

The Heart of the African City

Of Mapping and Resourcing

by Shane de Lange and Harrie Siertsema

The history still to be made will take into consideration the place (the architecture) in which a work comes to rest (develops) as an integral part of the work in question and all the consequences such a link implies. It is not a question of ornamenting (disfiguring or embellishing) the place (the architecture) in which the work is installed, but of indicating as precisely as possible the way the work belongs in the place and vice versa, as soon as the latter is shown.

– Daniel Buren¹

Art and architecture have long shared the responsibility of uplifting communities and structuring society. Presently, this responsibility is mapped over the urban landscape, taking in the various socio-political and economic circumstances that surround and support the engineered and manipulated environments of the modern city. Design thinking and artistic intervention are important factors in the construction of the moral and aesthetic vision of any society – keeping in mind geographical and political variables – and within this framework the city can be

viewed as a resource, a concrete yet fragile habitat for human consumption, growth and sustainability.

Globalisation, accelerated trade and communication networks have made it impossible to ignore the difference in perspectives between industrialised and post-industrialised geographies, specifically with reference to the first world/ third world polemic. Africa is a key geography in this context, and is thus the focus of *The Heart of the African City*. This exhibition follows the centenary celebrations of the University of Pretoria, ironically constructing a narrative of colonialism in South Africa through reference to the collection of buildings on the main campus of the university. *The Heart of the African City* can also be seen as a continuation of various dialogues generated by the ArchiAfrika biennale. These dialogues consider the infrastructures and environments originally set in place by colonisers but now in use by post-independence regimes. They also explore the impact (conscious or otherwise) that architecture has on our lives, and the ways in which art can serve as a resource for shaping and re-imagining existing environments.

The Heart of the African City is presented as part of the conference *The African City Centre (re)sourced*, a joint

initiative of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Pretoria, The Pretoria Institute of Architects and ArchiAfrika. A symbiosis between *The Heart of the African City* and *The African City Centre (re)sourced* created a space loaded with historical meaning and allowing for comment on a century of varying representative forms and identities in South Africa. Artists selected for this exhibition were asked to respond to this metaphoric space as well as to the actual spatial qualities of the surrounding architecture, with the idea that they would generate an awareness of the often-opaque relationship between art and architecture in South Africa. It was hoped that they would, at the same time, contribute to the mapping of a de-colonised, post-industrial, late-capitalist and pluralistic global community divided and unified by various political, economic, religious, ethnic, tribal and cultural pretexts and contexts.

Events such as *The African City Centre (re)sourced* often expose the ambiguous and problematic processes of identification and representation in the global community, implying the question "who gets to speak". As Roland Barthes pointed out in relation to the 1955 photography exhibition *The Family of Man*, "We are at the outset directed to this ambiguous myth of the human 'community',

which serves as an alibi to a large part of our humanism".²

Art is one way to document the ebb and flow of culture, history and identity, without which no geography can cohere. Architecture, too, is important in this regard. Built environments are sensitive sites because they literally contain the memories of the communities that inhabit and use them. They are also part of the infrastructure upon which societies and their customs are based, and in Africa, this infrastructure still conveys the values of the colonial powers. As Gwendolyn Wright suggests: "To understand the modern urban condition in Africa is inevitably to explore the legacies of colonialism, for it was under this aegis – both programmed and opportunistic, historical and ongoing – that contemporary African cities took shape, and most Western cities as well."³

At the same time that the West often operates opportunistically in relation to the urban African landscape, new technologies such as the Internet and other global communications systems are erasing and solidifying territories and borders. These territories are implicated in a dialogue that attempts to dissect the

pluralisms and polarities of a constructed but often schizophrenic global community. In this context, it is important not to forget that there is diversity in the world, and that everything cannot be homogenised – as colonialism had hoped, and as globalisation currently seems to suggest. The work selected for this exhibition gestures to the memories contained in the architectural monuments of South Africa in general and in the architecture of the University of Pretoria in particular.

Architecture is a material manifestation of ideology, memory, tradition and culture – recorded, formalised, communicated and poeticised through artistic practice. Buildings are monuments to institutions past, present and future. What many architectural structures fail to take into account is the potential generated by artistic intervention in architecture to create environments that add a sense of purpose to individuals and communities. The Heart of the African City hopes to foster an awareness of the collaborative relationship between artist and architect, who together can build towards a future in which consequences and responsibility are always considered, since, as Machiavelli observed,

... he who becomes master of a city accustomed to freedom

and does not destroy it, may expect to be destroyed by it, for in rebellion it has always the watchword of liberty and its ancient privileges as a rallying point, which neither time nor benefits will ever cause it to forget ...⁴

Notes

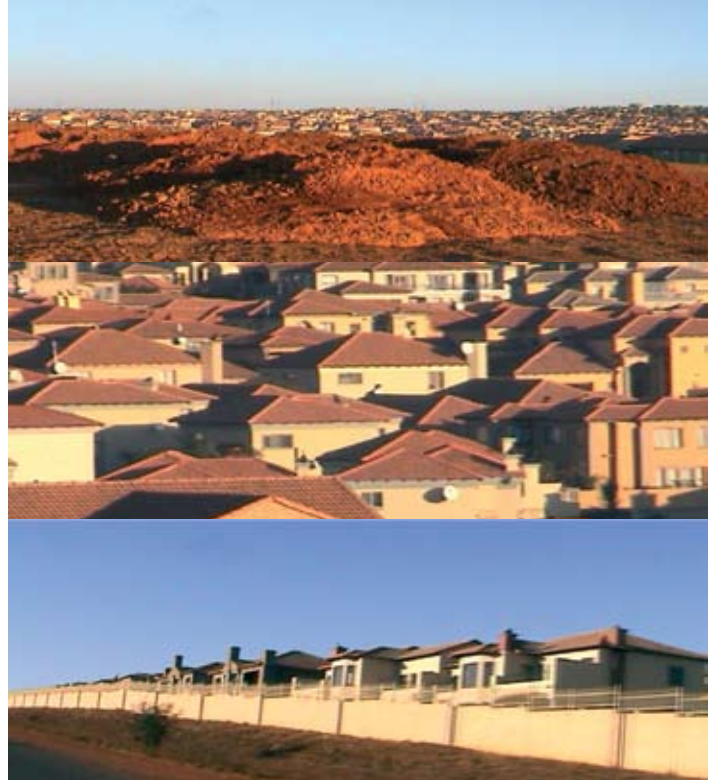
1. Barbara Vaderlinden and Elena Filipovic. *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-War Europe*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005, p. 63.
2. Roland Barthes. *Mythologies*. London: Vintage, 2000, p. 100.
3. Okwui Enwezor. *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*. Munich: Prestel, 2001, p. 225.
4. Cited in Guy Debord. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books, 2004, p. 119.

Artist: Jacques Coetzer

Title: CLUSTER PARK (still frames from video), 2006

Medium: Digital video loop with stereo soundtrack,
3min.15sec, framed LCD monitor, headphones

Shot at dawn and dusk over a period of three weeks in the winter of 2005, *Cluster Park* documents housing development in the Pretoria-Tshwane and Midrand areas of Gauteng, South Africa.



Artist: Jacques Coetzer

Title: OH NOW, 2006

Medium: Public intervention (with the assistance of Brindley Pritchard, Felix Oosthuizen and Abrie Fourie)

Real-estate signs next to the N1 highway in Centurion, Gauteng, were rearranged in this public intervention. Commuters could read the message in the signs for three weeks before the developer eventually moved the giant letters back to their original positions.



Artist: Deadheat

Title: MONUMENT TO THE FUTURE, 2009

Medium: Public intervention

The work unfolds as a set of instructions for the construction of a non-permanent monument dedicated to a future structure. The monument is fabricated from moulded concrete blocks used in highway construction. They are numbered and documented. As they will not remain permanently, they capture the moment before construction. Deadheat commissioned an architect to propose plans for a potential structure with the blocks as elemental units. What emerges is a poetics of the temporary.



Artist: Happy Dhleme
Title: DOWN TOWN JOZI, 2008
Medium: Giclée on Perspex
Dimensions: 37 x 50 cm

Dhleme's work in photography and installation is concerned with deconstructing urban architecture, with peeling back the accretions of modern urban life. He questions the notion of photography as a representative medium, suggesting instead that it is a medium that not only shows but also reinterprets what it finds in the world.



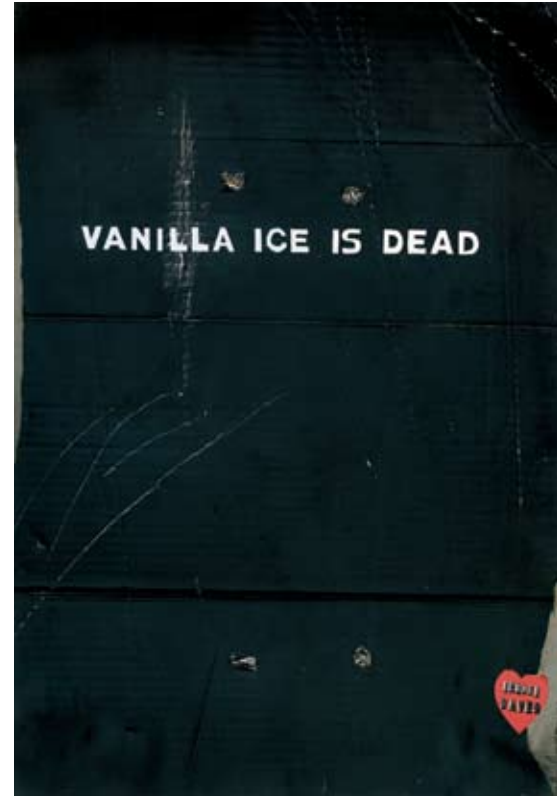
Artist: Ingozi Disco

Title: WISH YOU WEREN'T HERE, 2009

Medium: Postcard

Dimensions: 14.5 x 10 cm

Ingozi Disco is a schizophrenic celebration of the assumptions that underpin the dominant narratives and institutions of 'our' global village. *Wish You Weren't Here* is a commentary on voyeuristic and capitalistic visions of Africa in a hyper-stimulated world. It addresses the idea of rootedness using a specific South African vernacular, and alluding to things that South Africans take for granted, such as crime statistics. Ingozi Disco enacts processes of propaganda or 'hype', thereby attempting to impress and construct the proletariat. In *Wish You Weren't Here*, postcards tell the story of alibi and exile, and disco speaks of asylum and anarchy.



Artist: Ismail Farouk
Title: GOD'S LAND, 2009
Medium: Flickr posting

Highlands Hill, Yeoville, is an important public space where indigenous African religious practices are given expression and hundreds of worshippers gather daily to pray. Much of this activity occurs in contravention of laws set out by the city parks utility company managing the space and enforcing the 'no prayer' regulation by threatening to arrest worshippers for loitering. Much of the hill is earmarked for redevelopment as housing for inner-city residents. By altering existing exclusionary signposts on the Hill, God's Land points to the conflict between the spiritual needs of the local community and the needs of mainstream development. It draws attention to the need for spatial justice in this and other urban landscapes.



Artist: Abrie Fourie
Title: WAYMARK/WANTON, 1999-2000
Medium: Lightjet print
Dimensions: 34 x 42 cm
Edition: 10

The Voortrekker Monument is a familiar sight to anyone living in Pretoria, South Africa's executive capital. Initially its construction was linked to a vow made to God by the Afrikaner people should they obtain victory over their enemies. I've always lived in Pretoria and this peculiar building is an image that permeated my youth. It has a dreamlike quality, as if it were a castle built on sand, but standing still, a casket emptied of its historic glory, the remnant of a past best forgotten.



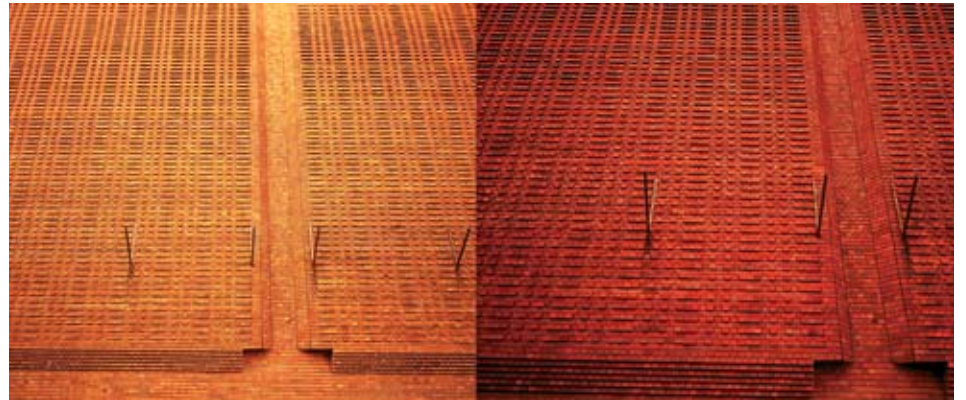
Artist: Abrie Fourie

Title: SWALLOWED, 2002

Medium: Duratran in lightbox

Dimensions: 120 x 300 cm

These two, almost abstract images were taken moments after each other, in the late afternoon. The street behind the building curiously has no name – a back alley, next to a river, where children and other furtive characters come for dubious privacy. The immediate environs are shabby, littered. The only indication of the building's purpose is a sign indicating 'River 132 KV Substation'. Probably built in the seventies, its patterned exterior has a retro feel to it, old and new at the same time. The interior remains stubbornly impenetrable. I heard that some kids had tried to climb its walls and had fallen, and so a barbed-wire fence was installed against the wall to protect children from hurting themselves.



Artist: Gordon Froud

Title: ROSE PORTAL, 2007

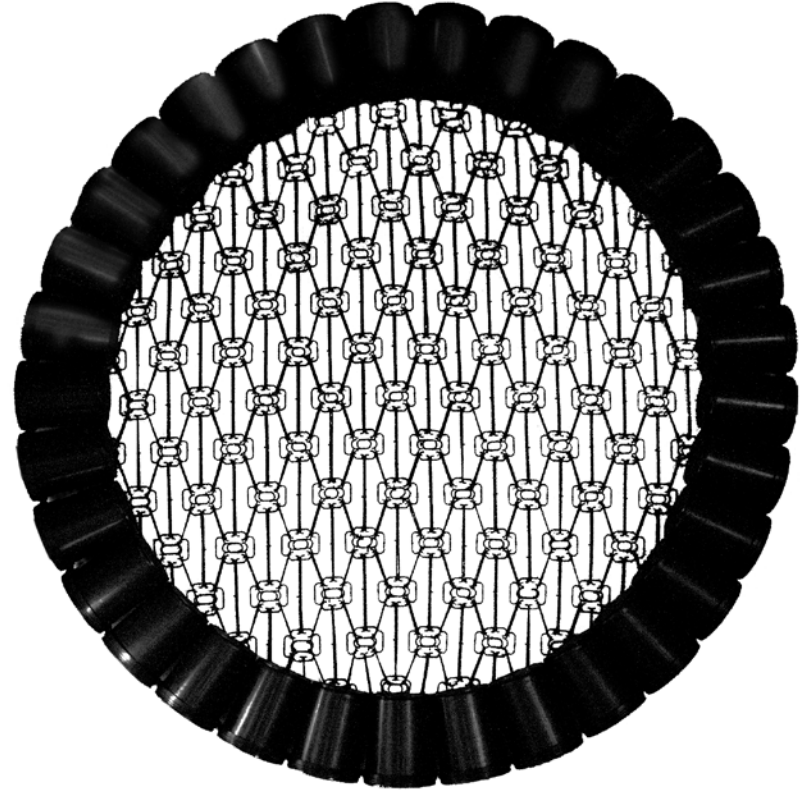
Medium: Plastic coat hangers, cable ties and buckets

Dimensions: 350 x 350 x 50 cm

Edition: 3

"Using plastic coat hangers and buckets Froud creates objects that question, mislead and misinterpret. Froud is drawn to experiments in shape and texture. But his application of these elements leads to new forms and possibilities. On the one hand, he maintains the integrity of his material by not overextending it and by eschewing support structures ... On the other hand, Froud takes plastic to its limit ... [stretching] the physical properties of the medium as far as he can ...".

Johan Myburg, 12 November 2007



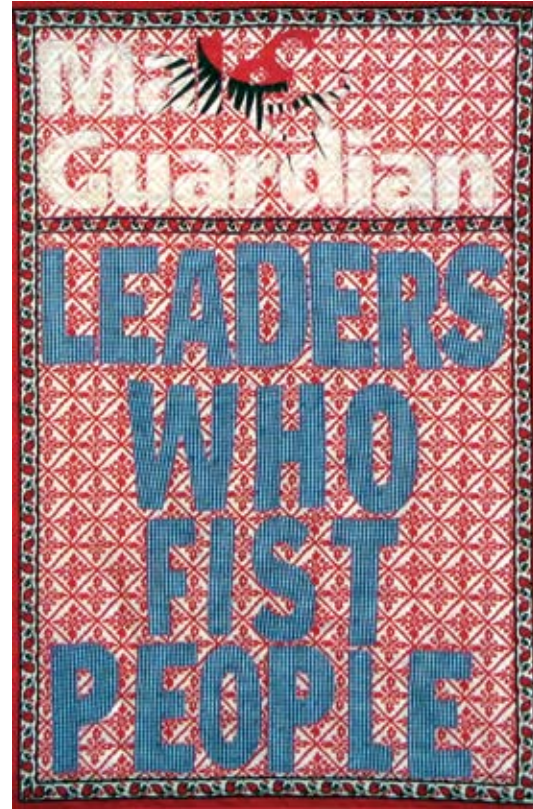
Artist: Lawrence Lemaoana

Title: LEADERS WHO FIST PEOPLE, 2008

Medium: Textile and embroidery

Dimensions: 124.5 x 83 cm

Using current headlines – commonplace in the streets of the city – Lemaoana playfully reverses dominant archetypes of masculinity and manhood. Using patterns, colours and fabrics drawn from modern, tribal symbolism, Lemaoana inverts established narratives into unorthodox perspectives on heritage, birthright and ancestry. The poetry of lost leaders and forgotten fathers is carefully stitched into text-based works such as *Kill a Man's Pride* and *Things Fall Apart*. Titles are 'crowned' with appropriated newspaper brands, as in *The Manly Son* and *Male and Guardian*.



Artist: Maja Marx

Title: PEDESTRIAN POETRY, 2007

Medium: Public intervention

In the series of works entitled "Pedestrian Poetry", I produced a collection of six painted Zebra crossings in Twist Street, central Johannesburg. The texts were painted late at night using large stencils in what is viewed by some as one of the most unsafe areas in Johannesburg. The production of the texts took on the performative quality of official road construction and marking, including the use of uniforms, official road paint, security banners and flashing amber lights ... The texts serve as bridges between point A and B, between the one side of the road and the other, between down here and up there, and ultimately between the self and other. In resonance with the transient nature of my landscape interventions, these painted Zebra crossings, have been swallowed by the passing traffic, with the photographs serving as the surviving trace and documentation thereof.



Artist: Titus Matiyane

Title: PANORAMA PIETERSBURG-SASOLBURG; PRETORIA,
CITY OF TSHWANE (detail), 2004

Medium: Pencil and watercolour

Dimensions: 46 x 1.5 m

Titus Matiyane makes large, panoramic drawings of cities and landscapes. The drawings are emblematic of his obsession with the built environment and modern cities. The city that Matiyane inhabits shares countless commonalities with cities in many other parts of the world and, as a result, Matiyane has been able to generate panoramas of these places without ever visiting them. His understanding of how the modern city works – with its industrialised buildings, standardised building materials, high-rise blocks, grid-iron roads, elaborate transportation networks and scrappy hinterlands – allows him to generalise, and the wide format of his ‘bird’s eye’ panoramas mesmerises and compels the viewer.



Artist: Sean Slemon

Title: JOBURG PREVIEW: REGION 8, CENTRAL REGION, 2005

Medium: Ink drawing on Fabriano

Dimensions: 75 x 100 cm

In making this body of work, I was looking to interrogate the way in which South Africans have, historically and politically, approached the issues of land and community. The work addresses questions of who had access to where, and how the population was distributed – and by what means (political will, the lay of the land, access etc). More importantly, the work asks how this is beginning to change, if at all. Looking through the lens of population distribution, I saw these works as a litmus test of where South Africa was at and what, if any, progress had been made on these important issues.



Artist: Johan Thom

Title: CHALLENGING MUD (AFTER KAZUO SHIRAGA), 2008

Medium: Single channel video loop on DVD (format 16:9, HDV converted to Pal)

Duration: 10 min 42 sec

On Sunday 23 March 2008, the artist covered his entire body with honey and gold leaf for a private performance in which he was to be buried alive by his wife and a close group of friends. In the resultant artwork the viewer witnesses an unseen hand slowly covering a golden figure lying in a foetal position at the bottom of a grave.



Artist: Johan Thom

Title: OUTPOST #FOUR, 2008

Medium: Silent video loop on DVD (format 16:9, HDV)

Duration: 4 min 48 sec

In *Outpost #FOUR* the central figure is dressed in a white worker's uniform onto which approximately 3000 envelopes were hand stitched, some containing loosely fitted paper-printouts of the letter x in red. Around the figure are scattered loose boxes, all seemingly packaged for transport purposes. As the sun rises he unfurls a massive red flag that he gently waves from side to side. This action progressively increases in speed and intensity before the video abruptly cuts to black.



Artist: The Trinity Session

Title: PUBLIC ART SHOULD HAVE AT LEAST 3 FUNCTIONS, 2008

Medium: Found situation

Taking on the role of public art commissioning agents for the city of Johannesburg while maintaining parallel artistic practices, Stephen Hobbs and Marcus Neustetter revel in the intermediary stages of the development of the city and in particular where urban regeneration and creativity struggle to marry. Their installation in this regard takes a self-conscious, ironic, behind-the-scenes look at the battleground that is art in public space. Various modes of documentation – photography in particular – serve as the means for recording transitions towards a finished project, and the work presented for *The Heart of the African City* employs an annotated digital collage of this mode of production.



Artist: Andrew Tshabangu
Title: LOOKING OUTSIDE, 2004
Medium: Fibre-based print
Dimensions: 50 x 75 cm
Edition: 10

"Andrew Tshabangu's 'city in transition' is one the photographer sees through the haze of traffic fumes and brazier fires, through the starred glass of shattered windows. It is a city shuffling, lurching, hastening and bargaining its way towards an uneasy truce with the twenty-first century. This body of work suggests that his concern with the ever-shifting social, political and physical landscape of a city presents itself as observation from the inside and the outside at once."

Bronwyn Law-Viljoen, 2007



Concept: ArchiAfrika

Curator: Shane de Lange

Co-Curator: Annemieke de Kler

Co-ordination: Harrie Siertsema

Advisors: Stephen Hobbs and Abrie Fourie

Text Editor: Bronwyn Law-Viljoen

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Lawrence Lemaoana courtesy the artist and Brodie/Stevenson, Andrew Tshabangu courtesy Gallery MOMO

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