 2019.)

Peet Pienaar *graphic designer* sud-africain vit depuis 2011 entre l'Afrique du Sud et l'Amérique du Sud. Il a conçu l'affiche de *Hacer Noche* ainsi que des *piñatas* pour la soirée d'ouverture, de gigantesques marionnettes de rue qui défilèrent dans les rues de Oaxaca, des tissus pour les murs d'exposition, des tissus pour les chemises des personnes impliquées dans le projet et des banderoles en papier découpé.

Sur l'affiche un serpent et un chien se regardent dans un triple anneau de grains de maïs. Pienaar dira : « *I included mielies because of the Aztec belief that maize was the origin of Man, so it symbolises life, which is similar in Africa because of it being a main food source. The snake is a symbol of death, and the dog – according to Mexicans – represents the afterlife. It's the same in Africa, where animals are linked to the afterlife. Also, in a lot of South African art, the dog represents the State, so I found it a fitting idea to present it in the design.* »

Il y a un proverbe mexicain qui recouvre les murs des révoltes altermondialistes : « Ils ont essayé de nous enterrer, Ils ne savaient pas qu'on était des graines. » On retrouve ces épis de maïs dans *La vengeance de 400 ans est en train de perdre ses dents de lait* (Oaxaca, 2018, baby teeth and maize cob) de Dan Halter. *Harvest* (2005) de Robin Rhode est une animation numérique de trois minutes, dans laquelle l'artiste utilise sa technique inspirée du graffiti pour cultiver de l'herbe blanche peinte sur un mur noir, qu'il récolte ensuite pour former un lit. Ces deux œuvres sont liées à la germination et la récolte, cependant O'Toole dira : « Les chiens et les squelettes étaient en plus grand nombre que le maïs dans l'exposition de groupe en deux parties, qui a réussi à capter quelque chose de la mélancolie et de l'humeur pensive habituelles de l'Afrique du Sud. »

« L'installation de Lehulere, *Cosmic Interluded Orbit* (2016), développe son intérêt pour les conceptions africaines du cosmos et présente des chiens en porcelaine noire et or, certains placés sur des pupitres d'école servant de socles, évaluant cinq dessins à la craie partiellement effacés. Ces derniers éléments ont bien dialogué avec *Harvest*. » (O'Toole) « *Interlude Orbit* est une critique des systèmes éducatifs, du savoir occidental et de l'amnésie collective observés dans les sociétés opprimées, comme les territoires colonisés. » (Fernández) « Dans la série de dessins *Mgodoyi 5* (1993) de

David Koloane, les chiens n'aboient pas. Ils nous regardent, nous représentent. À partir de ce territoire, ce travail nous permet de rencontrer le mythe de ce voyage nocturne à travers le Mictlan en compagnie des xoloitzcuintles : une transition. Ils ont cessé d'incarner l'oppression, ont refusé d'être les animaux domestiques de l'apartheid situés en banlieue. Ils abandonnent leur laisse, ne symbolisent plus la violence d'État, mais deviennent maintenant notre reflet même. Ils déambulent, reniflent, connaissent le chemin, nous guident. » (O'Toole) « Cela se termine comme cela commence, avec la lumière, dans *Harvest* de Robin Rhode. Une animation qui relate les épigraphes de ce texte (Ils ont essayé de nous enterrer ...) et la pièce d'introduction de Dan Halter, les graines de maïs et leurs potentialités. Germer, s'épanouir, *break the ground*, déplacer les hégémonies, activer nos composants, nous défragmenter. » (Juan P. Fernández)

Une seconde édition vient d'être annoncée, *Hacer Noche : Promised Land*. Elle inclura des artistes Mexicains et rassemblera plus de 50 artistes et producteurs culturels dont le travail explore les notions actuelles et futuristiques de résistance. Elvira Dyangani Ose qui a travaillé au Centre Atlantique d'Art Moderne et au Centre Andalou d'Art Contemporain en Espagne, à la Tate Museum et est depuis 2017 directrice du Showroom à Londres en sera la curatrice. En partenariat avec l'État de Oaxaca, des organisations et espaces publics artistiques de Oaxaca de Juarez, Promised Land se déroulera d'octobre 2020 à février 2021.

J'espère être à Oaxaca en Octobre. J'y croiserai alors Frida Robles une artiste mexicaine dont la pratique l'a menée de nombreuse fois en Afrique, notamment au Nigeria et au Sénégal. Elle y a fait une installation intitulée *Echoes of the resistance*, réalisée dans le cadre du programme de la Raw Material Company pour la Biennale OFF de Dakar. Cette intervention s'inscrivait dans le projet *The Revolution Will Come*

hacer noche crossing night

text
STEF YAMB

Relationships to death in Southern Africa and Mexico. A South-South dialogue in Oaxaca.

The State of Oaxaca in southern Mexico is majority Zapotec and Mixtec territory. Oaxaca is home to many distinct cultures, each with its own language and customs. In the mid-15th century, the Aztecs established outposts in the region up, until the Spanish invasion at the start of the 16th century.

In 2016, the city of Oaxaca became the symbol of civil resistance in Mexico. At its origin were teachers, who were joined by a vast civil movement, the APPO, or *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*. This trade union struggle transformed into a popular insurrection, crystalizing against the State Governor, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. Hundreds of barricades manned day and night were built by the population, who stormed the local radio stations, putting them at the service of the rebellion. Popular insurrection, barricades, the instigation of direct democracy: some called it the Oaxaca Commune in reference to the Paris Commune. During the entire second semester of 2006, Oaxaca was the site where the revolt of many indigenous and feminist movements was expressed. After this insurrection, after this popular "takeover" of the city of Oaxaca, after these struggles and their deaths, the State Governor remained in office. Oaxaca is a rebel city in a state that has the highest percentage of indigenous peoples (65.73%), followed by Yucatán and the neighbouring states of Guerrero and Chiapas (36.15%).

This preamble about Oaxaca is key in understanding that the choice to hold the *Hacer Noche* exhibition in this town rather than in Mexico City was inscribed in the very philosophy of the project. The aim was to bring postcolonial regions into dialogue, to allow the Global Souths to converse, and to decentralize Mexico's public cultural programming. "This initiative recognizes the importance of the community's diverse economies, ways of using space and organizational practices," stated *Hacer Noche*. Relationships to death were the central theme of these exhibitions, artists' residencies, educational workshops, and conference programmes: "The project looks comparatively at societal relationships with death in Southern Africa and in Mexico: the relationship between violence and death, the ethics of how we relate to corpses, our rituals of life, death and the afterlife, our connections with our



Brujeria,
Juchitan de Zaragoza, 2018
Acrylic paint on canvas
Courtesy of the artist
& Huxley-Parlour Gallery
& Stevenson, Cape Town
and Johannesburg



Pieter Hugo
Black Friday,
Oaxaca de Juárez, 2018
Courtesy of the artist
& Huxley-Parlour Gallery
& Stevenson, Cape Town
and Johannesburg



Pieter Hugo
The Mango Vendor, San Cristobal, 2019
Archival pigment ink on satin, 75 x 54cm
Courtesy of the artist & Stevenson,
Cape Town & Johannesburg
Paris Photo New York



Jo Ractliffe
Falsa Illusion, Oaxaca, 2018,
Silver Gelatin, 35 x 43cm
Courtesy of the artist & Stevenson,
Cape Town & Johannesburg
Paris Photo New York

ancestors. It is as an entry point to a broader search for shared ways of relating to history in the present in these two postcolonial regions. *Hacer Noche* touches on the fragility and finitude of human experience, and how our will for form is at the last instance a will to be remembered.”

Hacer Noche was organized by Francisco Berzunza (General Coordinator), Paloma Porraz, Dario Yazbek, Anthea Buys, Josh Ginsburg, Ery Camara and Piet Pienaar from 4 November 2018 to 10 February 2019. It took place in multiple venues and over thirty artists from South Africa, Angola and Zimbabwe dialogued with the Mexican cultural context: Tiago Borges, Steven Cohen, Marlene Dumas, Dumile Feni, Kendell Geers, Jare Ginsburg, David Goldblatt, Georgina Gratrix, Haroon Gunn Sallie, Dan Halter, Nicholas Hlobo, Jackson Hlungwani, Pieter Hugo, William Kentridge, David Koloane, Moshekwa Langa, Kemang Wa Lehulere, Ernest Mancoba, Sabelo Mlangeni, Santu Mofokeng, Samson Mudzunga, Zanele Muholi, Simphiwe Ndzube, Antonio Ole, Athi Patra-Ruga, Jo Ractliffe, Robin Rhode, Cinga Samson, Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, Johannes Segogela, Penny Siopis, James Webb and Portia Zvavahera.

This list of artists present in Oaxaca was impressive. Among the organizers, one name in particular is of interest to this 10th edition of the magazine: Ery Camara. A museographer, he is a precursor and central figure of this Mexican-African connection, the most Mexican of the Senegalese, the most Senegalese of the Mexican. In 1974, Senghor visited Mexico and the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City devoted to Pre-Columbian heritage. It was designed by the architect Pedro Ramirez Vazquez. It was a true shock for Senghor, who for years had wanted to build a museum devoted to African civilizations. In 1975, in the context of these Senegalese-Mexican relations, Ery Camara, who had just finished his first degree, went to Mexico to study the restoration of cultural artefacts. Vazquez never designed this museum, but it was the beginning of a grand voyage for Camara who, since 1975, has lived in Mexico. He passed a diploma in restoration and a Master's in Museology. He was the technical advisor to the Dolores Olmedo Patiño Museum, deputy director of museography at the National Museum of Anthropology, deputy director of the National Museum of Popular Cultures, deputy director of the Museo Nacional del Virreinato, and curator of the San Ildefonso College. He also taught a Master's in Museography at the Ibero-American University, is the author of many works and publications and today is an independent curator. After over forty years devoted to art in Mexico, this son of a family of blacksmiths says: “I'm not a hundred percent Senegalese, or a hundred percent Mexican. I am the sum of all my experiences.” South African journalist, art critic and publisher Sean O'Toole stated: “Camara's hand was most evident in ‘Crossing Night's’ two large-scale presentations in Santo Domingo and San Pablo.”

In 1979, the project for Dakar's Museum of Black Civilizations not yet having been shelved (it was finally inaugurated in December 2018), the Mexico Palace of Fine Arts hosted an exhibition of contemporary Senegalese art comprising a large number of artists. Under the patronage of Senghor and the Mexican President José López Portillo, paintings, prints and tapestries were exhibited from 24 April to 27 May 1979. This exhibition was one of the first cultural exchanges between a postcolonial African state and its equivalent in South America. Ten years later, from 1998 to 2000, there were three editions of an exhibition entitled *Cinco continentes y una ciudad: Salón Internacional de Pintura (Five Continents and a City: International Painting Exhibition)*, at the Museum of the City of Mexico. These different editions attempted to show a panorama of world painting, its exhibitions focusing on Africa, Asia and Oceania, the Americas, Europe and Mexico. Each continent's section was entrusted to a different curator. The first edition was curated by artist Marta Palau; the second edition was headed by the then USA-based Nigerian curator, Okwui Enwezor (1963-2019), and showed Godfried Donkor, Ellen Gallagher, William Kentridge and Yinka Shonibare CBE. The third edition was entrusted to Olu Oguibe, a Nigerian-born diaspora artist and professor.

This edition showed the diaspora artists Mary Evans, Odili Donald Odita and Julie Mehretu. Okwui Enwezor's participation in *Five Continents and a City* would prove to be a veritable Trojan horse. This exhibition was, in a way, the very antitheses of contemporary art biennales of the time. Marta Palau's text for *Five Continents and a City* reflected a certain kind of transcendental mysticism and insisted on the primacy of painting, whose essential character was not deemed transferable, and qualified other artistic manifestations – notably installations – as a pure fad. In this sense, painting was positioned as a superior art. In his text for *Five Continents and a City* entitled “Impresionante perversidad”, Okwui Enwezor attacked both this status conferred on painting and the articulation of the exhibition: “There is something paradoxical in this exhibition's conviction at a time of opening out like the one in which we are living, in which networks flow, although not necessarily, in chains between ideas, practices, places and people, in which it is possible to continue reproducing the multiple perspectives of current artistic practices taking into account not only the geographic notion: *Five Continents and a City*; but also the specification of a specific language: painting. ... Perhaps the same destiny of futility awaits this exhibition. In spite of everything, the Mexican context, with its particular historical vision of painting, presents an interesting challenge. It is perhaps therein that lies its *raison d'être*.” This was not a charge against painting on Enwezor's part, but a decentering that gave painting an erratic status rather than one the prime and grandiose source. There have been, then, *Contemporary Art of Senegal, Five Continents and a City*, and *Hacer Noche*, but let us return to Oaxaca and... to Southern Africa.

Hacer Noche/Crossing Night: we are indeed looking here at Death. Author Marguerite Duras wrote the abyssal words: “Death baptizes too.” The words of the poet Octavio Paz take us to Mexico: “If man is dust / those travelling across the plain / are men”, to a crossroads, “Cantata. Between day and night.” At the entrance to the group exhibition, on the wall of one of the two former convents, the following words of Birago Diop could be read: “Those who are dead are never gone.” (*The Breath of the Ancestors*, 1960) This Juan P. Fernández described as: “an affirmation that functions both as an epigraph and an exhibition text, saying all that there is to be said.” Here is a longer extract of this poem that millions of African school children learn: “Those who are dead are never gone / They are in the fading shadow / And in the thickening shadow / Those who are dead are not underground / They are in the tree that rustles / They are in the woods that groan / They are in the running water / They are in the hut / They are in the crowd / Those who are dead are never gone / Listen more to things than beings / The voice of the fire can be heard / Listen to the voice of the water / Listen to the wind / The sobbing bush: It is the breath of the ancestors.

Mexicans' intimacy with death is so great that some qualify death as “Mexico's national totem.” *Calaveras* (skulls) in Mexican art and the *Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead, are know well beyond the country's borders. Paz comments: “For those who live in Paris, New York or London, death is this word you never pronounce because it scorches your tongue. Mexicans, however, frequent it, ridicule it, defy it, sleep with it, celebrate it; it is one of their favourite pastimes and most faithful love. In this attitude there is perhaps as much fear as in the attitude of other peoples; but at least Mexicans do not hide from it, nor hide it; they contemplate it head-on with impatience, disdain and irony. ‘If they must kill me tomorrow, let them get on with it.’” In

Vocabulario Mexicano Relativo A La Muerte (1963), the philologist Juan Lope Blanch created a lexicon of the vocabulary and idiomatic expressions relative to death; the domain is vast. Going back in time, one of the earliest representations of death was found at the site of Tlatilco: a clay mask whose right side is a fleshy human face, while the left is de-fleshed. “The representations of skulls, crossbones, of totally or partially de-fleshed divinities; these iconographic motifs illustrate the power of regeneration and the fertilizing power of death. The bone is the hard kernel of the body; it is like that of the fruit around which flesh forms and, like it, is the seed of the future fruit.” If death causes us to experience suffering, suffocation, agony and loss, it is also a matrix, relational. It happens that, as experience, art or poetry are the trace, the sign, of a step beyond the frontier into the liminal space of death. Michel Serres reminds us that, “the real shows more relationality than rationality.” Existence is a co-belonging to different modalities. “Life and death summon humans at every turn. And their injunction is organic. For the artist, art is this very junction. It is in the body of the work like in the body of humans; it articulates them.” (C. Mouze, *Le lion Chestov*).

Santu Mofokeng, present at *Hacer Noche* with *Eyes-Wide-Shut – Motouleng Cave* (2004), expresses this junction. Through bodies, faces, landscapes, Mofokeng expresses history, memory, trauma and the spaces from which a cathartic prayer rises, a hymn to survival.

It is not a description; we are in a form of decryption. The chronical of Black South African social and spiritual life constitutes a “living metaphor”, involving the viewer in a “cognitive journey”. The man in *Eyes-Wide-Shut* is Mofokeng's brother, Ishmael, who had Aids and who, shortly before his death, went on a pilgrimage to the Motouleng sacred caves in Clarens. There is

something undefined and elusive, as Silvia Mazzuchhelli describes: “ His eyes seem closed, but this is a visual impression that requires confirmation. If you take a few steps closer to the image, you will come to a sudden revelation: Ishmael's eyes are slightly veiled, but open. Here and now, in the space of a close-up vision, the imaginary line between the man's and the viewer's gaze becomes blurred. The shadow in Ishmael's eyes does not suggest the presence of an absence, but evokes something immaterial that appears in all Mofokeng's *Chasing Shadows* pictures: an invitation for the viewer to get involved in an aesthetic experience, an exhortation to move into the space of reality to fill the gap of paradox, as the eyes are only apparently closed, and the shadow is at once real and unreal.»

In Sesotho, Mofokeng's maternal language, the word *seriti* can be equally translated as “shadow”, “aura”, “charisma”, “presence” and “status”. In the sacred space, shades, souls, presences, spirits, energies leave traces in the tangible world; more than that, they co-form the world. Researchers argue that near death experiences occur when the soul, formed by quantum substances, leaves the nervous system to enter the universe. Quantum phenomenon, such as the entanglement and superposition of states, are involved in the functioning of the brain and above all in the emergence of the conscience. This coexistence beyond biological death reminds me of the words of Buddha: “You cannot travel a path without being the path yourself.”

Samson Mudzunga works in a specific domain: performances and ritualized actions. Death is central in Mudzunga's practice; his performances concern burial and rebirth, disappearance and reappearance. Mudzunga goes as far as burying himself, and his “drums” are “coffin drums”, some on wheels, hollowed out to take Mudzunga's

body. “Reborn from the interior of his great tree drum/coffin carved in the shape of a rocket with fins of a woman and fish flanking it, Mudzunga emerged from the tail of the rocket through a small door without much ceremony or ostentation.” More than the sculptor producing a final object, Mudzunga is an artist of processes and transformation in which materiality, time and space relate, like in the “ceremonial drums;” the “sacred Lake Fundudzi” and the presence of the “ancestors”. Much could be said about Mudzunga’s highly transgressive aspect: his making drums on his own initiative; his entering the sacred lake without the assent of the customary authorities; his defiance of the tacit Singo-Netshiavha agreement on access to the lake. But this was not just a transgressive act; Mudzunga inscribes himself within tradition; he shakes up the play of power and inscribes himself in the complex historical dialectic between the constructions of tradition before, during and post-Apartheid. If Mudzunga transgresses several ancestral laws, which today are entangled with the political power of the region, his prison sentences cannot be isolated from the fact that Mudzunga explores, but also in a certain manner explodes, practices related to tradition. There is another transgression, which some would call artistic freedom, in the displacement, the translation, of a knowledge relating to the rural territory from the north to the urban centre of Johannesburg (and by extension, to international urban centres). And, more specifically, in the fact that the instance of validation and/or commission shifts from local religious and social structures to the contemporary art scene. Contemporary art is hungry to integrate real ancestral and ceremonial practices. The questionings that these new instances of validation and displacement open up are pretty vertiginous.

Let us head to the mountains of San Agustín Etna, 30 minutes from Oaxaca. It is two days after the Day of the Dead celebrations. Etna, which Sean O’Toole described as follows: “The village is reputedly one of the best places to experience Mexico’s energetic Day of the Dead festivities. During this three-day pause from normality, which kicks-off annually on 31 October, Etna locals dress up in ghoulish costumes festooned with bells and mirrors. Fortified with mescal, they dance and parade to fast-paced brass melodies throughout the night. Underpinning the febrile mood of the festivities is a clear-sighted focus on death.” William Kentridge’s elegiac video installation *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015), an eight-channel projection that presents a life-size brass-band procession and different actors carrying flags and heavy loads, was presented at the former textile mill now turned into the San Agustín Arts Centre. “It was made for this context,” said Berzunza, “who sees similitudes between the macabre dance in Kentridge’s work and San Agustín Etna’s renowned processions for Day of the Dead celebrations.” (Tracy Lynn

Chemaly) Sean O’Toole commented: “During the run of Kentridge’s exhibition, ‘CaSa’ hosted a parallel exhibition profiling Oaxaca’s rich heritage of graphic arts. Although not part of ‘Crossing Night’, the presented suggested profitable intersections between Oaxaca’s energetic woodblock print culture – the city has more than 20 active printmaking studios – and South Africa’s own woodblock and linocut print tradition, of which Kentridge is a devotee.”

In this dialogue instigated by Berzunza that might have been named “Glissant”, “Poetics of Relation”, certain *Hacer Noche* artists rooted their approach in a Mexican immersion, facilitated by the artist residencies. “Art is not an isolated phenomenon. It is produced in a specific context. It would be a shame to import an exhibition to Oaxaca that were not related to the [Mexican] context.” *Hacer Noche* was conceived as a catalyser for the creation of a South-South dialogue. In residence, Penny Siopis, Georgina Gratrix, Jared Ginsburg and Tiago Borges all produced or adapted works for *Hacer Noche* during this period. Sabelo Mlangeni was in residence there later in the year. Tiago Borges, who grew up in Luanda, ran a four-day workshop with seven students and produced a fanzine that illustrated his vision of the Garden of Eden. Speaking about the zine, Borges said: “It is local visual poetry, a construction of an experimental reality.” Zayaan Jappie enlightens us about certain implications of this work. “The fanzine is designed not merely for display in an exhibition, but with the intent of including the viewer, providing them with the option of ownership—to physically take the work, experience and marinate on its themes at leisure. He believes Mexico and Southern Africa have shared socio-political experiences including, lack of a unified identity, unequal access to resources and unrepresentative politics.” Borges added: “I hope this exhibition inspires the people of Oaxaca, especially the Afro-Mexicans who are forgotten ... I expect the exhibition to inspire a young generation of sensitivities regarding other forms of creatively understanding and thinking about the community.”

In Oaxaca, photographer Pieter Hugo exhibited twelve new pictures at the Álvarez Bravo Photographic Centre, all of which were taken during an immersion in Mexico, at Berzunza’s invitation, with as sole directive that the work focus on sex and mortality. This connection with Mexico was strengthened during and after *Hacer Noche*. Hugo made four nearly one-month trips to Mexico over a period of two years. He travelled from the northern desert region of Hermosillo to the industrial zone of Mexico City, and to the mountainous southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas. This latest corpus of 38 photos entitled *La Cucaracha* was presented at the Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2019. Let us hear how Pieter Hugo described his ties with Mexico: they “quickly became an obsession ... Mexico’s anarchic, visceral

energy got under my skin and sucked me in. ... *La Cucaracha* ... The jingle-like refrain, combining humour and derogation, is tied deeply to the specific geopolitical, historical and pop-cultural expression of Mexico – a place where hyperviolence, the joyful treatment of death, extreme machismo, expanded viewpoints on gender, dogmatic Catholicism, a reverence for the supernatural, cyclic autocracies, the provision of equitable social housing, chronic desperation and a communal outlook have all somehow found a way to coexist.” (Pieter Hugo, July 2019)

South African graphic designer Peet Pienaar has lived in South America since 2011. He designed the *Hacer Noche* poster, *piñatas* for the opening night, huge puppets that were paraded in the streets of Oaxaca, cloth for the exhibition walls, cloth for the shirts of the people involved in the project, and cut-out paper banners. On the poster, a snake and a dog stare at one another, surrounded by a triple ring of corn kernels. Pienaar stated: “I included mielies because of the Aztec belief that maize was the origin of Man, so it symbolises life, which is similar in Africa because of it being a main food source. The snake is a symbol of death, and the dog – according to Mexicans – represents the afterlife. It’s the same in Africa, where animals are linked to the afterlife. Also, in a lot of South African art, the dog represents the State, so I found it a fitting idea to present it in the design.”

There is a Mexican proverb that covers the walls of all anti-globalization revolts: “They tried to bury us, they didn’t know we were seeds.” These corn cobs are present in Dan Halter’s *The Revenge of 400 Years is Losing its Baby Teeth* (Oaxaca, 2018, baby teeth and maize cob). Robin Rhode’s *Harvest* (2005) is a three-minute digital animation in which the artist uses his graffiti-inspired technique to cultivate white grass painted on a black wall,

which he then harvested to make a bed. These two works were related to germination and harvest, yet O’Toole observed: “Dogs and skeletons outnumbered corn in the two-part group exhibition, which managed to capture something of South Africa’s habitual melancholy and pensiveness.”

“Lehulere’s installation *Cosmic Interluded Orbit* (2016) elaborates on his interest in African conceptions of the cosmos and features black and gold porcelain dogs, some placed on school desks functioning as plinths, appraising five partially erased chalk drawings. The latter elements dialogued well with ... *Harvest* (2005).” (O’Toole) “*Interlude Orbit* is a critique of the education systems, Western knowledge and collective amnesia seen in oppressed societies, such as colonized territories. (...) In the series of drawings *Mgodoyi 5* (1993) by David Koloane, the dogs don’t bark. They look at us, represent us. From this territory, this work allows us to encounter the myth of that night journey through the Mictlán in company of the *xoloitzcuintles*: a transition. They ceased to embody oppression, refused to be the suburban pets of the apartheid. They abandon their leashes, no longer symbolize state violence, but now become our very reflection. They deambulate, sniff around, know the way, guide us. (...) This ends as it begins, with light, in Robin Rhode’s *Harvest* (2005). An animation that relates to the epigraphs of this text and Dan Halter’s opening piece, the corn seeds and their potentialities. To germinate, flourish, break the ground, displace hegemonies, activate our components, de-fragment ourselves.” (Juan P. Fernández)

A second edition has just been announced: *Hacer Noche: Promised Land*. It will include Mexican artists and will bring together over 50 artists and cultural producers whose work explores the current and futuristic notions of resistance. Elvira Dyangani Ose, who

worked at the Atlantic Modern Art Centre and the Andalusian Centre for Contemporary Art in Spain, at the Tate, and who, since 2018, is head of The Showroom in London, will be curator. In partnership with the State of Oaxaca, and Oaxaca de Juárez’s public arts organizations and spaces, *Promised Land* will take place from October 2020 to February 2021.

I hope to be in Oaxaca in October. I will meet, then, Frida Robles, a Mexican artist whose practice has taken her many times to Africa, notably to Nigeria and Senegal. She did an installation there entitled *Echoes of the Resistance*, conceived in the framework of the Raw Material Company programme for the Dakar OFF Biennale. This intervention was part of the *The Revolution Will Come in a Form We Cannot Yet Imagine* project by Dulcie Abrahams Altass. In the epigraph of *Echoes of the Resistance*, Frida Robles deployed the words of Achille Mbembe: “There is a type of drum that resonates as if several are being beaten at once.”

Stef Yamb
English text :
Melissa Thackway

hacer
noche
**francisco
berzunza**

interview
ANA WELTER

contemporary arts



Hasser Noche
Exhibition view, 2019
Courtesy of the artist

***Hacer Noche* (November 4, 2018 - February 5, 2019) was Mexico's first-ever showcase of South African art, the exhibitions created a dialogue between the two regions. It was a first large-scale exploration of the historical links between Southern Africa and Mexico through the lens of contemporary art. Contemporary art and artists from Southern Africa were invited to interact with the Mexican cultural context. The project looked at societal relationships to death and dying in Southern Africa and Mexico: the relationship between violence and death, the ethics of how we relate to corpses, our rituals of life, death and the afterlife, our connections with our ancestors.**

Artists exhibited were Tiago Borges, Steven Cohen, Jabulani Dlamini, Marlene Dumas, Dumile Feni, Jared Ginsburg, David Goldblatt, Georgina Gratrix, Haroon Gunn Sallie, Dan Halter, Nicholas Hlobo, Jackson Hlungwani, Pieter Hugo, William Kentridge, David Koloane, Moshekwa Langa, Kemang Wa Lehulere, Ernest Mancoba, Sabelo Mlangeni, Santu Mofokeng, Samson Mudzungu, Zanele Muholi, Simphiwe Ndzube, Athi Patra-Ruga, Jo Ractliffe, Robin Rhode, Tracey Rose, Cinga Samson, Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, Johannes Segogela, Penny Siopis, James Webb and Portia Zvavahera.

Conversation with Francisco Berzunza, curator of the first edition.

Ana Welter: Could you tell us about the genesis of *Hacer Noche*?

Francisco Berzunza: *Hacer Noche* started when I came back to Mexico after a season of living in South Africa. The minister of Culture asked my advice on another show and the idea of bringing artists from Southern Africa and how to link it to Mexico popped up in our conversations. Originally the title referenced a term used by a group of South African printmakers: "crossing night". But when we tried to translate it, it sounded terrible and we found a Zapotec word which translates "to create the night". It was a non-literal but accurate interpretation of what the original term meant.

Why South Africa out of 54 African countries?

Although geo-historical exhibitions are totally outdated, I tried to recreate Fernando Gamboa's model of exhibition-making which is not seriously perceived by the cultural elites of Mexico anymore, but with a twist acknowledging Oaxacan traditions of craftsmanship. It was about testing the model in a different context, but sadly I didn't take into account several variations which made it redundant when it came to explore a region-country through art in order to make it accessible for wider audiences. However, the model is still current in the sense that it can attract large audiences, which in a way is positive.

How was *Hacer Noche* founded?

I approached my best friends Dario Yazbek and Paola Plaza and told them I needed their help to make the show. We started as "idrisnaim" because an NGO needed to be established to coordinate all the different venues which belong to different institutions or are independent. Very soon after we asked Paloma Porráz for advice as she is the most legendary museum director of my generation and she told us to reach out to Ery for the exhibition design. As the *Hacer Noche* name became more recognizable and people asked us to carry on with the project we decided to establish a new NGO, with a new format and a proper board and call it *Hacer Noche*.

Why Oaxaca and how was the reception there?

Oaxaca is the best location for a multi-venue show (Centro Cultural Santo Domingo, Centro Cultural San Pablo, Centro Fotografico Alvarez Bravo, Centro de las Artes San Agustín, Etna Museo de Arte Prehispánico Rufino Tamayo and the Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca (IAGO)). The state has a rich afro-Mexican History and has dozens of independent and remarkable cultural institutions. The response was one of confusion but yet amusement because people in Mexico City couldn't believe that a show of this size and importance was being held outside of the metropolis and the local population were just very happy to be exposed to something new. The exhibition received over 102,000 visitors during a period of 4 months.

There is also a residencies program, talks and workshops?

We organized seven residencies for South African artists and five more were invited but declined to participate. The community in Oaxaca gave a warm reception to the talks, although at the time they were poorly attended. Language was an issue I did not anticipate and next year we'll have professional simultaneous translators.

Regarding the workshops, three were remarkable with Penny Siopis, Jo Ractliffe and Tiago Borges. While a catalogue hasn't been published, we printed an edition of the journal *Fractal* with texts by Tamar Garb, Okwui Enwezor, Salah Hassan, Andreas Huyssen and Sean O'Toole amongst others. We won't repeat this model for the show next year. This time we'll partner with a Mexican and a British university to coordinate the talks and bring more students from all over the country, workshops will be more rigorous and the residencies will occur only to produce works towards the show.

What could we expect for the 2020 edition?

The last edition was very successful in every aspect. Some issues were raised and made us realize that we needed to fix them. We were a small team and to take it to the next level we are now a team of over 20 close friends who happen to be leading figures in their field. We count with Dario Yazbek, Paloma Porraz, Michelangelo Bendandi, Ery Camara, Malik Al-Mahrouky, Peet Pienaar, Mariana Holguin, Eloy Borgio, Elise Durbercq, Pablo Arredondo, Aaron Changpo, Javier Amescua Manolo Penagos, Paolo Sarra and Paola Plaza amongst a sea of volunteers and the local museum directors who have trusted in us since the beginning. Special shout-out to Daniel Brena, Sara López Ellitsgaard, Mariana Zardain, Alejandro De Ávila, José Luis Noria and Gina Mejía who have been constantly supporting us from their base in Oaxaca. The 2020 edition will open on October 16th, 2020 and stay on until mid-February 2021. We can anticipate it will be much bigger than the 2019 edition. It will include new commissions, over twelve different venues, live

performances, more works, more artists, a stronger musical component and better articulated programs. We want *Hacer Noche* to be flexible and to become a project capable of hosting a major retrospective of one artist or a show focused solely in performance or colonial Peruvian art. What matters is the possibility to maximize the capacity of the institutions in Oaxaca, to make access to culture even more democratic and to make people happy.

For the 2020 edition, we have invited Elvira Dyangani Ose to be the curator of the show. Her family comes from Equatorial Guinea, she grew up in Spain and the U.S. and is now based in London where she is the director of The Showroom. It's exciting to be able to collaborate with such a beautiful mind who has, with her previous shows, pointed the finger to issues which are so relevant to the times we live in. I am sure it will be a radical show in terms of how it is presented, what it has to offer and how it changes what exhibitions can do for a society.

Inviting an African curator, is that a way "to pass the baton"? Will all the following curators be linked to the African continent?

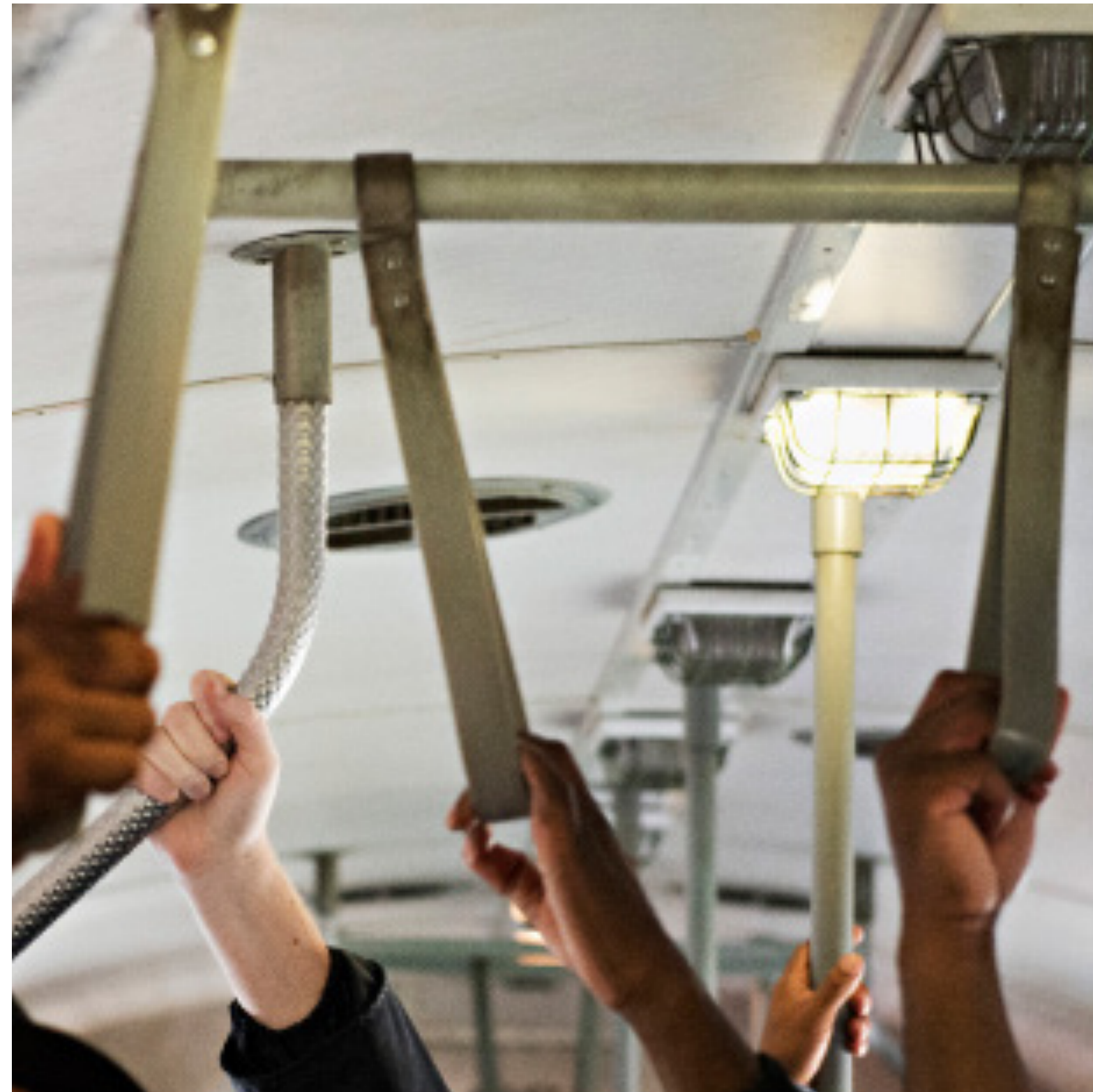
We just had to be realistic and none of the founders, Dario, Paola or myself is a professional curator. I find it is a specific expertise which is better left for a technician, a specialist in their field. I studied anthropology, filmmaking, history and political science; Dario is a historian and an actor and Paola is a tax lawyer so our knowledge of art comes from how we were brought up and the people who surround us. We needed a highly respected and like minded professional to carry on with *Hacer Noche* and Elvira was perfect for the role. Although the term is pretentious, it should develop in a rhizomatic way. The curators for *Hacer Noche* could come from anywhere, nationalities are not an issue for us, what matters is experience and creativity.

What is your own experience with the African continent?

I did a Master in Political Science at the University of Cape Town and later on I had a position linked to the Mexican Embassy in Pretoria. I have travelled extensively throughout the continent and I guess Johannesburg and Cape Town have defined me as a person more than any other place besides Mexico City.

In an interview you said: "I felt a duty towards a country that has shaped me profoundly and a sense of frustration at the lack of recognition or acknowledgement of African art by Mexican institutions in general". Could you please explain?

We can count with my two tiny pretty hands the African related exhibitions in Mexico throughout the years, and in relation to South Africa or more specifically the showcase of art from the region in Mexico, I can count them with the five fingers of my left hand. How can one of the largest networks of public cultural institutions in the world neglect the artistic production of generations of African creators? It's insulting and speaks of the narrow minds of our diplomats and how



Jabulani Dhlamini
On our way to FNB stadium
for Mandela's memorial service
from JHB, Soweto, 2013
Courtesy of the artist & Patrick Jabulani

provincial our institutions have become. When Mexico re-inserted itself in the international circuits it did it with a sense of aspiration, not of cosmopolitanism. A big problem of “contemporary art” is that context is easily neutralized, and when you do that you tend to erase History.

How could you qualify the interest for African art / culture in Mexico?

Mexico has historically been a hyper connected place in terms of culture. However, for the past years our cultural policy has been less diverse and less interesting. As I said before, it seems the only exhibitions that have queues of people are Impressionists and Koons (yawn). Yet, the movements of afro-descendants have played a big role in starting conversations about and with Africa. Our first show is proof that there is so much potential, that people want to engage with communities and histories from all over Africa and the world. I believe efforts in other realms than visual culture has been more prominent like in the fields of dance and music.

Which examples could one give to illustrate the artistic links between Africa and Mexico?

There have been some isolated cases of collaboration between the region and Mexico. Some shows include Okwui Enwezor's *Snap Judgments* or his participation in *five continents, one city*, or William Kentridge's *Fortuna*. A whole generation of African artists was influenced by Mexico and the first wave of muralism. I can think of Ibrahim El Salahi who painted one of his most important works *The Last Sound* after he met Rufino Tamayo while visiting Mexico City, or Gerard Sekoto and Peter Clarke who explicitly cited Diego Rivera as influence. The Casablanca school is present in Mexico City through a permanent sculpture by Mohamed Melehi. Mexico occupies an important place in the imagination of a lot of African artists, and the other way around I can think of the work of photographers Graciela Iturbide, Pablo Lopez Luz and artist Francisco Toledo.

You also said: “We need to find new ways of making exhibitions”. Could you please explain?

And we do need to find new ways of making exhibitions. The previous models are almost obsolete or they've become so self-obsessed and cryptic that in an age when what we call “culture” is more accessible than ever to more people, large audiences are either uninterested or feel they don't belong to these spaces. The white cube, the long-length narratives, biennials, relational aesthetics have all exhausted themselves. In Oaxaca we've learnt that in order for people to experience art as part of their lives, it must become an everyday thing, not a ceremonial affair or one that is painful (as in boring).

We are changing things, from exhibition design to how text is consumed in shows, how people physically interact with works and how works interact with the sites. Site specificity is another concept that has been over-used and is irrelevant. The same installation by the same artist was site-specific in the Cuzco Biennial, the Bottrop Festival and the Kuala Lumpur Art Summit. Instead we want works that are relevant to Art History, works that become part of people's routine or their cultural references. As an example of this, I can speak of how children in Etla would go every day to the William Kentridge piece and play inside the room with the piece on, or a girl wrote to Georgina Gratrix to tell her how every day before work she would go and look at her paintings. Pieter Hugo's photograph of a naked woman with a crown of flowers now hangs at Oaxaca's oldest cantina. That's not site-specific, that's iconic. I admire Tomás Toledo and his whole team at MASP, including Amanda Carneiro for creating exhibitions which are bold, immaculately researched, accessible to everyone, praised by critics and milestones for Art History. It's an inspiration to witness how a museum is changing an entire generation of young people and creating a world class safe space in the midst of political chaos. In the same way, another prominent Toledo, Francisco Toledo the greatest

Mexican artist of the second-half of the 20th century, established a whole network of free, accessible and democratic institutions which have in a way, made us re-think how to make an art exhibition relevant in a country with so much poverty and so much inequality.

Where on the African continent would you show art and how?

I would love to do a touring exhibition all over the continent about corn: corn food, corn art, corn clothes, corn photos, and corn people. The same grain which changed the history of mankind in Mesoamerica after it was domesticated in Oaxaca, is the same grain which changed the history of Sub-Saharan Africa. How do people relate to corn? How do they represent it? What do they use it for? How is it worshipped? Even when sometimes the conditions are not ideal, I think it's worth it to do these exercises because the more you see, the more experience you have and that changes your expectations and how you deal with life.

Hopefully sooner than later we'll be able to make an exhibition of the work of Francisco Toledo in collaboration with Daniel Brena and Amigos del IAGO y del CFMAB, the NGO Toledo founded. I owe it to him, and he deserves to be celebrated and his work appreciated from Bamako to Nairobi and from Durban to Kinshasa, in the hope that this might have as much of an influence on people there as it had on me.

Ana Welter



OAXACA CITY, MEXICO

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“promised
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2020

interview
STEF YAMB

contemporary art

Stef Yamb: To be in charge of the second edition of *Hacer Noche* in Oaxaca, entitled “Promised Land”, which will explore current and futuristic notions of resistance, appears in your path, for the reasons explained above, as a conjunction of the planets. The excitement must be great?

Elvira Dyangani Ose: Indeed. I see every exhibition, every project, as an opportunity to tell a story, to expand on a myriad of ways our understanding of the world, its histories and stories, to reshape the present, to imagine the future... Whether those new understandings come in the form of artworks with socio-political overtones or with new aesthetics challenges. Every project is a sort of extended dialogue; critical propositions or provocations to which both the artists and I respond. To do so in the context of Oaxaca – which as you said has an incredible history from recent moments of critical rebellion to an extraordinary atemporal milieu of vernacular knowledge and cultures – is a privilege.

***HacerNoche: Promise Land* will include Mexican artists and bring together more than 50 artists and cultural producers. The first edition brought together artists from Southern Africa around the Relationship to Death in Southern Africa and Mexico. The first thing I would like to ask you about is the presence of Mexican artists in this second edition. The second, *HacerNoche: Promise Land* will be part of a south/south transcontinental dialogue as it was in the first edition? From which geographical areas and/or artistic and research fields will these artists and cultural producers come?**

Exhibition making for me is a tool to read the context, which here will be highlighted by the presence of Mexican artists and interventions in the public space of Oaxaca. In general, I'm not interested in the artist's provenance unless that she,

he or they determine that knowing that fact is fundamental in telling their story. I'm moved by that storytelling, by the environment they are hoping to transform, the communities with whom they want to interact. In the particular case of *Hacer Noche*, we are inviting artists whose work has the capacity to generate platforms to establish spaces of ecological, socio-political, or cultural resistance.

In that respect, we will randomly explore transnational, historical and contemporary episodes that celebrate solidarity between artists – and other communities – from various regions in the world. Those episodes institute moments for the reinvention of aesthetic production and the formulation of art as a social fact. Among them, the beginnings of house music, whose hymn Joe Smooth's *Promised Land* and its longing for a world of unity and freedom, give the title to our project. The celebration of cultural disruption, the appropriation of the means of production that defied capitalist perspectives, and the reinvention of the ritual, meant a revolution in that context. To that and other revolutions, to the idea of a revolution understood beyond the single event – as Audre Lorde would say; to the notion of the *performativity* of history, this edition will also be dedicated.

My burning question is related to the previous. Your university studies concern art and architecture. During the Gothenburg International Biennale of Contemporary Art entitled “A story within a story” you worked with the architect Santiago Cirugeda for *House of Words (HoW)*, a platform for social participation and storytelling. “The aim was to produce a space that operated as the common house of words—in Spanish ‘casa de la palabra’— that I experienced during my childhood in Bata, Equatorial Guinea. A space of sociability, solidarity and collective knowledge.” you said. For

“Basilea” (Creative Time's / Art Basel's Messeplatz) you initiated a collaboration between the artists Lara Almarcegui, Isabel

Lewis and the architecture studio Recetas Urbanas, directed by Santiago Cirugeda. This open and participatory space has been active during three weeks. In your text “For whom are the biennials organised?” you mention that Arts & Urbis brought together artists, curators, urbanists, architects and cultural and social workers. This connectivity between art and architecture will be deployed in Oaxaca? This leads to a second question about the relationship, city/art/architecture.

To the extent that some of the artworks will be produced in public space, but not necessarily in the way that the projects you discussed above did. A key element there – and I hope that will be the case in Oaxaca – is the audience. I always do projects for the public that will attend them, that will participate in them. Their experience as visitors is fundamental in this equation. The visitor that has come from afar to engage in a new environment but, most importantly, the people that have transited a space in a city or visited tons of times the same museum or public square, how can we offer them a new narrative of that place?

You said, “I was born in a place of dissent”. You talk to “reactivate our political relationship to the practice of art”. Between the harshness of the struggle, the dimension of walk the talk and the dimension of care, the openness of possibles.. how do you articulate what for many of us is a double imperative, hold booth politic & poetic? This is addressed to *Promise Land* in Oaxaca, but also to your practice at The Showroom in London, where you recently presented an installation of Em'kal Eyongakpa. An artist who brings to a point of incandescence, the tragic and the poetic space, fluidity and circulation, the intersection and meeting of many fields, visual and sonic, scientific and mystical, political and poetic. From Oaxaca to London, from Douala to Lubumbashi, what about current and futuristic resistances?

From Spain where you were born and Equatorial Guinea you belong to the Spanish linguistic and cultural area. From this language, your double culture (which also constitutes Mexico) and your immersion in the worlds of art, what elective affinities did you have with Mexico before focus yourself to *HacerNoche: Promise Land*?

There are aspects of Mexican popular culture that were a definite part of the imagination of my adolescence – the engravings of Elizabeth Catlett, the Siqueiros murals, the life and work of Frida Khalo. Then, through history of art, I learned even more about social struggles and the revolution that the country endured in the first quarter of the 20th century and its aesthetic explosion in muralism.

I read more about Surrealism and psychoanalysis, Stridentism, and the relationship of the Popular Graphic Workshop and creators like Catlett. The Mexican art I grew up with was full of the epic, Surrealism and hope. And maybe that's why, too, it oozed political intention and imagination for social change. At that time, I was also studying African independences and the cultural production those political moments generated, along with the demonstrations of workers and students, and other class struggles of the late 60s, early 70s. This project offers us the chance to reflect on how the desire for social justice is manifested in art – then and now, in Mexico and Ghana, in South Africa or Spain. It also explores our capacity to imagine the world beyond the presentness of any struggle, various notions of *becoming*, of potentiality, of the possibility of personal and collective transformation. The exaltation of that imaginary lies in this edition of *Hacer Noche*, one in which the city of Oaxaca, its institutions and its people, have a fundamental role.

Stef Yamb

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ratcliffe

interview
DANIEL BRENA

photography

Daniel Brena: You've mentioned that you were influenced by Mexican photographer, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, and in particular his photo *Obrero en huelga asesinado* (1934). How has this photograph influenced your work?

Jo Ractliffe: My first encounter with Manuel Álvarez Bravo's photograph, *Striking worker, murdered* (1934), was in 1982 when I acquired a book called *World Photography*, edited by Bryn Campbell. It was my first real exposure to international photography - South Africa was very isolated during that time and books like this were quite difficult to come by. It was a wonderful book, encompassing everything from street photography to reportage, to war, to fashion to medical science, to art. And it introduced me to many of the great photographers like Robert Frank, Joseph Koudelka, Bill Brandt, William Klein, Henri Cartier-Bresson - and of course, Manuel Álvarez Bravo. If I think about it now, that book was critical in shaping my understanding of photography. And when I read what the photographers had to say about their work, it occurred to me that the separations between genres or conventions or approaches - whatever terms or classifications you might use - were not fixed. Things overlapped, you could mix up conventions and there were ways of working where your interests could be political and poetic or expressive at the same time. This was quite unusual in South Africa where photography's primary role was to expose the injustices of the apartheid government and there were fairly clearly delineated codes and conventions about how people worked. Which brings me to the photograph of the murdered striking worker: I was simply transfixed by the image - such violence, such beauty! People say it's Álvarez Bravo's most political image, that it's almost journalistic - especially given its title. I think the power of that image is the way in which the political and the poetic merge. It's very specific: there's no mistaking it - the violence in the image and in

the title, and there's even the flag as a backdrop. And yet it's also a very poetic, affecting image, and there's so much to read into beyond the immediate. I think it has something to do with its stillness. Every time I look at the photograph I am struck by the impossibility of death in that young man.

So in this image - and in Álvarez Bravo's work generally - it's as if certain elements or objects in the image stand in for something else; things seem more than they appear to be, as if he had parted the veil between the appearances of this world and what lies behind it. I love that about his work and it's something I strive to work with in my images.

When I first saw your pictures, I was struck by how they seemed bathed in a very different light than photography in Latin America. Given that you produced new work in Oaxaca, México can you comment on the differences between the light in South Africa and how you incorporated Oaxacan light into your pictures?

I hadn't thought about that. In Oaxaca I wasn't aware of a great difference between the light there and back home in South Africa - a bit thinner perhaps, less harsh and bleached. I've heard people talk about the difference between southern and northern light, but I didn't need to adapt my way of working in Oaxaca. I don't have much experience working outside of southern Africa and I've found even here at home, the light can vary greatly depending on the region. But then also, I've never been overly preoccupied light - partly because in my work, I don't often have the luxury of waiting for the 'right' light - if there is such a thing - so I have to work with whatever light quality is there, in the moment.

It might also have something to do with the way I shoot and print. From the early days I've rated my film a stop overexposed - shooting 400 ASA at 200. And then in my prints I like to maintain as much shadow and highlight detail as possible, printing mostly on grade 2 paper. So the harshness of the light here gets somewhat compressed by that reduced tonal range. There's something similar I've noticed in Álvarez Bravo's photographs (although I've seen only a few in the original - most reproduced in books), where his images seem almost overprinted, bordering on flat, and yet there are still rich tonal shifts and detail in the shadows.

How have your strategies for creating work changed over time?

That's an interesting thing to think about because I've worked in various modes over the years, from 35mm and medium format, 'proper' cameras to plastic toy cameras and simple point-and-shoot cameras. And each requires its own approach, both conceptually and technically. But as far as strategies go, my approach and the way I operate, hasn't really changed much since I first started taking pictures in the early 1980s. I work very simply: just a camera and spotmeter and, when I need it, a tripod. With a few exceptions, such as when I was travelling through Angola

with veterans, I work alone. I'm a slow worker; I make a number of visits to the places I'm working, over an extended period, and so the work develops over time through a process of accrual, as I get to know the places I'm photographing.

I've always worked in the landscape; in some ways it's less of a 'subject' than it is the medium through which I can explore questions of violence, conflict and memory - in particular, the ways in which past violence is manifest in the space of the present. Most of my work starts in a fairly open-ended way, usually prompted by a question or experience that I want to explore, or sometimes something I've read. But I don't pre-empt things or plan much in advance; most of my research is unfolding while I'm doing it, and even where there is research to be done, lived experience is very different on the ground and this often directs the work.

That said though, in 2015 I sustained a spinal injury and that has forced a significant change in my approach. Since then my photography has shifted away from the research-based, extended photo essay, which required lengthy and repeated journeys into the landscape, to a more sporadic way of working, and closer to home.

South Africa has produced an amazing number of great photographers, however, there aren't as many museums and schools dedicated to photography as other countries with similar photographic production. What made South Africa such a fertile ground for photographers?

That's a big question! But at the risk of being overly simplistic, I would say that the violence and oppression of the colonial and apartheid eras laid the ground for photographic practice in South Africa - as it did for many forms of cultural expression here. So you could say that photography developed as a mode of defiance - that's been its driving force - a means of active resistance against the injustices of apartheid.

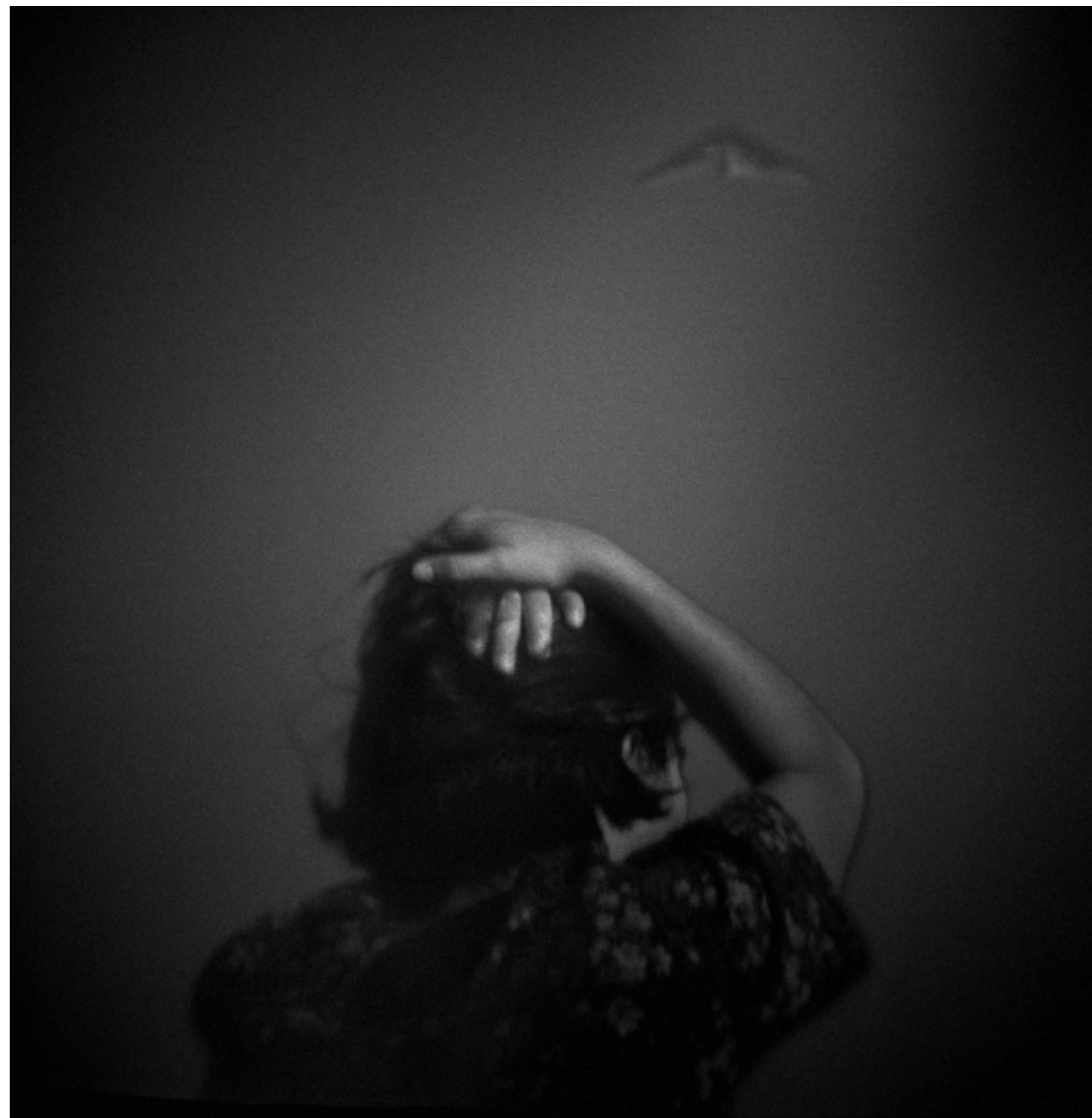
You have been involved in teaching photography students in South Africa. What are some key insights that you try to convey to young photographers?

I've been teaching since the mid-1980s. These days, many of my students tease me, saying that I'm very 'last century'. And I am aware, especially as I get older, that I inhabit an increasingly different world from theirs. The challenges and pressures facing emerging photographers - all young people actually - are very different, as is the world we live in. It's a more competitive, technological and deeply unstable world - I mean this in terms of a global uncertainty as much as local. And there aren't recipes for success - certainly not as a photographer. But what remains at the core of everything for me is hard work, commitment and the courage to stay true to who you are.

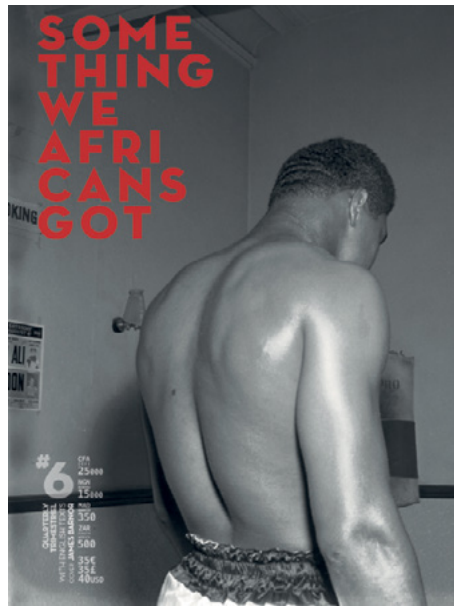
Daniel Brena



*Piet Basson's bible,
Riemvasmaak, 2013*
Silver gelatin print
25 x 31cm Edition of 3 + 1AP
Courtesy of the artist
& Stevenson, Cape Town
and Johannesburg



Jo Ractliffe
Microlite, 2004
Pigment print on cotton paper
Size: 35 x 35cm Edition of 10 + 2AP
Courtesy of the artist
& Stevenson, Cape Town
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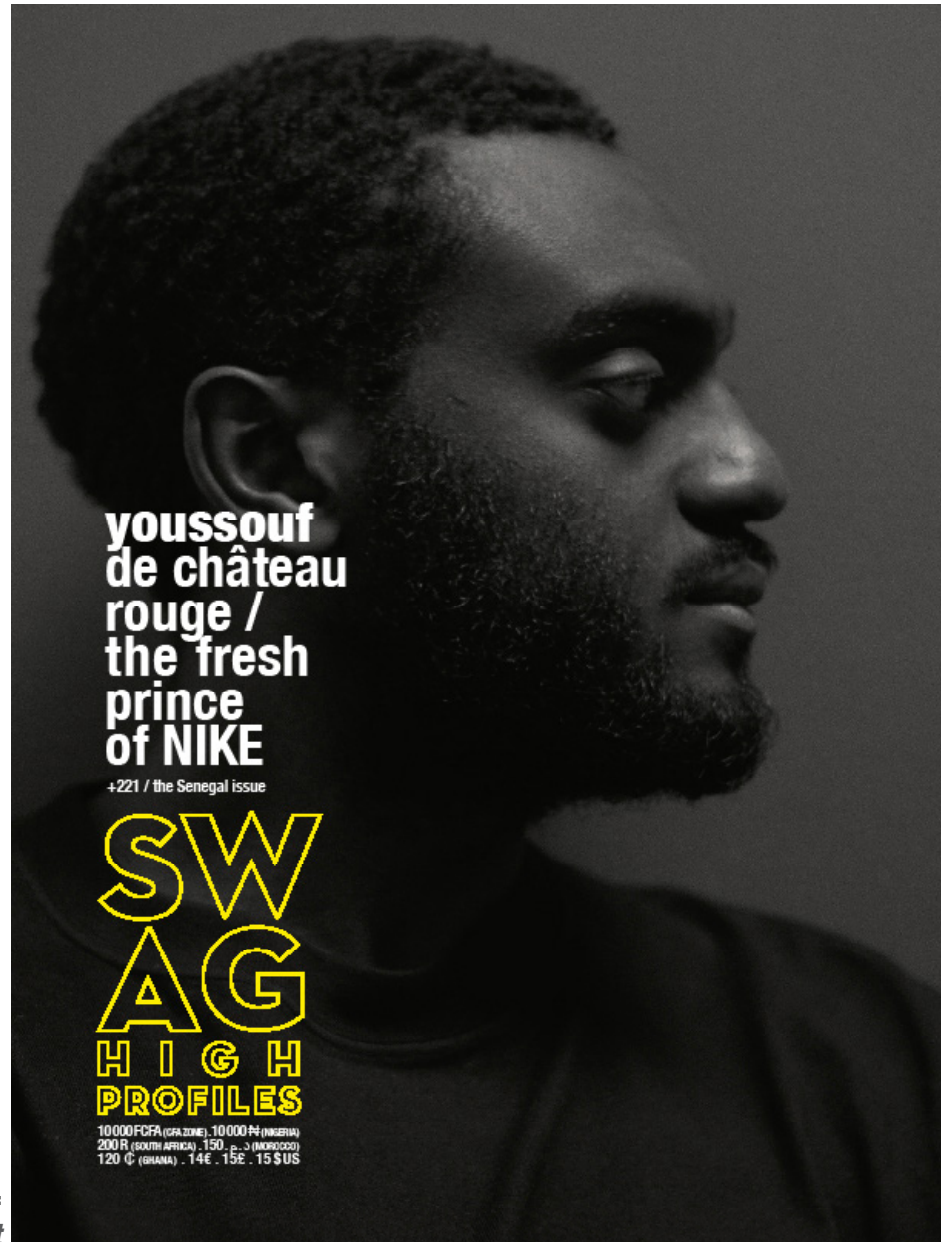


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