

BLIND SPOT

PERFORMANCE ART
PROGRAMME

curated by
RUTH SIMBAO



Performance Art Programme at the South African National Arts Festival 2014



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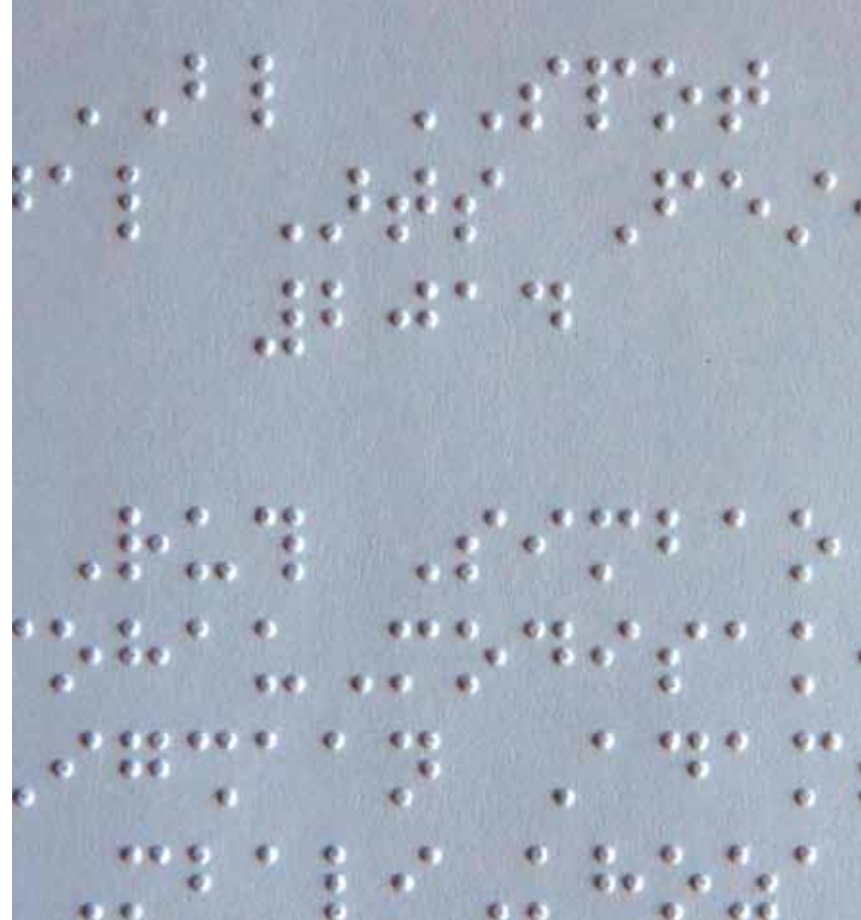
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ARTISTS:

MOHAU MODISAKENG

IGSHAAN ADAMS

MBALI KHOZA

SIMONE HEYMANS

IVY KULUNDU-GOTZ

JOSEPH COETZEE

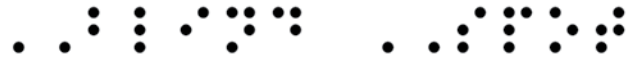
CHIRO NOTT



BLIND SPOT

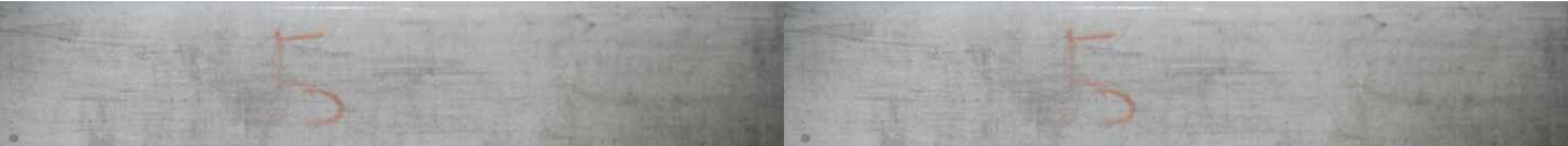
CURATED BY

RUTH SIMBAO



Vision...is not the simple thing it is imagined to be. It has to do with desire and possessiveness more than mechanical navigation, and it entangles us in a skein of changing relations with objects and people... Because we cannot see what we do not understand or use or identify with, we see very little of the world—only the small pieces that are useful and harmless. Each act of vision mingles seeing with not seeing, so that vision can become less a way of gathering information than avoiding it.

James Elkins , *The Object Stares Back*, 1996



BLIND SPOT is a collaborative collection of four site-situational performance works that acknowledge what we don't see and grapple with some of the things we think we see. Created for the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, the works engage with the old Egazini Memorial, the basement of the 1820 Settlers National Monument, the Eastern Star Press Museum and Victoria Girls' Primary School.

Vision is not simply what we see, and seeing is far from inert. With every look we dissect, avoid, grab, twist, freeze, stab or possess. Invisibility tumbles into hypervisibility. We obscure. We label. We fumble in the dark, as we think we know what we see.

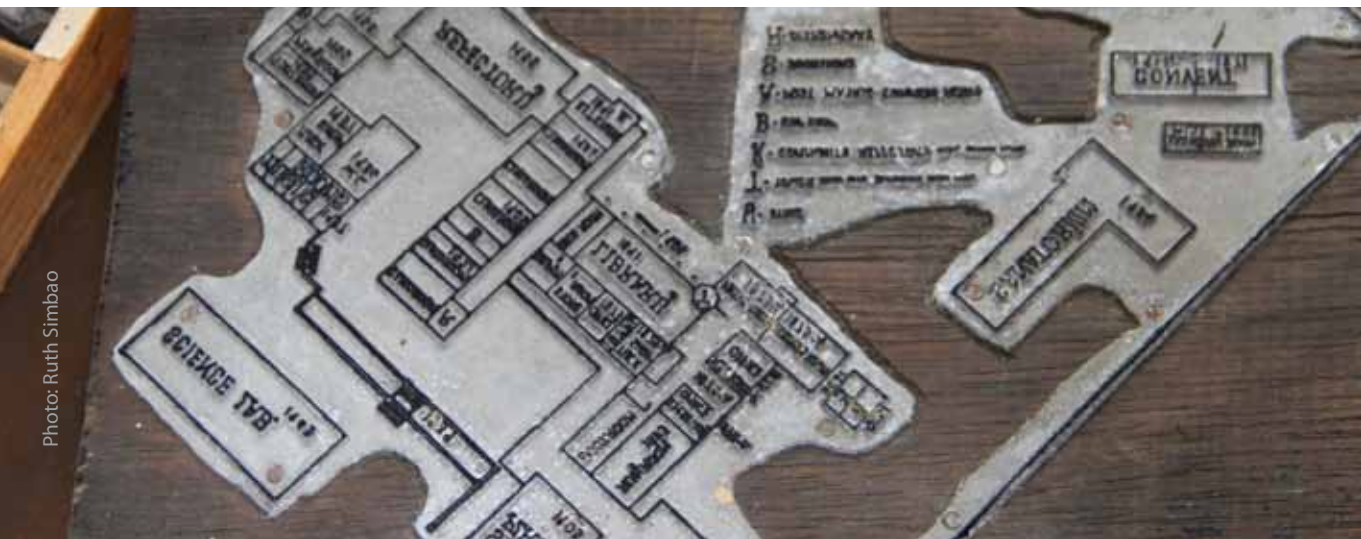


Photo: Ruth Simbao



Photo: Ruth Simbao

Scotoma, Greek for darkness, is an obscuration of the visual field. Termed a blind spot, it is an area with no photoreceptor cells, creating an absence of vision that can only be detected when one eye is closed.

Metaphorically, it can be said that one has a blind spot when one is ignorant, prejudiced, biased or unappreciative of something or someone. Just as with *scotoma*, the brain makes up certain details that are not actually there, and cultural or cognitive biases rely on farcical information and skewed perspectives.

Cognitive biases include stereotyping, irrational ideas based on essentialism, the 'curse of knowledge' when one becomes unable to consider supposedly less-informed perspectives, or a status quo bias, which is the difficulty in accepting change.



Photo: Ruth Simbao



Photo: Courtesy artist and Brundyn+ Cape Town

MOHAU MODISAKENG *BARONGWA*

Performed with Sikhumbuzo Makandula
Sunday 6 June 15:30 Fingo Square

Produced for **BLIND SPOT**, *Barongwa* features the procession of a silent marching band from Fingo Village square to the vicinity of the old Egazini Memorial. Imaginary sound reignites a sensitive history marked by deprivation, emphasising the fact that we can only see when we fully recognise our blindness.

Fingo Village is an important site in Grahamstown. "The title of the land was given to the amaFengu people in return for their services and bravery in fighting the British during the battles with the amaXhosa between 1846-1853. The amaFengu who at this point were refugees were given title to 320 plots in 1858. They quickly established a community and built churches, schools and houses. They were well respected and liked by the rest of the community..."*

Mohau Modisakeng connects his desire to produce images to his experience of growing up with the rich narratives his mother relayed about her gift of visions and dreams. Through her, he learnt to imagine that which cannot always be seen. Running through his work is the impetus to reimagine lost visions. Performing gestures that refer to the private rituals of a widow's mourning, he challenges society's degenerated visual acuity with regard to the traumatic history of South Africa.

* Fingo Revolutionaries Sisonke Movement www.fingovillage.blogspot.com

"It was Maya Angelou," says Modisakeng, "who set it straight for me when she said prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future and renders the present inaccessible. The prejudice of apartheid and colonialism has effectively espoused our collective histories and left whatever remains severely distorted"***



* In *Performing Stillness in Order to Move: Mohau Modisakeng's Becoming* by Ruth Simbao, 2014



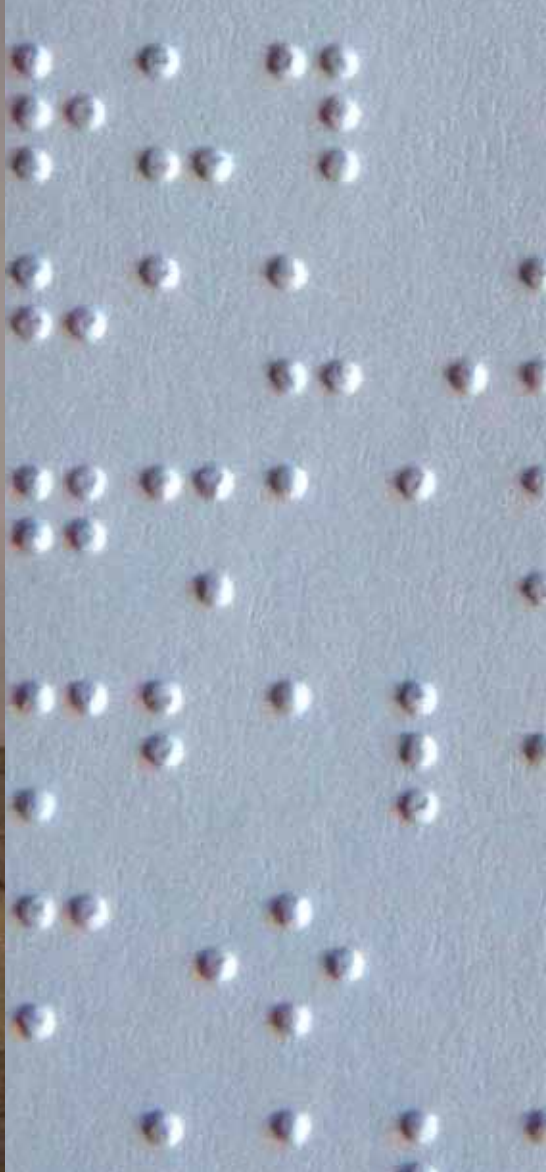
IGSHAAN ADAMS *BISMILLAH*

Performed with Amien Adams
Monday 7 July and Tuesday 8 July 11:00 and 15:00
Monument Basement

Igshaan Adams is an installation, mixed-media and performance artist whose works speak to his experiences of racial, religious and sexual liminality in South Africa. Opening up anticipated ways of seeing and being seen, Adams draws from tensions and complexities within his own cultural background and iconographies of Islam. In the **BLIND SPOT** performance titled *Bismillah*, Adams performs with his father who prepares his body for burial following the Islamic cleansing and wrapping ritual, as if he were dead.



Photo: Brian Engel



MBALI KHOZA

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKES WHO IS SPEAKING?

Wednesday 9 July and Thursday 10 July 11:00 and 11:30
Eastern Star Press Museum

"As I read it every single word erased itself into my mind. Afterwards they came to take out the stitches from the wound of it. The stitches were published. The reviewers made obscene noises"

Dambudzo Marechera, *House of Hunger*, 1978

Mbali Khoza engages with performance, video and installation in order to translate and express her understanding of language and literature as a mode of communication. The act of stitching is an important trope in her work. She is inspired by Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera who, in his novella *House of Hunger*, compares the act of writing to a violent stitching of a wound. Drawing from Foucault's lecture "What is an Author?" Khoza's **BLIND SPOT** performance questions authorship and the violent invisibility caused by translation, as language is altered and deleted.

Surrounded by the three-dimensional blocks of text at the Eastern Star Press Museum that in the past were meticulously arranged by hand, Khoza carefully performs a stitched transcription of a West African language using isiZulu phonetics as a guide.





Photo: Simone Heymans

"Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable... And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn't fit in with the core belief."

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 1967

SIMONE HEYMANS, IVY KULUNDU-GOTZ
JOSEPH COETZEE, CHIRO NOTT

EVERSE

Monday 7 July and Tuesday 8 July 19:00
Next to Glennie Hall, Victoria Primary

This live installation produced for **BLIND SPOT** is an extension of a series of public interventions installed for the duration of the National Arts Festival. It consists of a phenomenological stop-frame animation and installation; a water-based performance; a physical endurance 'test', and the performance of a character guide who draws on the history of Victoria Girls' Primary.

Everse is an obsolete word meaning to subvert or overthrow. The live installation **Everse** is a site-situational, spatial walk-about at Victoria Primary that engages with the blind spots of spaces of learning and the long-term repercussions these can have ideologically, socially, politically and philosophically. The audience is invited to engage with the collectively nostalgic yet subjective memories of schooling, and extrapolated elements of the education system are highlighted, unhinged and subtly critiqued.



Photo: *Views of Grahamstown*, 1892, published by D. Knight

Everse also refers to the uninterrupted vision of an octopus. Unlike humans, the octopus has no blind spot and its vision differs from the human act of 'seeing with the brain'. The human brain is taught how to see, and perception of the image relies on learning, culture, memory and contextual interpretation. The octopus, however, mimics objects to avoid predators, it obfuscates the vision of others, it problem-solves, and it tastes through touch.

Apart from its everse vision the octopus is viewed as one of the hardest working mothers on the planet. After laying and stitching together over 50,000 eggs, she spends half a year fending for her young and uses her last breath to blow her children out into open water.



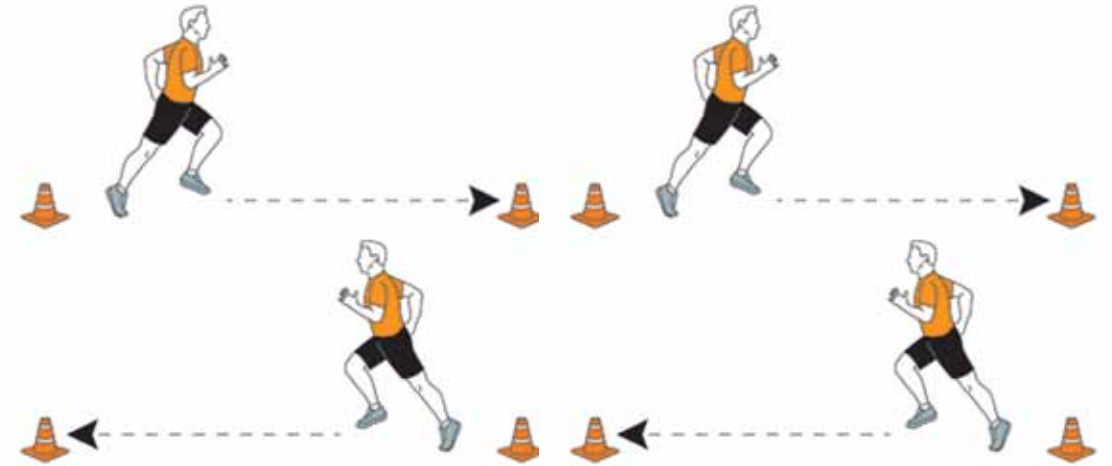
Photo: Colin Kendall, courtesy Cory Library, Rhodes University

Through the mediums of water, light, digital projection and performance, Everse explores intensities of parenting; perspectives of power structures, and the potential blind spots of daily rituals within the education system.



Photo: Ivy Kulundu-Gotz

The Beep Test, a ritual prevalent in former model C schooling structures in South Africa as well as the military, police, and fire departments is a form of fitness testing. Participants are disqualified from the test when they fall behind the pace of the beeps for two consecutive end lines. In a school context where fitness performance is not job related, the test turns a blind eye to diversity of ability, mental and emotional stamina, and body type.



BIOGRAPHIES:

Ruth Simbao is Associate Professor at Rhodes University and founder of *Visual and Performing Arts of Africa* (ViPAA). She is the curator of BLIND SPOT (2014) and Making Way (2012 and 2013)

Mohau Modisakeng is an artist based in Cape Town and Johannesburg and his recent solo exhibition, Ditaola opened at BRUNDYN+, Cape Town.

Igshaan Adams is a Cape Town-based visual and performing artist, and a 2014 RAW-EC Artist in Residence at ViPAA, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.

Mbali Khoza is a Johannesburg-based artist who works with video, text and sound. She is a 2014 RAW-EC Artist in Residence at ViPAA, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.

Simone Heymans is a South African multi-media artist who creates experimental phenomenological environments and interrogates the relationship between place and non-place.

Ivy Kulundu-Gotz is a Kenyan multi-media and performance artist, and a MFA candidate at Rhodes University. She often works with water, ice and light.

Joseph Coetzee is pursuing a MFA degree at Rhodes University. His interests lie in social media, public interventions and socio-political critique.

Chiro Nott is a performance artist with an interest in masking and pilgrimage. She is a MFA candidate at Rhodes University.

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Photo: Ruth Simbao