

C&

CONTEMPORARYAND.COM

PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONAL ART
FROM AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES

**SPECIAL:
10TH BERLIN
BIENNALE**



YOU ARE ALREADY IN IT
LOOKING AT A GLOBAL DIASPORA



CONTENTS

**SPECIAL:
10TH BERLIN BIENNALE**

6 – 9
DINEO SESHEE BOPAPE
The artist’s complex creativity gives form to a practice that is simultaneously idiosyncratic and richly associative.

10 – 14
GABI NGCOBO & YVETTE MUTUMBA
The biennale curators talk about the meaning of refusal, how they’ve dealt with various kinds of expectations, and the importance of saying things with a different kind of clarity.

15 – 17
JULIA PHILLIPS
The German-born artist talks us through her inspirations and the work she’s decided to present in Berlin.

35 – 39
JOHANNA UNZUETA
Having a keen interest in the history of industrial materials, the Chilean artist connects industrialization with colonization and capitalism.

40 – 43
THIERRY OUSSOU
The painter explains why his work for the 10th Berlin Biennale is a piece of contemporary remembrance, and why we don’t need more heroes.

**FOCUS:
C& ROUND TABLE**

20 – 21
ELISABETH EFUA SUTHERLAND
“It’s about the power of the narrative. People ask you, ‘Who are you?’”

22 – 27
FAITH RINGGOLD
“I am very inspired to tell my story, and that’s my story.”

28 – 31
ZINEB SEDIRA
“Identity is very much at the core of every artistic practice, whether painting flowers or exploring one’s culture or politics.”

32 – 33
KELVIN HAIZEL
“The question points to the overburdened subject every artist from the Global South has had to grapple with in the last thirty years.”

C& OPINION

44 – 46
ON CAPITALISM AND BLACK REPRESENTATION
When discussing art and culture, capitalism and neoliberalism are often overlooked and contribute to a hierarchy in Black representation.

SPRÜTH MAGERS

ORANIENBURGER STRASSE 18 10178 BERLIN

SENGA NENGUDI

MAY – SEPTEMBER 2018

KARA WALKER

MAY – SEPTEMBER 2018

ANDRO WEKUA

MAY – SEPTEMBER 2018

ORANIENBURGER STRASSE 18
10178 BERLIN
+49(0)30 2888 4030

7A GRAFTON STREET
LONDON, W1S 4EJ
+44(0)20 7408 1613

5900 WILSHIRE BOULEVARD
LOS ANGELES, CA 90036
+1 323 634 0600

HONG KONG OFFICE
+852 9019 0289
SPRUETHMAGERS.COM

EDITORIAL

EDITORS' NOTE

“Our goal – and the ‘we’ is always the right mode of address here – is not to end the troubles but to end the world that created those particular troubles as the ones that must be opposed [...] Moten and Harney tell us to listen to the noise we make and to refuse the offers we receive to shape that noise into ‘music.’”

Jack Halberstam in *The Undercommons* by Stefano Harney & Fred Moten

Gabi Ngcobo is the artistic director of the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art — a good moment to reflect on the ideas of “the global” in the German art capital. Berlin’s institutions are pointedly trying to produce “politically correct” projects that are committed to artistic positions beyond Euro-America and don’t shy away from “problematic issues” such as (post)colonialism, migration, and nationalism. Examples during this and last year include the solo exhibition of Kemang Wa Lehulere as Deutsche Bank’s Artist of the Year, at the bank’s KunstHalle, and ifa’s year-long project around the theme “Colonial Legacy and Contemporary Society,” featuring distinguished names such as that of installation artist Pascal Marthine Tayou. Most recently the Hamburger Bahnhof opened its major exhibition *Hello World*, examining the “globality” of their collections. *Hello World* is part of a broader trend of German museums exploring that question — at least for now, based on current funding priorities.

These examples indubitably demonstrate that the German cultural landscape is (finally) starting to question its contextual approaches and policies. But what relevance does this really have in broader social contexts? How enduring is it, after all?

From October 2016 to May 2017, the German Historical Museum in Berlin presented an exhibition on German colonialism. There is plenty to say about that, but to give you a feel for where all our questions come from, here is an actual encounter one of us had while reading a text about Afro-German history in the exhibition. Suddenly a gallery assistant approached, asking: “Excuse me, do you speak German? You have to move a bit farther from the display, please.” As an Afro-German visiting an exhibition on colonialism, to be asked whether one speaks German — despite obviously reading a German text while leaning

over a display about Afro-German history — was aggravating, to say the least, and symptomatic of a larger issue: the continuing stasis when it comes to the definition of who is and who is not German.

So what do all the above-mentioned efforts mean in a country, a city, whose institutions are starting to speak “global,” but where moments like these still happen with significant frequency? Zooming in on the arts and culture scene, it is clear that most producers and audiences are not aware of either these kinds of situations or the concrete implications of notions such as (post)coloniality, migration, and racism. Their understanding rarely extends beyond the tendency to capitalize on a “global art quota.”

Hey, don’t get us wrong. Berlin is a great, open, and international city. And a growing acknowledgement of art as global is undeniably a very positive development. Having Gabi Ngcobo as this year’s curator of the Berlin Biennale is a huge deal. The unfortunate thing is that when talking to members of the art scene or reading the German arts pages, it’s a big deal because she is a Black South African woman curating this biennale together with an all-Black team. To quote one such article, “Art is the new Black” (“Kunst ist das neue Schwarz”). This is unfortunate because it reflects the ongoing hierarchies within the art world, of which many are not even aware.

We still live in an (art) world where a Euro-American “us” exists alongside a Global South “other.” So if the latter breaks into the former’s system — unfortunately it is still a big deal. The upcoming Berlin Biennale will surely use the chance to create a corrective, place things in a new perspective, and confuse entrenched ideas.

The C& team

GIVING BIRTH BEING BIRTHED

DINEO SESHEE BOPAPE'S complex creativity gives form to a practice that is simultaneously idiosyncratic and richly associative, writes **LIESE VAN DER WATT**



Dineo Seshee Bopape, *Lerole footnotes (The struggle of memory against forgetting)*, 2017. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut. Photo: Aad Hoogendoorn



Dineo Seshee Bopape, *Mabu, Mubu, Mmu*, 2017. Mixed-media installation, variable dimensions, installation view, Future Generation Art Prize. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut. Photo: Pinchuk Art Center

Giving birth. Being birthed. Bopape performs this birth with every creative process anew, giving form to a practice that is simultaneously idiosyncratic, local, and specific, but also richly associative, reaching far into that space beyond words and conventional language.

Dineo Seshee Bopape is a South African artist who explores the cultural and personal dimensions of emotion and representation. Although she works with a vast array of media, Bopape is best known for her immersive environments, one of which won her the 2017 Future Generations Art Prize. Her creative process – which is showcased at the 10th Berlin Biennale – is simultaneously idiosyncratic and richly associative. When Dineo Seshee Bopape speaks, her hands join in the conversation. They seem to punctuate phrases, they complete sentences while her voice trails off, they trace forms and outlines in the air where words seem to fail her, they flutter and feel around for stable ground. It is as if she is searching, constantly, for that which lies beyond language, trying to hold onto a realm which isn't ordered by syntax and semantics but by an altogether more fluid and nebulous state where meaning is never anchored but endlessly sought for, suspended, and deferred. In an interview Bopape once mentioned that languages “speak her” as much as she speaks them. It was a somewhat offhand comment, perhaps an afterthought, but it provides a subtle yet crucial point of entry into her art, suggesting

an idiosyncratic relationship to communication and the act of creating. Take, for instance, the various iterations of what is often inadequately referred to as her “land” or “earth art,” which she has produced over the last few years after moving away from earlier video art and for which she won the Future Generation Art Prize in Venice in 2017. In *sa — ke lerole, (sa lerole ke —)* (2016) and *Mabu, Mubu, Mmu* (Venice, 2017), she fills an empty room with compacted soil, into which she fashions various shallow, round, womb-like holes, sometimes lined with gold leaf, around which are dotted rocks, shells, feathers, healing herbs, and clay forms produced by a clenched fist. Bopape references her biography when she talks about these works, invoking the dry earth of Polokwane, north of Johannesburg, where she grew up, but also the more urgent politics of land and landlessness in her home country. In South Africa, as indeed everywhere else, land is a proxy for many conflicts around race and dispossession, and therefore a site of memory and identity. But it is clear that for Bopape the land or earth is an extension of the gendered self, as if the self is the land, as if the land – like a language – “speaks” the self.

Like the titles of the two above-mentioned works, which both refer to soil and dust as an active and productive substance in Bopape’s native Sepedi language,¹ her land works suggest a relationship with the land that is integral, primary, essential. This is crucial: unlike most land art, where the artist creates or fashions or manipulates the land from a Cartesian distance – creating an object to be viewed by the detached eye – it is as if Bopape emerges from the land, as if she is inside the land: the clay formed by a clenched fist emerging from a self in and of the land. In a London talk, Bopape discussed *Sedibeng, it comes with the rain* (2016), which was acquired at Frieze for Towner Gallery in the UK. The work, as the gallery’s head of exhibitions Brian Cass explained, represents “the edge in landscape.” It is a mixed-media installation with anthropomorphic metal structures and bendy beams, with bags of herbs, feathers, mirrors, and images of fruit and African flowers scattered among the beams. A slide projector shows the clenched fist, moulding and discarding clay shapes. The installation invokes cosmology, fecundity, productivity, and frustration in that ubiquitous fist. It is landscape by association only. “Is Miro an influence?” asked someone in the audience. “Not really,” answered Bopape, somewhat puzzled. Ana Mendieta? “Maybe. A little.”



both images Dineo Seshee Bopape, *Sedibeng, it comes with the rain*, 2016.
Mixed media, variable dimensions.
Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut

These are reasonable suggestions, but I realized that something was eluding and probably ensuring the fascination of this largely European audience: it is not only the metaphysical and spiritual practices relating to Africa and its Diaspora that Bopape refers to in this work. There is something much more elementary and intimate at play which has to do with a local tradition of South African sculptors such as Jackson Hlungwani and Samson Mudzunga, who had deep and bonded relationships to the earth from which they fashioned their wooden sculptures, and from which Mudzunga would emerge repeatedly, staging his rebirth. It also has to do with an aesthetic that references the color of South African dust, the bareness of a scrubbed and swept yard around a Limpopo homestead, and with the ordered randomness of ritually significant objects in that land. By this I am not suggesting that there is something essentially “African” in this work and therefore illegible to anyone who is not African; rather I am suggesting that there is an aesthetic and emotional charge in this work that is uniquely located in place and site and in an altered and radically different relation to land and landscape.

In *Sa koša ke lerole* (2016) Bopape explores the history of the Polokwane Choral Society, of which both her parents are members and which has played an integral part in her life. The work may seem surprisingly documentary in an oeuvre so committed to association and intuition, but in fact it circles back to that same concern with rootedness and memory and language. On one level this is a layered history of a communal choir through archival photographs, video, and sound, interviews and various memorabilia. Yet the installation is also a complex journey into memory, interiority, and identity and how this is born from place and history. As much as Bopape creates this work, the choral society also “sings” her into being. Giving birth. Being birthed. Bopape performs this birth with every creative process anew, giving form to a practice that is simultaneously idiosyncratic, local, and specific, but also richly associative, reaching far into that space beyond words and conventional language.

Dineo Seshee Bopape is a participating artist in the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, taking place from June 9 to September 9, 2018.

1

To be precise, *sa ___ ke lerole*, (*sa lerole ke ___*) (“that which is made ___ is made of dust [that which of dust is ___]”) and *Mabu, Mubu, Mmu* are all variants of the word for soil.

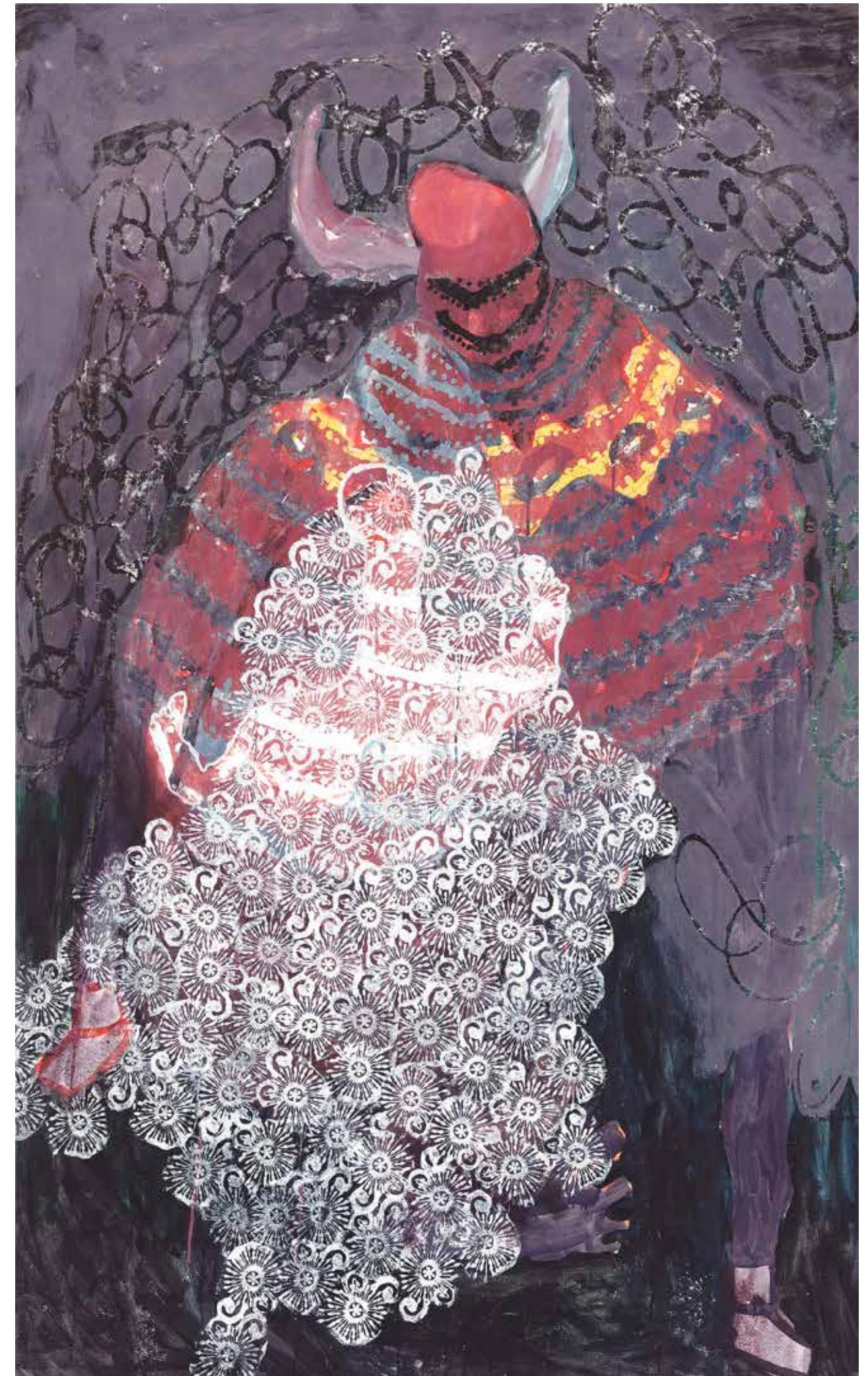


Dineo Seshee Bopape, *Mabu, Mubu, Mmu*, 2017. Mixed-media installation, variable dimensions, installation view, Future Generation Art Prize. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut. Photo: Pinchuk Art Center

OPACITY IS A DIFFERENT KIND OF CLARITY

Since the announcement in late 2016 of **GABI NGCOBO** as the curator of the 10th Berlin Biennale, anticipation has been running high – and the expectations too. Ahead of the opening, C&S's **JULIA GROSSE** sat down with with Ngcobo and **YVETTE MUTUMBA**, one of the biennale's co-curators and C&S's co-founder, to talk about the meaning of refusal, how they've dealt with various kinds of expectations, and the importance of saying things with a different kind of clarity.

opposite Portia Zvavahera, *Hapana Chitsva (All Is Ancient)*, 2018.
Oil-based printing ink and oilstick on canvas, triptych, part I, 204 x 126 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg



CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) The biennale’s title, *We don’t need another hero*, as well as the title for the public program, *I’m Not Who You Think I’m Not*, underline a position of negation or refusal, in a good way. Where do these negations or refusals come from?

GABI NGCOBO I guess they come from different places. I think one is an expectation of what the biennale will focus on based on our subject positions. The negations can be read as a way of distancing ourselves or escaping a certain kind of expectation so we can work with the freedoms that other curators don’t even have to claim. And it became necessary to have these kinds of negations, especially with the public program title.

C& Why the public program title in particular?

GN Well, we decided to start the public program a year before the biennale would open. So it became an important tool to create a space, to have this conversation freely, and not to wait until the artist list was released. The public program helped us set the tone for the Berlin Biennale, but also to figure out how to work with the organization of the biennale itself.

YVETTE MUTUMBA It also helped us a lot, while we were on the go, to think about what refusal even means. We had a lot of conversations figuring out if it’s against something, or whether it’s about being elusive. Is it something positive or negative or even violent? In that sense it was quite useful that people had certain expectations – or still have – because it forced us to really think through what our language is, or what language we want to use that stands against those expectations.

C& The title *We don’t need another hero* seems to focus on collective power.

GN Yes, I think that’s important. You know, when people like us – also women in general – go into these power positions, often they’re not interested in changing the rules of the game. They kind of play that game as they find it – as it’s defined by, let’s say, hierarchies defined by white male power. Over centuries. One has to be careful about how one refuses that position, because of course we are not refusing our subjectivities,

and the fact that when we start thinking about the exhibition itself we think from a certain perspective. We also get asked questions that would never be asked to other people. There are a lot of other people who think that we start from the same position, especially white women. They make remarks about a shared subject, focus, or theme, but for us this is not a matter of interest or focus – we can only begin from here, it’s our reality, this is us – it’s not our subject.

C& In terms of representation, when the news came out that you would be heading the Berlin Biennale, what was the feedback from the Black art world – did it also bring forth certain expectations?

GN Well yes, those expectations are the other side of the same coin, actually. Our negations were influenced by different sides, of course. So we try to find the language ...

YM ... to also confront those very specific expectations.

GN It’s Antonia Majaca who has written and delivered a couple of lectures titled *Against Curating as Endorsement*, and I think that’s a really important position. For us this project is also not about gathering together people who agree with each other, or with us.

C& And you’re not representative of anyone.

YM Exactly. Because that cannot be our job either, to cater to expectations.

GN And a lot of expectations directed at us were assumed that we would of course work with certain culturally specific institutions in Berlin or address certain unresolved questions that have been at the center of the cultural landscape, such as the Humboldt Forum ...

YM And it was very clear that we would not be interested in addressing those venues. At the same time, with Akademie der Künste for example, how we relate to the works shown there is still very political and historical.

C& How did you negotiate the selection of lesser-known artists and big names, as well as non-living artists?

GN Well, we didn’t sit down and say, “We need dead artists.” It was a series of

conversations and chance encounters, which were quite great. Nomaduma Masilela, from our curatorial team, encountered the work of Mildred Thompson when she was working at MoMA and started to research her work. Thompson in fact created a lot of work in Germany when she was self-exiled from the USA. We thought it would be an important position to bring through. We wanted to have strong female perspectives in the exhibition, and so there are those that are not alive anymore but what they did was very important – also their deaths maybe. Women like Gabi Nkosi and Belkis Ayón and Ana Mendieta. The fact that we have more female artists is because these are positions that we are interested in and that are most visible to us. We see them.

YM We see them and then we connect with them, and that’s exciting. With Mildred it was great to find all these things out, like this interesting German connection, also in terms of a broader context and in relation with Audre Lorde and other people who are important for us. I think that’s the same with the big names, and not-so-known names. Some say every big biennial “needs” two or more people who are being “discovered.” It was really clear that we didn’t want that. So if there’s an unknown name, it’s not because we want to unearth this name from Africa or wherever.

C& I like your idea, Gabi, that as an artist you add a touch of deviancy to your curatorial roles. Because you have also worked as an artist.

GN In this project and in my general practice, I think it’s an interesting part of my life to retain. That doesn’t mean that I exist in a studio, but I think keeping this identity allows for this deviancy. I am not governed by the rules that I didn’t make for myself. And I don’t think that artists are more special than other people doing important work in the world.

C& Let’s talk about Berlin as a city, with its deep, complex historical layers – how did that inform your thoughts about the Berlin Biennale?

GN I don’t think this exhibition would be possible anywhere else. We didn’t want the weight of history to overwhelm us. Of course, it’s there. But we point to these



above Karl Peters, Portrait of Mildred Thompson, early 1970s. Photograph taken with fish-eye lens

below / left Mildred Thompson, *Untitled (No. VIII)*, 1973. Silkscreen print on paper, 61.3 x 42.9 cm

below / middle Mildred Thompson, *Untitled (No. IV)*, 1973. Silkscreen print on paper, 61.3 x 43 cm

below / right Mildred Thompson, *Untitled (No. III)*, 1973. Silkscreen print on paper, 61.1 x 42.9 cm

all images Courtesy The Mildred Thompson Estate and Galerie Lelong & Co., New York



things in very poetic ways. And we hope that people in Germany, in Berlin, will find things that resonate ...

YM Also, there are [history-related] activities and interventions already happening in Berlin, so we did not want to reinvent the wheel. I think it's a little bit like what I said before, with regard to the venues, where there are historical references but they're not an obvious framework for the exhibition.

GN Avoiding the about-ness.

YM Exactly. And we have certain artistic positions that go very specifically into these histories. The installation by Zuleikha Chaudhari, for example, deals with an aspect of the city that is not well known – it explores the complicated trajectory of Subhas Chandra Bose (1897–1945), a charismatic leader of India's struggle for independence. Not only did the Nazi government help fund the Free India Center in Berlin, where he served as an ambassador of sorts, but it embedded his *Free India Radio* programs in its own propaganda broadcasts to India.

GN Also, in terms of the spaces that we chose, the environment of Akademie

der Künste, the fact that it's surrounded by a garden, and that people can create some breaks within the space itself is also important. It's the same with ZK/U – Center for Art and Urbanistics – it has a public park, greenery, where people can also rest. With regard to the Akademie there is also the fact that it holds a lot of history within its vast archives, so vast that no one who's alive knows everything that's in there. And I think for us it was important to enter those archives to be able to look at certain things.

YM So we visited the archives, digging out material, like posters and artworks which reflected the connections between the former East German Akademie and socialist countries like Cuba.

C& Are you going to show them?

YM It was more an awareness of what's there rather than literally putting them into the exhibition. To see what kinds of histories the Akademie contains. Also to understand what stands for artistic excellency in the context of the Akademie: for centuries it was Western, white European, male positions. Of course bringing in the artists that we chose is also a statement of saying what artistic excellency can also be, as the

Akademie is still about membership, still an exclusive club.

C& Speaking of awareness – the graphic colors and the pattern of the Berlin Biennale, what do they refer to?

GN The dazzle camouflage is also a kind of a negation – the idea is taken from war-historical narrative. In World War 1, ships were painted in different color patterns so that they were not easy targets. So it meant that whoever was trying to attack the ship was not really sure of the direction it was taking. It's an interesting history, because it was to obscure the direction, the size, and the intention of the ship, but when you read more about it, it didn't help that much – the ships that were painted in dazzle were attacked. Perhaps even more than those that didn't have it.

C& Because they tried to become invisible?

GN Yes. Not invisible per se, but to be differently visible. Because of course they could be seen. For us the search for language is the search for a language to be differently clear. To speak about the same things have been spoken or written about for hundreds of years, and to see if we can say it with a different kind of clarity. It also allows for this position to be opaque, in the knowledge that opacity is a different kind of clarity.

IN MINIMALISM EVERYTHING COUNTS



The German-born artist **JULIA PHILLIPS** met C&'s **WILL FURTADO** to talk us through her inspirations and the work she has decided to present at the 10th Berlin Biennale

Julia Phillips, *Exoticizer, Worn Out* (Josephine Baker's Belt), 2017.
Courtesy the artist and The Studio Museum in Harlem

left image Mildred Thompson, [Woodwork], 1969. Wood, nails, green paint, 90 x 103 x 6.3 cm

right image Mildred Thompson, [Woodwork], 1969. Wood, nails, brown paint, 90 x 103 x 6.3 cm

both images Private collection. Courtesy The Mildred Thompson Estate and Galerie Lelong & Co., New York

Julia Phillips is a Hamburg-born artist based in New York City whose work addresses the body and mechanisms of oppression, among other subject-object relationships. Through video, sculpture, drawing, and printmaking, the artist uses materials metaphorically to create artworks that are both sensual and conceptual. In addition to taking part in the 10th Berlin Biennale, Phillips currently has a solo show at New York’s MoMA PS1 and is included in the New Museum Triennial. We spoke to the artist to discuss the problematics of an assumed shared knowledge, how growing up surrounded by Bauhaus-inspired materials has shaped her mentality and aesthetic, and how Germany’s post-WWII reparation payments could work as a model for other types of reparations.

CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) What sort of culture and media did you grow up on?

JULIA PHILLIPS I wasn’t allowed to watch TV as a child or teenager, except the news and a very small selection of harmless programs. Of course when I was visiting friends’ houses I got my MTV fix. Music-wise I was influenced by a broad range of artists. I’ve been a Michael Jackson fan from the moment I can remember music. My mother also brought my attention to the opera singer Jessye Norman, who is still a major inspiration to me – her dedication and the integrity with which she approaches her art. As a teenager one of my biggest influences in terms of female empowerment and Black female role models was Destiny’s Child.

C& Your works have titles in English. Why not in German?

JP I remember being influenced by Sol LeWitt’s work quite a bit when I first started traveling to New York in 2008. I kept finding reasons and ways to come to New York and loved going to Dia:Beacon and looking at LeWitt’s wall drawings and the precise descriptions of what they are. For instance *Isometric figure with progressively darker gradations of gray ink wash on each plane* (1984). I mean, it’s just fantastic. It tells you exactly what it is, and it is so much more than that, to a degree that it really isn’t what the title says it is. Beautiful. There is something about English being my second language, and the desire to express something precisely in its alienness, that I find attractive. My sculptures have specific functions and each element – also in other works that

aren’t sculptures – have a purpose. A deliberateness. If Minimalism taught me one thing it is “everything counts.”

C& One of your titles refers to Josephine Baker. Why her?

JP Speaking of identification. There are a few markers to Josephine Baker’s persona that I can identify with or see family history reflected in. A Black American woman from the South, who, tired of segregation and violence against Black people, migrates to Europe with the hope of a serious career and more opportunities. Who finds herself exoticized in a predominantly white country, eroticized as well. As a fair-skinned, slender, energetic joyful source of endorphins. Who has a complex mind and a developed intellect, is engaged with the political situation but known and represented as a sex symbol.

C& How do you negotiate your German background in your work, as an artist who is based in NYC?

JP I don’t really – at least not consciously. My German education just reminds me of the fact that assumed shared knowledge – anywhere really – is a problem. Our knowledge is informed by so many influences, and education is just one of them. Many things that I learned in school and that I simply could not identify with just passed right through my brain and didn’t stick. And some knowledge did. But then I also sought out certain knowledge by surrounding myself with certain people. It’s so subjective. If I navigate anything, it is the voices that I choose to listen to. In terms of my German background and heritage, I think Germany shaped a big part of my mentality. And of my aesthetics. My father, as a Bauhaus-inspired architect, built the house that I grew up in. I was surrounded by glass and steel (and some concrete). My sculptures consist of ceramics, steel (and lately concrete). Another thing that comes to mind is a job that I had in 2015/16. I was working as a telephone operator for the German missions to the UN and the consulate. I handled all incoming calls and a lot of them I had to transfer to “Wiedergutmachungen” – German reparation payments to those Jewish people who qualify, living in the New York area. Just recently I was thinking about

guilt and responsibility and reparations. And how such payments would work for the historically colonized people living here in the US.

C& What is the concept behind your work at the 10th Berlin Biennale?

JP There is one sculpture and a series of prints. The sculpture is titled *Operator I (with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, Aborter)*, 2017. The piece resembles a surgeon’s trolley, with four “tools” on top, which the titles in parentheses refer to. I think of that object as an analogy to a relationship, that’s why there are two sets of handles attached to the trolley, to underline the collaborative aspect. The work is quite personal, and at the same time addresses mechanisms of oppression that can exist on social and political levels as well. “Muting” for instance is a mechanism that can appear within an intimate relationship, but it can happen systemically as well by violating freedom of speech rights. And the prints that were selected for the biennale are part of a series called *Expanded*, collagraphs that show stretched pantyhose printed on paper.

C& What does it mean to you to show your work in a German context?

JP When I think about my art education in Hamburg, it was very common to hear the term “Frauenkunst” – “women’s art” – especially when looking at a print that shows pantyhose. So the reading of the work will be different I think. But I don’t think that my work selected for this exhibition is very nation-specific. I think it borrows quite an ancient language of tools and human gesture that ideally is relatable to a broad audience. But I am sure the language used for unpacking the work will be different, and so will the references.

Julia Phillips is a participating artist in the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, taking place from June 9 to September 9, 2018.

top Julia Phillips, *Protector I*, 2016
middle Julia Phillips, *Extruder (#1)*, 2017
below Julia Phillips, *Operator I (with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, Aborter)*, 2017 (detail view)
all images Courtesy the artist



The Burden of Representation

In our ongoing series of round-table discussions we ask a selection of artists and art practitioners to answer a set of questions on a specific topic. This time around the theme is “identity” and the invited artists include **ELISABETH EFUA SUTHERLAND**, **FAITH RINGGOLD**, **ZINEB SEDIRA**, and **KELVIN HAIZEL**. Visit our website for the full list of contributions and other topics.

“Identity” and “identity politics” are terms with which artists from Africa and the Diaspora are often associated, whether they like it or not. This has been the case for decades, or rather ever since there has been a debate around artistic production by artists from African perspectives. The idea that those artists are working on “identity” may be one of the assumptions made by a “Western” audience – and this applies just as much to Black communities. But is this fair? Is it not also leading to a “burden of representation,” as Kobena Mercer once called it? What does it really mean to make work on our “identity”? And who gets to decide that? And what about those artists with African perspectives who aren’t addressing the issue of “identity”? Their work and viewpoints are relevant and important, as they move away from this “burden to represent.” In this round-table discussion, four intergenerational artists discuss the problematics of these terms and their usage.

01

ELISABETH EFUA SUTHERLAND

*“It’s about the power of the narrative.
People ask you, ‘Who are you?’”*

02

FAITH RINGGOLD

*“I am very inspired to tell my story,
and that’s my story.”*

03

ZINEB SEDIRA

*“Identity is very much at the core of every
artistic practice, whether painting flowers
or exploring one’s culture or politics.”*

04

KELVIN HAIZEL

*“The question points to the overburdened subject
every artist from the Global South has had to
grapple with in the last thirty years.”*

identity – what’s in a word?

“

It's about the power of the narrative. People ask you, 'Who are you?'

Elisabeth Efua Sutherland's practice is always rooted within her current environment, which at the moment is the streets of Ghana. Yet the co-founder of the Accra Theatre Workshop refuses to let her subject be reduced to "identity." Through local perspectives she wants to gain insights into the social microcosms that surround her. Be it the behavior of agitated drivers on the road or of young women trying to balance work and family life. She talks with C& about dissecting her surroundings without losing sight of the bigger picture.

CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) In your work you examine the way culture can shape identity and you often engage with your local environment in Accra. How important is this local perspective to you and your practice?

ELISABETH EFUA SUTHERLAND My practice is very reactive. A lot of what I make, especially in choreography, comes out of what I see, hear, or feel as I move around – when I listen to the radio, or when I walk on the street. So in one sense my practice is always local, because the physical and social geographies of my environment play an active part. And as I spend most of my time in Accra, that is the locality I bring to my practice at the moment. What draws my attention in those day-to-day moments is how culture shapes the ways people move, interact, and behave in social situations – for example, the physical and verbal interactions between drivers on the road, or the struggles of young professional women balancing career and family, and the traditionalism and stereotypes that still affect how gender roles are played out. In all of this there is a culturalization that causes individuals to behave the way they do, especially in public situations and in smaller relational units like family or circles of friends. I try to constantly unpack and

explore this. Who are we as a people? Where did we come from? And why are we where we are today? That's what I want to know.

C& Why do you think "identity" – in the broad sense of the word – is a recurring topic with artists from Africa and the Diaspora across generations?

EES I think because other people know so little about us, and they put the burden on us to explain ourselves without necessarily giving us the power to do so. It's about narrative. People ask you, "Who are you?" Then they interrupt your reply to negate or edit what you just said because it doesn't fit into their perception of what you should be, based on their own prejudices and previous exposures. I think it's about power and about narrative. Who gets to tell the story? Whose version of the story is heard? Whose version is accepted? You have to keep asserting who you are until people have the stomach to take it. And that's not only an external thing but an internal one as well.

C& How specifically relevant is it to your practice that you speak about subjects related to your culture or identity?

EES I believe in somatic history, embodied history. I believe you carry the cultural marks of where you originated from in your DNA, and that these can manifest in your spirit and in your fleshly life. So for me it's important to look at the history of a person and a people and the objects and practices and lived histories of that lineage in order to explore the ways they manifest today – as road rage at rush hour, or as a struggle to choose between having a job you care about or answering the combined call for reproduction by your ovaries and your church auntie. In a roundabout way I do believe you can never really escape or

transcend your history, and that it may just morph into a different manifestation in your current life. You may embrace or reject it, but either way it remains part of your self-identification.

C& When a conceptual artist from Accra focuses on non-identity topics, such as Bauhaus for example, they are often questioned in a way white artists aren't. How do you think this can be challenged?

EES By refusing to engage with that questioning, by engaging the people and structures doing that questioning and challenging why they feel the need to question – it says more about them than it does about you. Just continuing to do the work.



both images Paa Joe and Elisabeth Efua Sutherland,
Ake yaaa heko // *One does not take it anywhere*, opening.
Courtesy Gallery 1957, Accra.
Photo Nii Odzenma

“
I am very inspired to tell my story,
and that’s my story.

Born in Harlem, Faith Ringgold is a veteran US artist who’s been making political art since the 1960s. Ringgold’s oil paintings and posters have often carried strong messages of freedom that have won her fans, including James Baldwin, who wrote her first exhibition review. One of her most iconic paintings, *American People Series #20: Die* (1967), depicting a street massacre, hangs at MoMA in New York. Being socially engaged both in her art and life, in 1968 she demonstrated against the exclusion of Black and female artists by New York’s Whitney Museum of American Art. That episode led to her being called the N word for the first time in her life, to which she responded with multiple artworks. In 1970 she made the poster for the *People’s Flag Show* at New York’s Judson Memorial Church, resulting in her arrest for desecrating the US flag. Never one to quit, in 1971 Ringgold cofounded Where We At, a group for African American female artists. Constantly experimenting with different media, Ringgold has worked extensively with African crafts while breaking with the hierarchy that limits what crafts can do in the fine arts. Another series, which has become her trademark, is of quilts combining images and handwritten text to tell the lives of African Americans. One of these, *Tar Beach*, was turned into a children’s book published in 1991, the first of Ringgold’s eighteen children’s books. Today, Faith Ringgold is still making art and has even ventured into children’s games, proving that her imagination and prowess have no limits. In April 2018 the artist had her Berlin solo debut, where we met to discuss her life and career.

CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) Your work often deals with race, gender, and social status. Why have these themes remained important

to you and how has your approach to working with them evolved?

FAITH RINGGOLD Well, they remain important to me because they are part of my life’s struggle. I can’t get through the world without recognizing that race and sex influence everything I do in my life. So I’ve spent my life finding and dealing with these issues in a way that will not inhibit my privacy. And so I continue. It continues to be a problem and I continue to struggle.

C& Why do you think “identity” is a recurring topic with artists from Africa and the Diaspora across generations?

FR Across different cultures, ethnicities, is this an issue? I don’t know. Actually I’ve never been asked that question. I’m sure it’s not easy being green [laughs]. No, I don’t think so. So I think it probably isn’t. I know it isn’t with African Americans, without a doubt. The visual art world is kind of racist. I’m convinced of that. And not only racist but sexist. In fact, I think it’s more sexist than racist. We have to struggle against it the best we can and see what happens.

C& So you think, because of that, we will always have artists who want to explore this issue of identity in their own work?

FR I think there is a choice that you can make to ignore that and do something else like everything is ok, or you can use that problem to create art that imposes it. I mean, you have a choice – you don’t have to. A lot of artists don’t, like for instance Ed Clark. He’s great but he doesn’t do it. He ignores it and a lot of Black artists don’t think about it. They don’t want to deal with it. Or maybe that is a way to deal with it, I don’t know. But I don’t choose to do it that way and I always do what I want.

C& How would you refer to your practice when you’re exploring subjects related to your culture or identity? How is it relevant to speak about it in these terms?

FR It is important because that is who I am. And it is what inspires me. I am very inspired to tell my story and that’s my story. And I can’t imagine just acting like it’s not there, although I have works that don’t fit this situation. Because I really do what I want. So I do it and I don’t do it. I’ve done a lot of work. Not all of it is an expression of racism and sexism, some of it is.

C& When artists from Africa and the Diaspora explore themes beyond their “identity,” a conceptual artist from Accra focusing on Bauhaus for example, they are often questioned in the way white artists aren’t. How do you think this can be challenged?

FR You have the right to do everything you want as an artist. Your expression, your artistic expression, your visual expression is whatever inspires you. You don’t have to do anything. You can do what you want. And artists have done what they want, or we wouldn’t be here. African artists create all the kinds of ways African American artists do. And that is because they don’t see themselves limited by their race and/or their sex. And they are not! It is only if they miss it, if it inspires them, if it brings them something unique. Other than that, no. You don’t have to do it. Do it because you want to, because you have something special to say. You want to add something, learn something and you are free to do so. Free. You can do what you want. And you go.



Faith Ringgold, *Hate Is a Sin, Flag*, 2007. Dyptich, silkscreen 4/10, 57 x 56cm.
Courtesy the artist and Weiss Berlin

FREEDOM On Tuesday
Morning we faced

the Devil in the sky and told him

that... Freedom will never die Ringgold
9/11/01



Faith Ringgold, *Feminist Series: We Meet the Monster*, 1972. Acrylic on canvas framed in cloth 12/20, 127 x 83 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Weiss Berlin



Faith Ringgold, *Marlon Riggs: Tongues Untied*, 1994. Storyquilt, 226 x 151 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Weiss Berlin

“

Identity is very much at the core of every artistic practice, whether painting flowers or exploring one’s culture or politics.

Zineb Sedira is an Algerian French artist currently based in London. For two decades Sedira has consistently worked with themes related to oral history, migration, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Using various media including video, photography, and installation, the artist has explored Algeria extensively—its history, its people, and how they relate to the world – often informed by her North African and European identities. In *Mother Tongue* (2002), one of her best-known works, Sedira depicts herself with her mother and daughter, finding a common mode of communication despite speaking different languages. Currently, she has a retrospective show with older and new works at the Sharjah Art Foundation until June 16, 2018.

CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) Why do you think identity is a recurring topic with artists from Africa and the Diaspora across generations?

ZINEB SEDIRA I think all artistic works are about identity, not just for artists from Africa or the Arab world. Identity is very much at the core of every artistic practice, be it painting flowers or exploring one’s culture or politics. Isn’t the personal political? However, often artists from Africa, the Middle East, and other continents create work about what is called “identity politics.” Often issues of a social/political nature, like imperialism/colonialism or wars/conflicts, are explored or exposed because many of these countries still struggle with these issues. In my case – and I can only talk for myself – the reason I’m still very much interested in the politics and history of Algeria’s past is because I believe the country hasn’t dealt with its colonial history. In the same way, France (and this extends to the “West”)

has not really dealt with its colonial past. I am resisting a form of aphasia and amnesia intrinsic to these colonial pasts and feel the need to reveal unspoken histories and their inconsistencies through self-exposure.

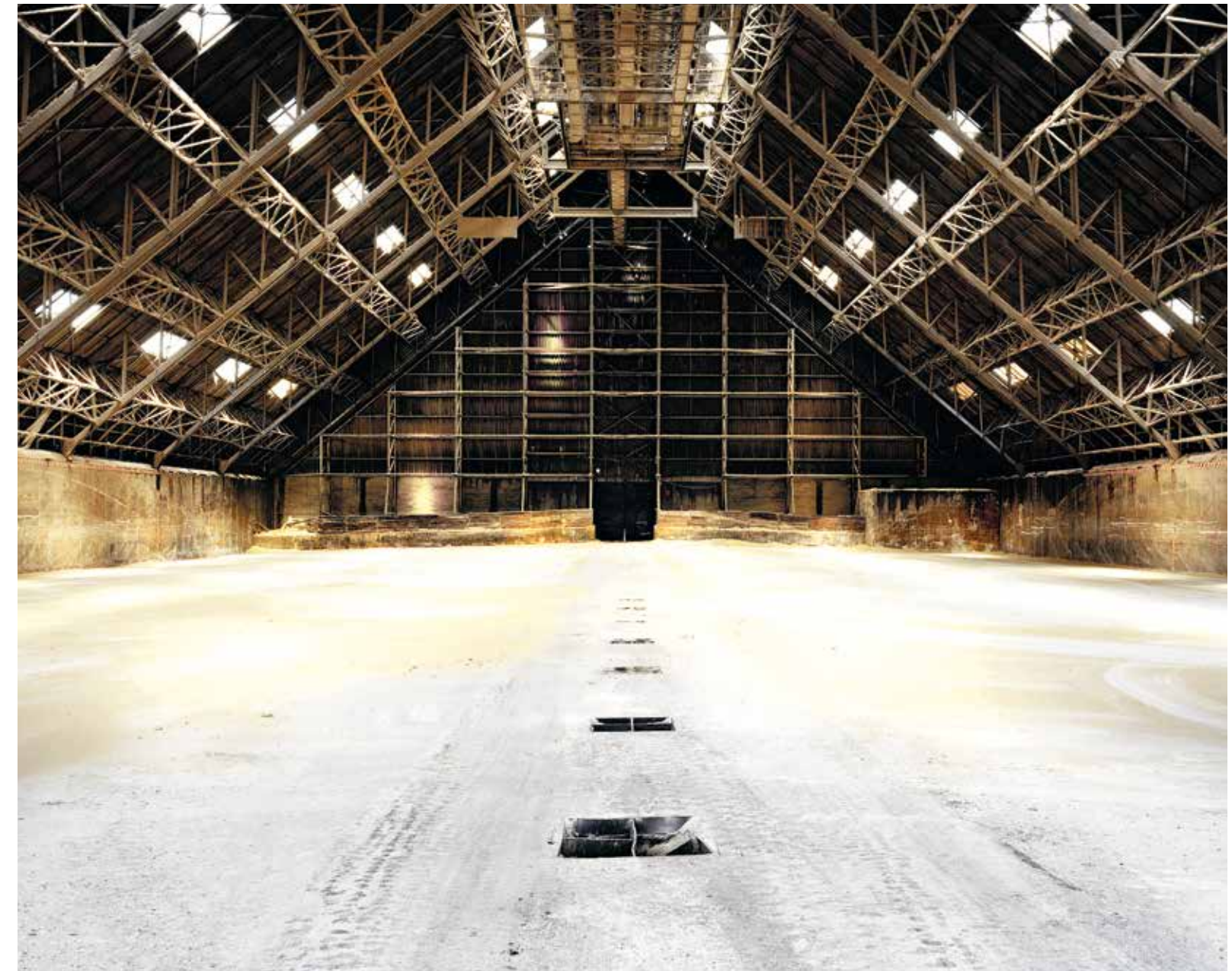
C& How would you refer to your practice when exploring subjects that relate to your culture or identity?

ZS It is very difficult for me to “brand” my work as it varies according to the places and subjects I am looking at. Yet I see myself as a storyteller. In the art world, my practice is often defined and narrowed into work on “immigration” and “memory.” But when, for example, a white American artist creates work about identity politics, he is not only defined by his country of origin or history. Artists are interested in similar issues and they can be found in many different cultures or countries! But depending on where you come from, your work is read or received differently. Once a curator asked me why my work wasn’t about politics, assuming that because I am “African” or “Middle Eastern,” my artworks should be about social or political issues. As if I ought to be an artist activist because of where I come from. For me the personal is essential to politics and I always try to combine them. I am also interested in political poetry and bring both elements into my work.

C& How do you think we can challenge this double standard?

ZS I believe that, as artists, we need to find a way to speak about our work outside of what is expected (stereotypes) and anticipate the expected. For example, I understand the earlier work of Anish Kapoor to be about his Indian culture. However, he has never written or spoken about it in those terms only: he discussed his work in a more

universal manner. Somehow, he escaped categorization, the labeling that other artists experience. So for me, it is important to develop a way to still speak about the personal, the collective, the politics, without being confined to a geographical context. At the beginning of my career, I used to be invited to many geographical group shows on account of my nationality, but it doesn’t happen anymore. This may have been good for visibility, but it did limit my work to that specific context. After the proliferation of so many Arab, African, and Chinese exhibitions in Europe and the US, there is no need for art institutions to curate these shows anymore. Regional contexts are forever changing: new borders and countries are created or disappear ... Nations with their cultures, traditions, languages, and even religions are evolving, making it impossible to synopsise and reduce them using curatorial Eurocentric discourses. The situation changes when you exhibit in international solo contexts – like my current show in Sharjah – where my practice is seen and read beyond my Algerian, French, and English identities. The interpretation of my art is then anchored within the context of the region hosting the work, thus creating new readings. The artwork extends its scope and is more universal, opening up to an inclusive audience. This is what I want; this is what artists want ...



Zineb Sedira, *Sugar Silo II*, 2014. Diptych, C-Type, 180 x 200 cm.

Commissioned by Marseille-Provence 2013, European Capital of Culture and the Port of Marseille.

Courtesy the artist and the galleries: The Third Line, Dubai, and Plutschow Gallery, Zurich



Zineb Sedira, *Maritime Nonsense and Other Aquatic Tales*, 2009. Triptych, C-prints mounted on aluminium, 100 x 120 cm each.
Produced and commissioned by Iniva – Institute of International Visual Arts, Rivington Place, London.
View of the installation, 2009. Photo: George Torode. Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris



Zineb Sedira, *Haunted House I*, 2006. Color photograph, 100 x 80 cm.
Commissioned by the Photographer's Gallery, London.
Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris

“

The question points to the overburdened subject every artist from the Global South has had to grapple with in the last thirty years.

What do pictures want? W. J. T. Mitchell asked that question over ten years ago. But we now live in times when 3D printers produce food, and images become objects that one day may be able to “act back” at us. Which is why Kelvin Haizel, exploring physical and cultural landscapes from his home in Ghana, is interested in the condition of the image. The artist talks with C& about potentially dangerous images and an identity discourse that desperately needs change.

CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) In your work you examine the condition of contemporary images extensively. What do you observe in them these days?

KELVIN HAIZEL Images, in many ways, have become objects in and of themselves. Consequently, the image has become “matter” that is not to be perceived only with visual apparatuses and faculties – a wide range of sensibilities are needed to engage the image now. If, as with Hito Steyerl, the image has literally crawled out of screens, canvases, walls, and billboards and has materialized as a part of our reality, then it is equally plausible to say that it may also become something we may bump into when backing up to see the expanse of a blank wall. One can already imagine, with the advent of 3D food printers, the image becoming something that can even be eaten and digested. Just imagine food from around the world advertised on the internet, edited in Photoshop, and printed for lunch! We soon might no longer edit only visual temperature but temperatures of the image that can literally burn and bruise your tongue or give

us novel culinary experiences. That is an exciting world to anticipate.

C& How does this image-to-object reality influence your personal practice? And how does it relate to subjects that explore culture and identity?

KH Images have crossed from the screen into our reality and become objects in our daily experience. They come to us from almost every geographical location possible, therefore the environment I talk of in my work is already at once local and global in every sense. For example, when Toyota recalled some 6,000 of its Camrys, Siennas, and Highlanders due to the faulty vacuum assembly in their breaking mechanism, a number of the cars were already running on our roads in Ghana, cars which were probably never recalled. And that may actually have played a role in the record high of 20,444 accidents on our roads in that period. So the errors of such a giant multinational company contribute to cumulative deaths in my local context, affecting the texture, literally, of the social and cultural landscape. My participation in this is to critique these neoliberal lapses and invite the wreckages, via image-become-objects, into my work.

C& Why do you think “identity” is a recurring topic with artists from Africa and the Diaspora across generations?

KH I don’t necessarily think anyone enters their studios and says to themselves, “I’m going to produce work about identity.” No. And sometimes it is simply those reading the work who wish to decipher the “identity”

of the artist. I am wondering if anyone ever considers that this very notion of “identity” is also at play with Koons or Hirst, with all the furore that the latter’s Venice Biennale work sparked. I tend to believe the question points to the overburdened subject every artist from the Global South has had to grapple with in the last thirty years, if not more. It is as if all artists that fall within your above-named category must define and defend their artistic interventions based on a certain rootedness. With the benefit of hindsight, we see that by the multicultural turn of the late 1980s and 1990s, artists in the so-called African Diaspora were asserting their equality partly by routing their interventions via the same identity-DNA narrative that “inventive” curatorial mishaps had engineered. Those on the African continent also erroneously believed they had to refer their subject matter to some “originary” notions in order to participate in the “global” conversation. So we are far from a differentiated discourse of identity.

C& What could be done about the fact that many curators still crave the “authentic” from artists in Africa and the Diaspora?

KH Having studied at the Department of Painting and Sculpture in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, my practice is premised on starting with the void. Like many of my colleagues, I don’t privilege any particular medium, form, or material, nor one singular genre. All the histories are tested so that maybe we will be able to invent practices for futures ahead of us.



above and below Kelvin Haizel, *things and nothings*, 2017.
Installation view at the 11th Bamako Biennial. Courtesy the artist

Berliner Festspiele #immersion

Immersion

2018

Das gesamte Programm von *Immersion* und Tickets: berlinerfestspiele.de

Philippe Parreno
Ausstellung
25.5–5.8.2018
Gropius Bau

Welt ohne Außen
Immersive Räume seit den 60er Jahren. Ausstellung, Aufführungen, Workshops. Kuratoren: Tino Sehgal & Thomas Oberender
8.6–5.8.2018
Gropius Bau

The New Infinity
Neue Kunst für Planetarien
In Kooperation mit dem Planetarium Hamburg
Herbst 2018
Mobiler Dome im Berliner Stadtraum

The future ages faster than the present.
Norman Klein

Gefördert durch

Partner

arte BERLINARTLINK COO GGG EXBERLINER MONOPOL TAGESFESTEL YORCK SINGGRUPPE

Having a keen interest in the history of industrial materials, Chilean artist **JOHANNA UNZUETA** connects industrialization with colonization and capitalism

WHERE INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS COME IN POCKET SIZES



Johanna Unzueta, *Grain Elevator*, 2005. Felt and thread, 98 x 30 x 25 cm. Courtesy the artist

JOHANNA UNZUETA's topic is labor. Not just in the social and historical sense but also in the fabrication of her own art. Unzueta often constructs work that is based on industrial elements and objects – her sculpture series of grain elevators, cooling towers, and windmills is just one example. Currently based in New York, the artist still has strong links with the art scene in her native Chile, a scene that inspires her lighthearted take on the heavy objects she works with. With C&'s **THERESA SIGMUND** she speaks about industrial buildings, natural ink, and a new generation of Chilean artists.



Johanna Unzueta, *Deep in the Pool*, 2010 (detail).
Felt and thread. Courtesy the artist and House of Propellers, London



Johanna Unzueta, *Mural Sink*, 2018. Felt and thread , 300 x 200 x 35 cm.
Courtesy the artist and 57w57Arts Gallery, NY

LOOKING BEYOND
DOCUMENTATION
OF AFRO-IRANIANS
READ IT ON
CONTEMPORARYAND.COM

“In between all this I somehow saw the humanity of these buildings – grain elevators, gas tanks, cooling towers, windmills, and even the emblematic water towers from the rooftops of New York City.”

CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) Where does your fascination with handmade objects come from?

JOHANNA UNZUETA It may sound a little clichéd, but I think I was born like this. Somehow I remember always keeping myself busy, working on different projects, and all of them involved using my hands. The making of objects was a way of communication, of expressing thoughts or feelings for me. I was also very curious and constantly surprised by different textures and materials. I guess that was part of my personal development.

C& It seems like the relationship between body and material is an important element in your practice, no matter what media you work with. Could you explain why that is?

JU As you say, this connection appears in most of my works – in my sculpture pieces in felt, in the drawings, and in the Super 8mm films. I think our bodies relate to space and are in constant dialogue with the objects that compose it. So in my practice I am interested in the history of the elements I work with, in particular with their industrial origins and innovative architecture. Recently I’ve been reading *Empire of Cotton* (2014) by Sven Beckert, and I discovered that the Industrial Revolution started much earlier than the eighteenth century. It was great to connect the history of colonization with the Industrial Revolution and the history of capitalism. In this sense machines replaced slavery, or a new kind of slavery was formed, a new way of human and economic abuse.

C& I am often cowed by big industrial buildings – they have something indomitable. Yet your work deconstructs them in a very amusing way: You make them appear in unexpected spaces, and the material you use is rather unconventional. Has your relationship to those urban and natural spaces changed since you rebuilt them?

JU When I started my series of sculptures more than ten years ago, I was thinking about their landscape. My interest was focused on the history that these places contained in their architecture: the iron, the concrete, and the wooden structures. In between all this I somehow saw the humanity of these buildings – grain elevators, gas tanks, cooling towers, windmills, and even the emblematic water towers from the rooftops of New York City. And I decided to replicate them with felt. I don’t really know if my relationship with them changed, but I do feel closer to them now.

C& In 2013 you started a series of drawings. How do they speak to your other media?

JU The starting point for this new body of work was simple experimentation and it was also a personal healing process. After years of working with felt, cutting and sewing, I started to have some health issues with my hands and needed a physical break from it. My drawings slowly started growing in dimension and complexity. When I learned how to weave, I also learned to dye the

yarn with natural dyes taken from plants and vegetables, which was a profound experience I had in the south of Chile with Eugenia, a Mapuche woman. Although there are some variations from that experience in my current work on paper, the tinting techniques are pretty much the same, specifically in the making of the colors.

C& Did you develop your work with local people before? And is this also something you will do for your Berlin Biennale contribution?

JU At this point I am still in the production process for the Berlin Biennale, but what I can tell you is that I will present a series of new large drawings with respective support structures, and a mural piece. I have worked with murals before in different contexts and places in collaboration with local people. I like to think that creating these large drawings in public spaces and involving people from that particular context or community transforms the drawings into more democratic pieces of art. Although I know they are following a set of instructions I give, the experience of making it together opens the work up. In the end, the work is out of there, in the world, available to everyone.

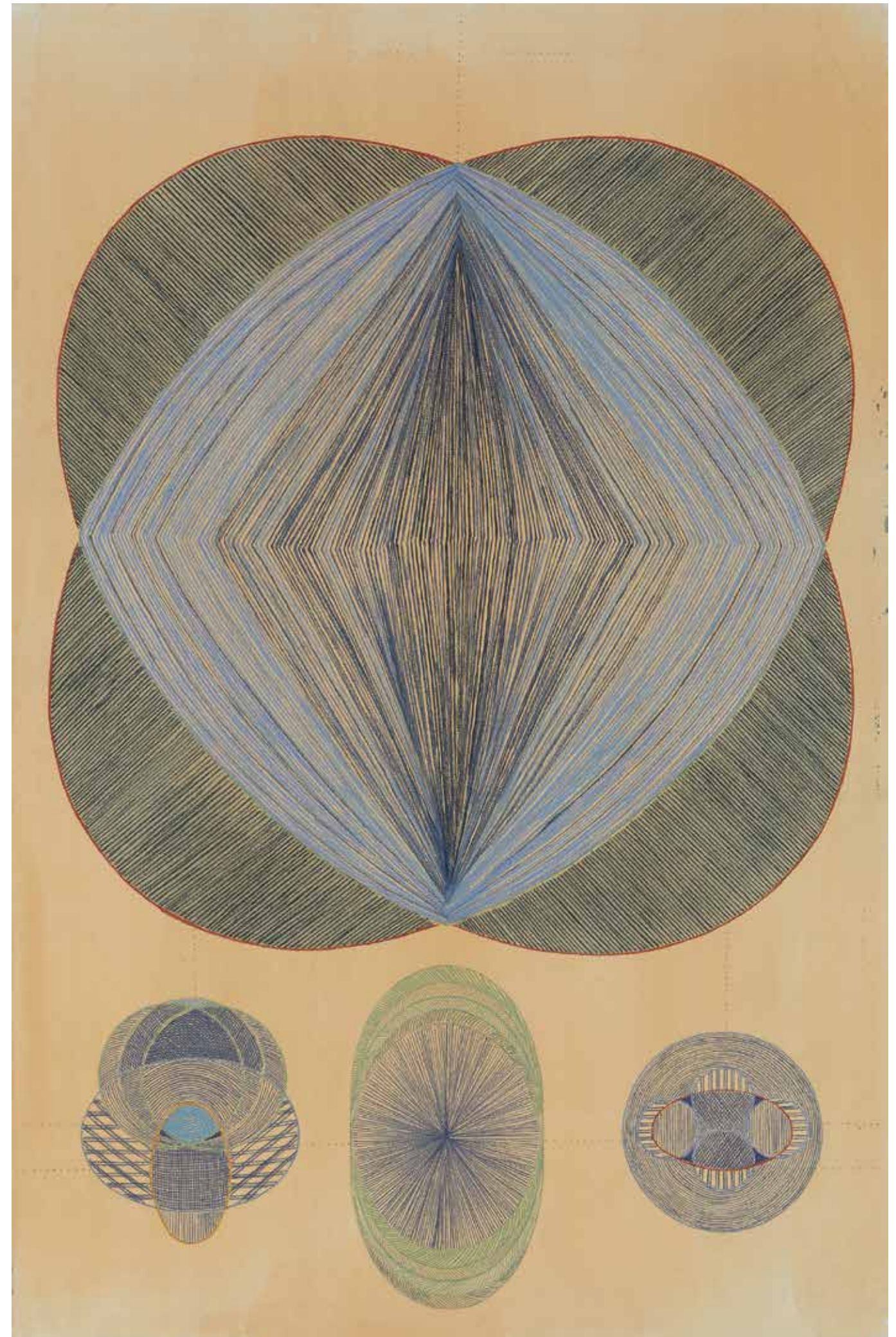
C& How do you observe the developments within the Chilean art scene from afar?

JU Since I moved to New York, I have always kept a relationship with Chile. This is important to me because it is not rare that Chilean artists leave the country and then disappear locally. We should stick around. My generation is what we call the 90s. We are the first post-Pinochet generation, which can particularly be seen in the arts as we broke away from the conceptual and political forms of the 70s and 80s. Back then artists collaborated with poets, writers, and critical thinkers. They made shows and performances in alternative galleries and published magazines. It was a very vital and interesting scene, yet also very dogmatic. My generation grew up in the dictatorship, but we trained as artists in the transition period. We had other references too and were probably more international and pop-based, influenced by the early internet. Altogether we tread a bit lighter, or at least our outlook is more positive. We are looking into the future and not into the past or terrible present.

Johanna Unzueta is a participating artist in the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, taking place from June 9 to September 9, 2018.

opposite h, 2016.

Drawing, watercolor paint, pastel pencil, charcoal, and needle holes on tinted paper (fustic), 65 x 100 cm. Courtesy the artist

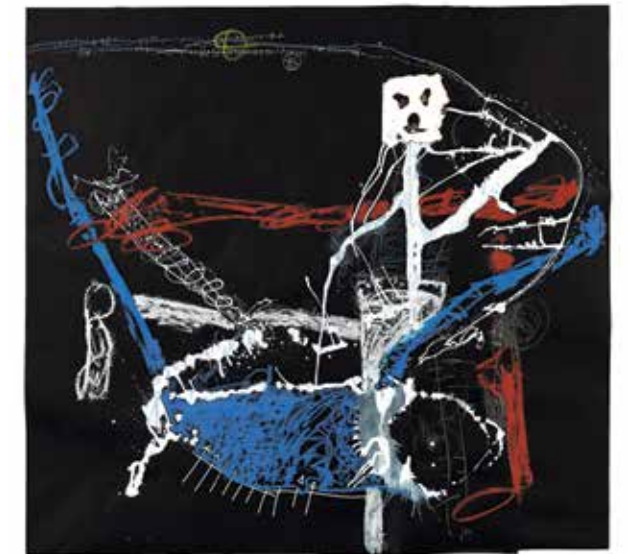


FROM ARCHEOLOGICAL METHODS

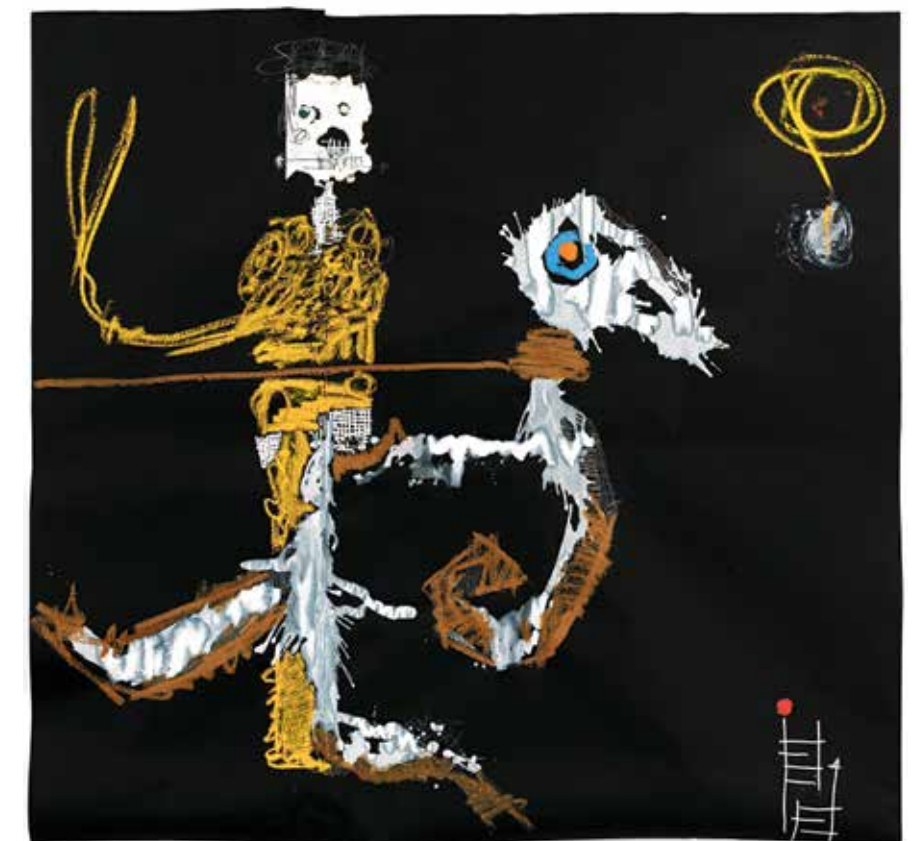


With C&'s **JULIE ABRICOT**, the painter **THIERRY OUSSOU** explains why his work for the 10th Berlin Biennale is a piece of contemporary remembrance and why we don't need more heroes

above Thierry Oussou, *Two as one*, 2018.
Mixed media on paper, 226 x 57 cm
centre Thierry Oussou, *You can divide the apple but not the word*, 2018. Mixed media on paper, 151.5 x 382.5 cm
both images Courtesy the artist and Stevenson,
Cape Town and Johannesburg



TO CONTEMPORARY ART



top right Thierry Oussou, *City's colour*, 2018.
Mixed media on paper, 214 x 229 cm
top left Thierry Oussou, *Untitled*, 2018.
Mixed media on paper, 214 x 224 cm
both images Courtesy of the artist
and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg

“As a contemporary artist, of my generation, I have the right to talk about it in the way that I can and in the way that I see it.”

His family had wanted him to become a policeman. At the time there just didn’t seem to be prospects for young and visionary artists in Benin. So in 2011, Thierry Oussou founded his own kind of art school, Yè art studio in Cotonou, from where he still organizes art and visual culture workshops. With his socially and ethnographically investigative works Oussou has been nominated for the One Minute Africa Award, and is now taking part in the Berlin Biennale.

CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) Your show at the Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg (February 10 – March 16, 2018) was entitled *Before It Is Completely Gone*. You seem very attached to South Africa. To what extent does this country feed your artistic work?

THIERRY OUSSOU My work is related to the environment. The places where I work both inspire and influence me. I like observing my surroundings when I’m traveling. The pieces exhibited at the Stevenson Gallery have a connection with South Africa, and with the African continent in general, within an overall view of globalization. My idea with the title is to imply that there are witnesses to what we are at the moment. It’s a way of reminding us that what we are doing is documented, recorded. As a contemporary artist, of my generation, I have the right to talk about it in the way that I can and in the way that I see it.

C& Your works on paper have this recurring theme of masks and a black background. What about this recent exhibition?

TO My work on paper comes out of the idea of appropriating this medium. I originally started with the idea of slates, with small drawings on black sheets of paper. Now I prefer a much larger format. Embers recall human suffering. I sculpt the faces and use acrylic to represent the skin. Paper, like the human being, is fragile. This highly symbolic medium is with us our whole lives, from the birth certificate to the death certificate.

C& Your working methods seem to hook up with your intention to create archeological documentation. The notion of strata is there in your installation *Ce que nous sommes* (That which we are) as well as in your works on paper, which are made of several layers of different media. Are the rough wood on the ground and the processed wood on the wall (the paper, in other words) also a reference to this relationship between nature and culture?

TO In my work *Ce que nous sommes*, I invite the public to appropriate the wood, which has been moved from the park to the gallery. So, in my performance, visitors can sit on this material and have a different view of the wood. They form part of the work. At the moment we enter the exhibition space, we become one with the environment.

C& What variations do you bring to your installations in situ? Is there a consistency running from *La Poésie* (Poetry, 2015) to

Ce que nous sommes (2018)? Why this need to use wood from the places you’re in residence?

TO Yes, there are some variations. I presented *La Poésie* in situ for the first time in Benin in 2012/13. An installation with twigs, some drawings on paper, leaves from trees, etc. When I went to the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, I followed a different approach. I devoted myself exclusively to developing my installations, using only wood, this time without any drawing. The installation evolved from day to day. In the group exhibition *Gaia in the Anthropocene* in Rotterdam (February 2 – March 31, 2018), it was not the same presentation as in 2015. I’m currently in Berlin. If I need to present the work here, I’ll follow a different approach. My encounters with the architecture and the local people are important for me. The results of this and the presentation of my work are bound to be different depending on the city. As in poetry, I use the same material, but each time I give it a different meaning, taking into account the characteristics and technical constraints of the place where I am exhibiting.

C& On a final note, how does *We don’t need another hero*, the title of the 10th Berlin Biennale, resonate for you? What was your initial feeling when your participation was announced? Can you tell us about the project you’re preparing for the event?

TO We really don’t need another hero. We’re already heroes. For me it’s easy to grasp. No one is going to do our work for us. It’s the first time I’ve been an official participant at a biennale, so you can imagine what it’s like! I’ve always wanted to show the project *Impossible Is Nothing* in other cities outside Amsterdam. It’s been my hope that one day the throne might be put on show at the Palais de Tokyo. In Amsterdam, it was presented as part of an academic research project, whereas now we’re talking about a large-scale exhibition. On this occasion, I intend to exhibit it together with the reports of the students who worked with me and the video of it being excavated. It’s a symbol of culture and power. When it’s presented, we are unable to touch it. Our cultural wealth is only visible through a small window. The work is a piece of contemporary remembrance.

Thierry Oussou is a participating artist in the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, taking place from June 9 to September 9, 2018.



THE
“DISAPPEARANCE
OF THE BLACK”
IN ARGENTINIAN
IDENTITY
READ IT ON
CONTEMPORARYAND.COM

Thierry Oussou, *On Mandela Bridge*, 2018.

Mixed media on paper, 223.5 x 214.5cm.

Courtesy the artist and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg

GOD'S P(L)AN

When discussing art and culture, capitalism and neoliberalism are often overlooked. This in turn contributes toward a hierarchy in Pan-African representation, argues Contemporary And's deputy editor **WILL FURTADO**



Arthur Jafa, *Dreams Arc Colder Than Death* (still), 2013.
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome

When asked if he'd consider adapting one of his exhibitions to its particular location, Arthur Jafa unequivocally says no. And – aside from that being his right as an artist – he has a point. Currently Jafa has a large show at Berlin's Julia Stoschek Collection (JSC) in partnership with London's Serpentine Galleries, where the artist showed last year. Both iterations of *A Series of Utterly Improbable, Yet Extraordinary Renditions* deal heavily with race issues specific to the North American context, in the form of intricate video montages with a cathartic quality. "I want to make black cinema with the power, beauty, and alienation of black music," said Jafa in *Interview* magazine last year about *Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death*, a video containing found footage of Black sorrow and success, arranged to Kanye West's *Ultralight Beam*. For Jafa's work to adapt to a particular location or context, especially internationally, would mean the standardization and simplification of the Black experience. And by extension the erasure of the Black experience – in this case in Europe, where his work is being shown. However, from a curatorial point of view that's also exactly what's at stake when curators in Europe give more exposure to non-European artists when curating shows that engage with race issues. The prominence of African Americans in the arts at times seems to overshadow art made in Africa and by the Diaspora, in Europe and elsewhere. There are a number of reasons why this might happen and also why this is detrimental to the plurality of Blackness across the world and how it is perceived and supported.

Take Ryan Coogler's recent Marvel movie *Black Panther*. Across much of the press the movie has been lauded as revolutionary. And in some aspects, for instance in terms of representation in the mainstream, it is. As far as superhero films go it is the first to deal with issues of being of African descent, its director is African American, it's partly set in Africa, and its cast is predominantly Black, including actors from Africa and Europe. But where does that leave all of the other films with all-Black casts made in Africa? Nollywood should be celebrated with enthusiasm, as well as films such as Rungano Nyoni's *I Am Not a Witch*, released at the end of 2017. Do these films not matter? Are they not worthy of mention and support and distribution on a larger scale? Where were all the leading African actors in *Black Panther* who hadn't gone to Yale? One of the most lauded achievements of the film is that it proved to Hollywood that Black narratives sell and therefore that there's no reason to neglect these stories or Black actors, professionals, and artists. While representation matters and can reinforce the idea that Black lives matter, this premise is embedded in the discourse of profitability and art as a commodity. After all, Marvel Cinematic Universe is owned by Disney, which has historically profited from films with racist undertones. When discussing countries such as the United States of America and culture, there's one thing that cannot be removed from the equation – capitalism and more specifically neoliberalism. And this is why commercial success as a pointer of "success" and "revolution"



Black Panther (still), 2017, with Florence Kasumba, Danai Gurira, and Lupita Nyong'o © 2017 – Disney/Marvel Studios

is flawed and perilous. There are artists, thinkers, and especially rappers who have dealt with it head on – most recently Drake and his video for *God's Plan*, in which the rapper hands out cash to people on the streets. There are others who disregard it, such as writer Ta-Nehisi Coates, who, upon the release of his book *We Were Eight Years in Power* (2017), was accused by Professor Cornel West of representing the neoliberal wing of the Black freedom struggle. This wing, West argues, might sound militant about white supremacy, but it renders Black fightback invisible. And the repercussions of that attitude can be spotted in the arts in the form of Black artists pandering to the art market. "Today's artists are no longer fighting the colonial order," veteran artist Rasheed Araeen said at the 2018 March Meeting at Sharjah Art Foundation in relation to non-Western artists' increasing popularity in the global art market and the political apathy that often follows it. Araeen is also very vocal about formulaic art by POC artists, such as that criticizing non-Western governments to feed the expectations of the White West. Arguably culture and commerce need each other in order to thrive, but does it always have to be at the expense of the unprivileged? The US prominence in the arts can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, cultural exports such as hip-hop have helped not only Black people but all sorts of minorities to articulate their own ideas of freedom. On the other, this phenomenon, aided by its increasing profitability, also leads to the erasure and neglect of local cultures and the reinforcement of a hierarchy where brand USA often sits at

the top. In recent years the desire for something more "authentic" has resurfaced, which in itself could be simply the product of our market economy's continuous cannibalistic search for the new to commodify it. The market and industry of art and culture have always had a tendency to commodify everything from people to ideas to emotions. Failing to recognize the role of the capitalism that's entrenched in culture happens at the expense of the 99 percent. When it comes to Blackness, the urge to emphasize this becomes more pressing because capitalism was the force that fueled slavery. In 2018 US narratives still dominate across the board, especially when it comes to art that addresses race and racism. In Europe, Black and POC artists who deal with race and racism in Europe are often neglected in favor of African-American artists and their experiences. And there are also instances when African Americans organize events in Africa with an imperialist attitude, whereby there is little attention or care toward the local realities, or a "woke" message is used for capitalist endeavors. There is no doubt that Arthur Jafa deserved his solo shows at the Serpentine and at JSC. Yet we have to question why Black artists in Europe who deal with race are not being supported on a large scale too. Historically the German Left was very supportive of African American intellectuals, from Angela Davis to Audre Lorde. When Davis was imprisoned in October 1970, *The New York Times* reported that self-organized initiatives to free her quickly spread across Europe, especially in East Germany, thanks to student movements.

Equally in West Germany more than 10,000 people including former West Berlin mayor Heinrich Albertz and Bundestag member K. H. Walkoff signed an appeal to release Davis. Yet they were silent on the issues affecting Black Germans.

In London, while the Tate Modern exhibition *Soul of a Nation* was received with great praise and had a high number of visitors (especially Black) last year, there is yet to be a show of such magnitude dedicated to POC British artists. Representation does matter, and curatorial and institutional support should not be underestimated when it comes to aiding artists to take their art further or simply survive to tell their stories through art.

But things are never one-sided.

UK institutions also tend to focus disproportionately on experiences of the English-speaking world, with rare exceptions. Hence the UK can at times function as the “US” of Europe, whereby British artists disproportionately represent the European POC Diaspora. The Diaspora Pavilion in the 57th Venice Biennale, for instance, featured mostly British and UK-based artists. This leaves Black European artists on the European continent, who generally grew up isolated, lagging behind and using that as an excuse to not organize. But things are changing and there is a new awakening to these very issues. There are now initiatives across the continent that are creating networks with Black and POC artists in mind. One of these initiatives is 1.1 in Basel, Switzerland, a platform for young artistic practice in visual arts and music, cofounded in 2015 by artists Deborah Joyce Holman and Tuula Rasmussen. “We want to broaden a narrative that is usually told and represented disproportionately and from a not very diverse position,” says Holman. “Europe is a diverse continent, and it should be reflected as such through outputs but also within infrastructures of institutions.”

By commodifying art, capitalism has simultaneously contributed toward democratizing it, to a certain extent. This paradox can create new worlds of opportunity and it’s up to the gatekeepers now to ensure that this also extends to all African perspectives.

C&

CONTEMPORARYAND.COM

Contemporary And (C&) is an online art magazine and a dynamic space for the reflection on and linking together of ideas, discourse, and information on contemporary art practice from diverse African perspectives.

PUBLISHED BY

Contemporary And (C&)

CONCEPT

Julia Grosse
Yvette Mutumba
Will Furtado

EDITORIAL TEAM

Julia Grosse
Yvette Mutumba
Will Furtado
Olivia Buschey
Theresa Sigmund
Elisabeth Wellershaus
Julie Abricot

BOARD MEMBERS

Bisi Silva
Christine Eyene
Clémentine Deliss
David Adjaye OBE
N’Goné Fall
Thelma Golden
Thomas Lax
Yinka Shonibare MBE
Suzana Sousa

CONTRIBUTORS

Will Furtado
Julia Grosse
Julie Abricot
Theresa Sigmund
Liese van der Watt

ART DIRECTION & DESIGN

Britta Rogozinski,
SHIFT Design, London

PRINTING

BVZ Berliner Zeitungsdruck
GmbH

**COPYEDITING AND
TRANSLATIONS**

Simon Cowper
Jenifer Evans
Myriam Ochoa-Suel

© authors / photographers / C&

All rights reserved.

While we have endeavored in good faith to obtain from such third parties the rights we believe necessary to include their works, we do not represent or warrant that use of the content displayed will not infringe or violate the rights of third parties.

FRONT COVER

Zineb Sedira, *Sugar Silo I*, 2014. Diptych, C-Type, 180 x 200 cm each. Commissioned by Marseille-Provence 2013, European Capital of Culture and the Port of Marseille. Courtesy the artist and the galleries: The Third Line, Dubai, and Plutschow Gallery, Zurich

BACK COVER

Faith Ringgold, *Black Light Series #7: Ego Painting*, 1969. Oil on canvas, 76 x 76 cm. Courtesy the artist and Weiss Berlin

Kemang Wa Lehulere
Dada Khanyisa
Claudette Schreuders
Portia Zvavahera
Bronwyn Katz
Guy Tillim
Mame-Diarra Niang
Zander Blom
Simphele Ndzube

in conversation with
Sinazo Chiya

more
9 WEEKS

C& IS PUBLISHED BY

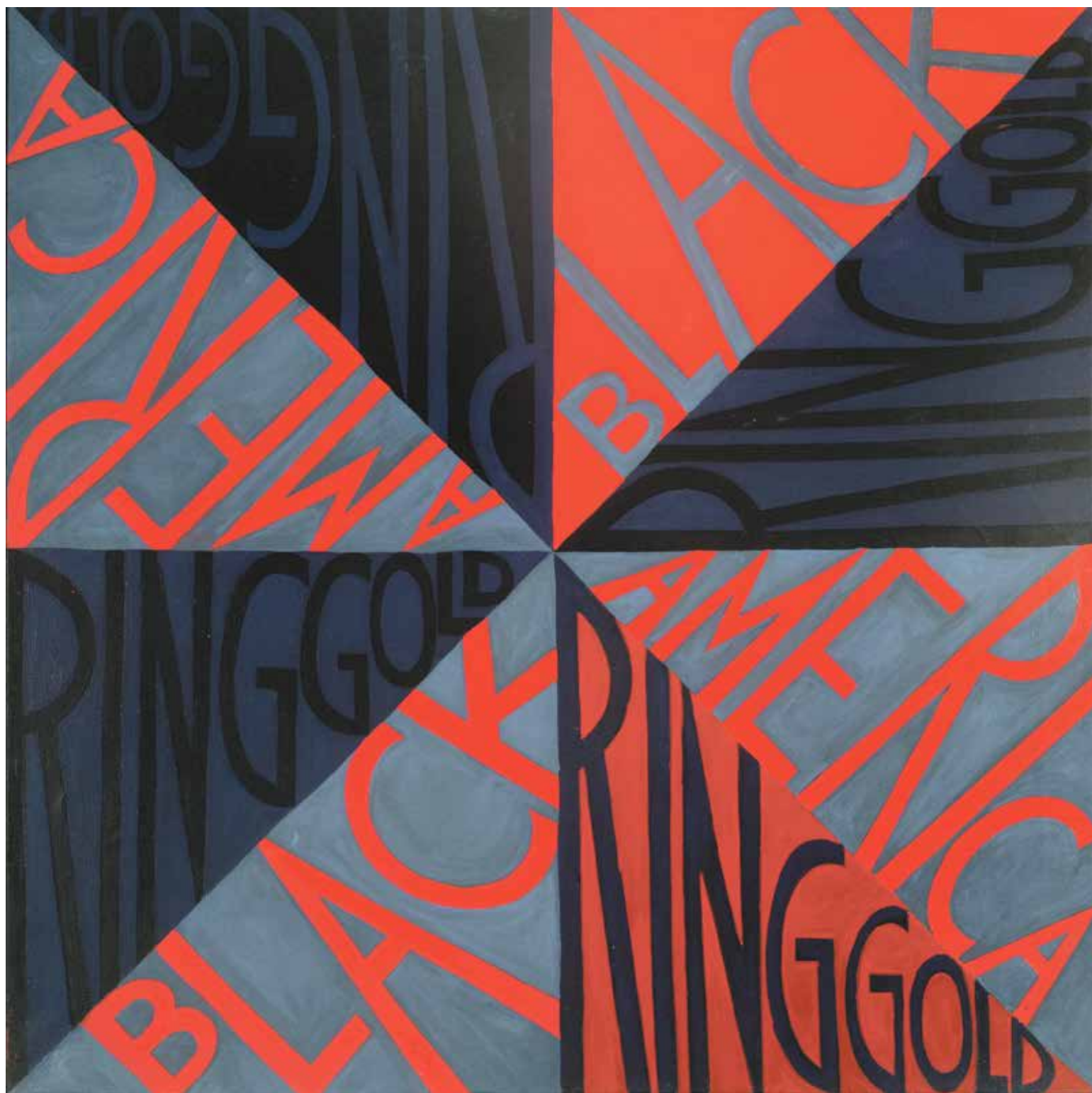
ifa Institut für
Auslandsbeziehungen

C& IS FUNDED BY

 Federal Foreign Office

Published by Stevenson
Available for preorder from books@stevenson.info

STEVENSON



CONTEMPORARYAND.COM