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making way

Contemporary Art from South Africa & China • Ruth Simbao

ARTISTS

ATHI-PATRA RUGA

BRENT MEISTRE

CHEN QIULIN

DAN HALTER

DOTUN MAKUN

DOUNG ANWAR JAHANGEER

GERALD MACHONA

HUA JIMING

JAMES WEBB

KUDZANAI CHIURAI

LEBOGANG RASETHABA

MALEONN

QIN GA

RANDOLPH HARTZENBERG

THENJIWE NKOSI

VULINDLELA NYONI

WU JUNYONG

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RUTH SIMBAO



MAKING WAY: Contemporary Art from South Africa & China

Curator: Ruth Simbao

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Venues: Alumni Gallery in the Albany Museum, Fort Selwyn, Provost Prison and camera obscura tower of the Observatory Museum

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Making Way: Opening up the Road

BY RUTH SIMBAO

*Places are not always stationary
(Tim Cresswell 2004:7)*

*The operative definition of the site has been transformed from a physical location—grounded, fixed, actual—to a discursive vector—ungrounded, fluid, virtual.
(Miwon Kwon 2002: 20-30)*



Fig. 1. Brent Meistre, *The stranger who licked salt back into our eyes*, 2009, stop-frame animation film. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 2. Brent Meistre, *The stranger who licked salt back into our eyes*, 2009, stop-frame animation film. Courtesy of the artist.



In navigation terms, 'making way' suggests that a ship is moving through water with its own power—a sail or an engine. If a ship merely drifts, it is 'underway', not 'making way'. In a time of unmoored geographies, the nautical term 'making way' can suggest physical progress across land too, for land is not as conceptually grounded as it used to be. Although artists in this exhibition are based in South Africa and China, it is important to recognise the tide-like undulation of place-markers. There is no inherent 'South African-ness' or 'Chinese-ness' in these works. As artist Wang Zhiyuan asserts, "So-called 'Chinese-ness' is a stamp imprinted by the West". Similarly, African artists have too often been expected to display, for an outside audience, an 'Africanicity' in their work. The artists who are based in South Africa are not bound to the place of this hyphen-nation (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 634). A number of artists, such as Vulindlela Nyoni, Dan Halter, Gerald Machona, Doung Anwar Jahangeer, Dotun Makun, and Kudzanai Chiurai have merely adopted its coordinates, for a while.

Both China and South Africa have undergone enormous socio-political change, and in recent years there has been a swell of Africans making their way to China (Fig. 3), and Chinese people moving to Africa, *Fei Zhou* (非洲). As places of significant transformation, 'South Africa' and 'China' are constantly morphing, reflecting Tim Cresswell's (2004: 39) assertion that, "place is constituted through reiterative social practices—place is made and remade on a daily basis—an unstable stage for performance Place . . . becomes an event rather than a secure ontological thing Place as an event is marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence".

This does not suggest, though, that place does not exist in a meaningful way, for no matter how temporary these artists' dwellings might be, the 'pause' revealed in their works is embedded in the specificity of local life—the movement across actual borders, the discrimination against specific accents, the frustration with real leaders, and the competition of particular markets. There are specificities to South Africa and China; only "top-down globalization" says Cresswell (2004: 84), "is insensitive to the specificity of place". Specificity, though, does not translate into fixity. Place, argues Yi-Fu Tuan (1977: 6), is merely a pause: ". . . if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place".

It is this perpetual rhythm of moving and pausing, moving and pausing that is considered in this exhibition, as artists allude to the complexities of migration and global shifts that fuel positive manifestations of cosmopolitanism as well as negative incidents of xenophobic violence. Social clusters of people are reshuffled as nations, governments, and communities make way for new dispositions, new traditions, new accents and new outlooks. As such, 'making way' can be used as a metaphor for the making of socio-political, communal or personal progress. This progress is not necessarily linear with a clear, triumphalistic goal ahead, but can simply be about movement, about progress beyond stagnation. When people make their way to new places, and societies make way for novel modes of being, the rhythm of moving and pausing, moving and pausing is played out, forging new pathways, and opening the road (*ukuvul'indlela*).



Fig. 3. There are many African traders in the Xiaobei Lu district in Guangzhou, China. Photos: Lincheng Qian.

PAUSE WITHIN MOVEMENT

The exhibition, *Making Way*, at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, is curated in such a way that certain works 'pause' at specific sites in a site-responsive way. The venues of the exhibition—the Albany Museum, Fort Selwyn, the Provost Prison and the *camera obscura* tower of the Observatory Museum—are imbued with specific colonial histories, and 2012 marks the 200-year anniversary of the establishment of Grahamstown. (It also marks the 100-year anniversary of the African National Congress). Site-responsive art today bleeds beyond a mere tapping into archeological layers of the past. The semaphore attached to the colonial fort, Fort Selwyn, which is adjacent to the 1820 Settlers Monument, "was erected [in 1845] as part of a telegraph system that was intended to connect Grahamstown with Fort Beaufort and Fort Peddie"². The alphabet of this now antiquated communication system can be reinterpreted intertextually in relation to the sign language used in Mestre's film (Fig. 4). As Miwon Kwon (2002: 29) writes, "Site is now structured (inter)textually . . . its model is . . . a fragmentary sequence of events and actions through space, that is, a nomadic narrative whose path is articulated by the passage of the artist".



Such "nomadic practice" (Kwon 2002: 43) can be viewed in **Doung Anwar Jahangeer's** *City Walk* series, which he devised in 2000 and has performed in Durban, Johannesburg, London, Belo Horizonte, Addis Ababa, Malmo, Marseilles, Amsterdam and Copenhagen. Convinced that pathways reveal the characteristics of society—especially informal, alternative pathways etched by the natural, irrepressible flows of pedestrian movement—Jahangeer intimately observes and experiences these breakaway trails by foot, through oral narrative and through preparatory drawing (Fig. 5). He embodies the suggestion that "places need to be understood through the paths that lead in and out" (Cresswell 2004: 43). For the *Making Way* exhibition he has produced a new *City Walk* titled *The Other Side*, which explores the stark economic divide that continues to plague the city of Grahamstown.

Site-specificity is no longer simply about responding to the presence of a site and its history, but rather reveals, within and beyond the site, "intimacies based on absence, distance, and ruptures of time and space" (Kwon 2002: 8). In an ongoing installation titled *In-Between* (Fig. 6), Jahangeer focuses on small tufts of grass that push through the tar on the road, as if elbowing aside the painted line, and rupturing that which demarcates structure and rules. This work is inspired by the writing of Walter Benjamin (1983: 36; 1979: 50) who describes the style of the walker, the flâneur, as "botanizing on the asphalt", for "only he who walks the road on foot learns the power it commands".

Fig. 4. Left and right: drawings of a semaphore of the semaphore alphabet, courtesy of the Albany Museum archives. Centre: Brent Mestre, *The stranger who licked salt back into our eyes*, 2009, stop-frame animation film. Courtesy of the artist.

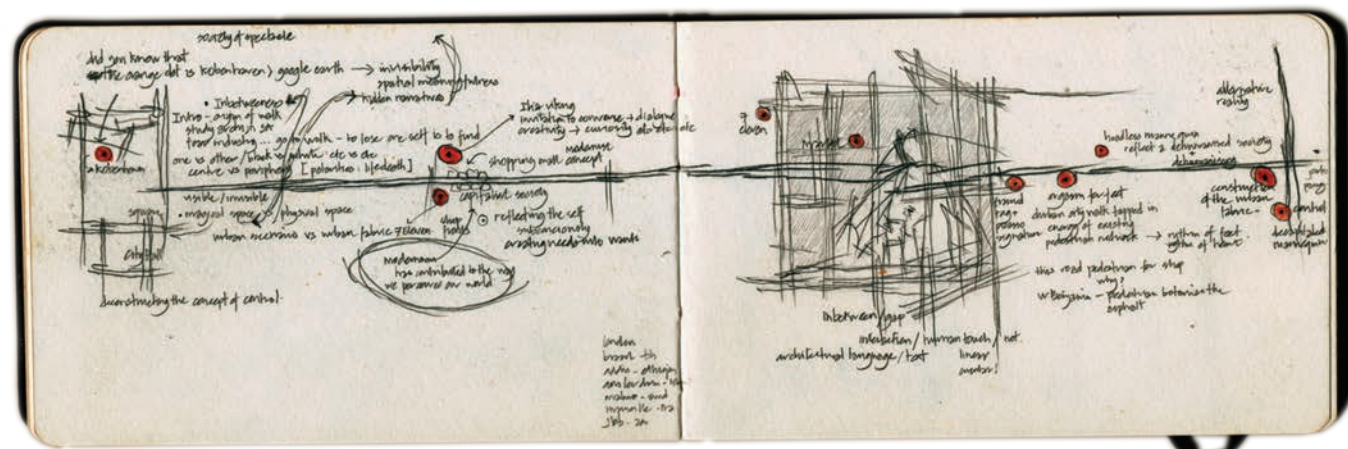
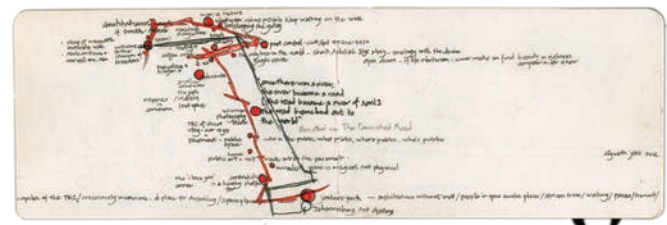
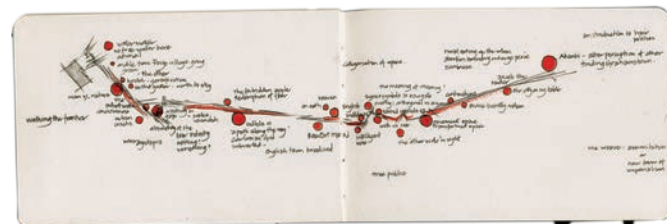
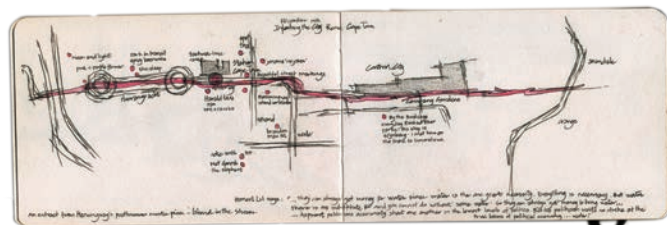


Fig. 5. Doung Anwar Jahangeer, preparatory drawings for *City Walk* series. 2000–ongoing. Top to bottom: Cape Town, Grahamstown, Johannesburg, Copenhagen. Courtesy of the artist and **dala**.



The notion of walking on foot is an important metaphor in this exhibition for the manner in which many people ‘make way’ today. While Jahangeer has produced the *City Walk* all over the world, reflecting the itinerant lifestyle of the residency- and biennale-hopping contemporary artist, Kwon (2002: 160) suggests that the “seductive allure of nomadism” is somewhat romanticised. Arguing that we should at least acknowledge the vulnerability of movement and nomadism she writes, “. . . the paradigm of nomadic selves may be a glamorization of the trickster ethos that is in fact a reprise of the ideology ‘freedom of choice’—the choice to forget, the choice to reinvent, the choice to fictionalize, the choice to ‘belong’ anywhere, everywhere and nowhere. This choice, of course, does not belong to everyone equally” (Kwon 2002: 165).

Fig. 6. Doung Anwar Jahangeer. *In-Between*, 2003, installation ongoing. Courtesy of the artist and **dala**.



Privileged academics, she suggests, measure their success “by the accumulation of frequent flyer miles . . . [and] our very self-worth seems predicated more and more on . . . ungrounded transience . . .” (Kwon 2002: 156). Jahangeer’s *In-Between*, however, pertinently captures a grounded, bottom-up notion of ‘opening the road’. Similarly, artists in this exhibition, such as Hua Jiming, Qin Ga, Randolph Hartzenberg (Fig. 7), Thenjiwe Nkosi, Brent Meistre and Athi-Patra Ruga (Fig. 8) reveal a gritty, grounded manifestation of movement, as bodies drag, scrape, wade and leopard crawl, alluding to endurance—endurance of the human spirit and the human form. In this exhibition, a number of artists use their bodies to etch meaning onto various sites.



Fig. 7. Randolph Hartzenberg, *I want to hear my brother*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Adam Letch.
Fig. 8. Athi-Patra Ruga, *Death of Beirut*, 2009. Courtesy of the artist and Whatiftheworld Gallery

GROUNDING, CORPOREAL FORMS OF ‘MAKING WAY’

In 1995 Beijing artist **Hua Jiming** and a friend performed *Walking Feet* (Fig. 9), which consisted of a four-day walk (ranging from 25km to 55km per day) from Huangshi to Huangmei in Hubei Province. On the last day they walked to Sizhu tomb and then slept at the Wuzu tomb. *Walking Feet* was a performance of Buddhist meditation, a ritualistic way of gaining composure through mindful walking. In the Great Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, Buddha teaches ‘walking meditation’ and explains, “A monk applies clear comprehension in going forward and in going back”³.

In 2010 Hua performed *Walking into Africa in a Chinese Way*⁴ as part of the *Infecting the City* performance festival in Cape Town (Fig. 10). Wearing a suit made from Beijing and Cape Town newspapers, he walked mindfully around the CBD, as if gaining composure as he entered *Fei Zhou* for the first time. At one point he spontaneously stuffed his mouth with flyers that were being handed out by vendors. This gagging action raises questions about the media, particularly the media’s often negative and stereotypical portrayal of China-Africa relations. In an unexpected moment of Sinophobia during Hua’s performance, a passerby shouted out “Kung Fu! Kung Fu! Foreigner! Foreigner!” (Simbao 2012: 4).

According to art historian Gao Minglu (2005: 196), “The act of wrapping one’s body became a common gesture used in the performance art of the ‘85 movement”⁵ and usually alluded to woundedness. While Hua’s newspaper suit registers a shift from the typical woundedness of the late 1980s and engages more positively with global accessibility of information, a similar sense of endurance lingers in his work. In the Chinese art scene in the early 1990s, “The body was the only unrestricted medium for the expression of ‘personal freedom’ . . . [Artists] could arbitrarily ‘persecute’, ‘sell’ or ‘injure’ their own bodies, and in doing so, test their own powers of endurance. ‘Endurance’, in this way, evolved into another form of free ‘enjoyment’” (Gao 2005: 175).

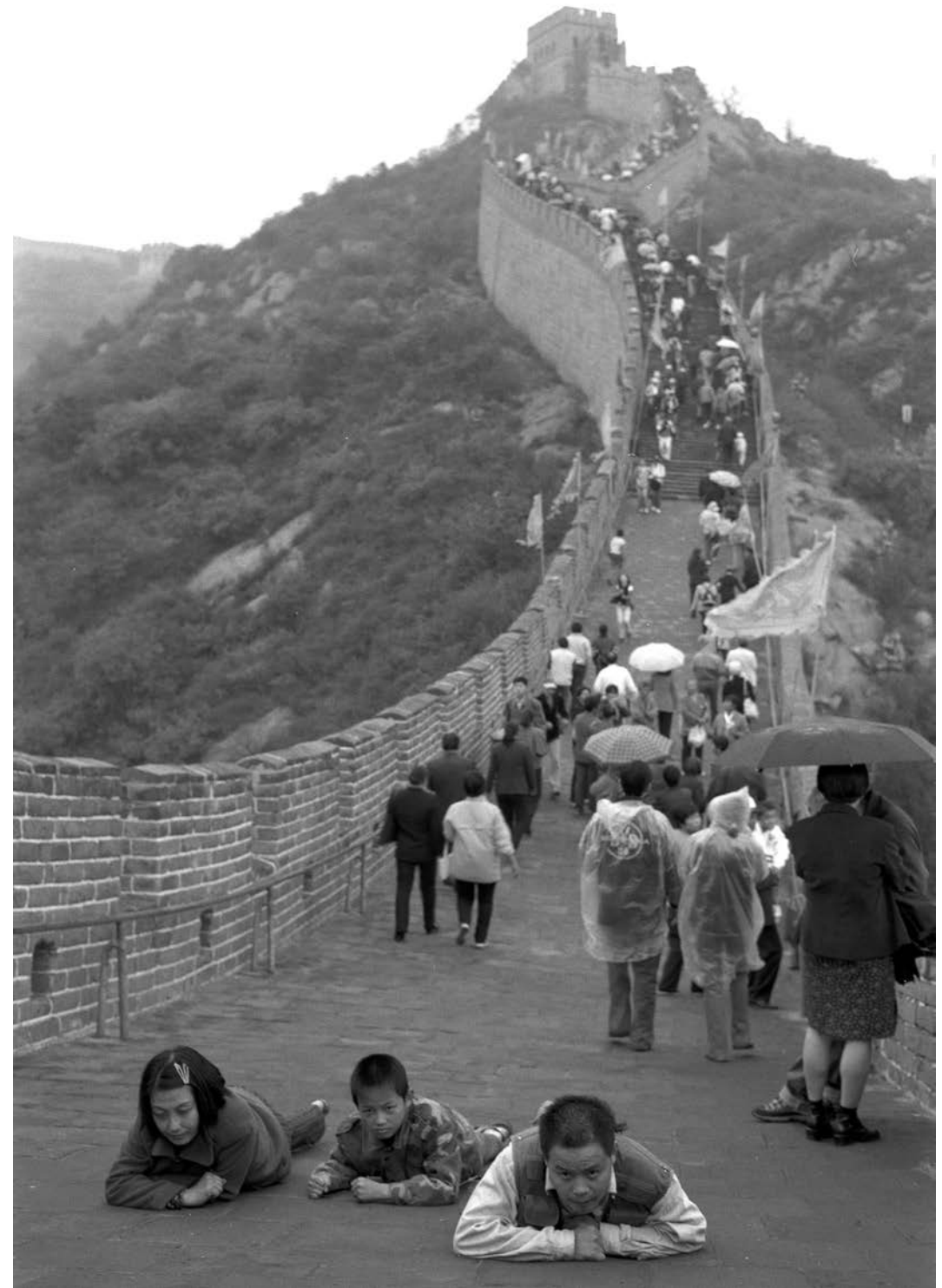
Resonating with this “process of enduring pain” (Gao 2005: 177), Hua climbed up Table Mountain in Cape Town in 2010, wrapped from head to toe in newspapers. Such endurance is an extension of earlier works performed in China, such as his series of crawls: *Crawling along the river bank at Tongzhou* (2001), *Hong Kong Anti-War Festival* (2002), and *Crawling before the front of the Tokyo Gallery in the 798 Art District* (2003). In 2001 Hua leopard-crawled with his partner and child for two hours along the Badaling Great Wall north of Beijing, which was key to protecting the city (Figs. 11 and 12). Hua interprets the Great Wall in relation to his inner being: “For me the Great Wall is a psycho-wall too. I must cross it to free myself from its cage, and then I would be released from the prison of power” (Hua n.d.: 16). Echoing Cresswell’s (2004: 39; 195) notion of place being composed of a series of changing events, Gao Minglu argues that the Great Wall of China is less about the physical structure of the wall than the discourse around it—a fluid discourse that creates an “indeterminacy of the Great Wall as a signifier”⁶.



Fig. 9. Hua Jiming. *Walking Feet*, 1995. Photographic print based on *Walking Feet* performance. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 10. Hua Jiming, *Walking into Africa in a Chinese Way*, 2010. Photographic print based on the 'paper man' performance in Cape Town. Courtesy of the artist.
Fig. 11. Hua Jiming, *Crawling on the Great Wall*, 2001. Courtesy of the artist. Right: Detail.



Crawling on the Great Wall, 2001. Detail.



Fig. 12. Qin Ga. *Miniature Long March*, 2002-2005, photographic print. Courtesy of the artist and Long March Space, Beijing.
Clockwise: Zhuokeji Fortress of the Tibetan Landlord; Hongyuan Grasslands; Yan'an Bao Pagoda, and Mao Zedong Temple, Hengshan County.



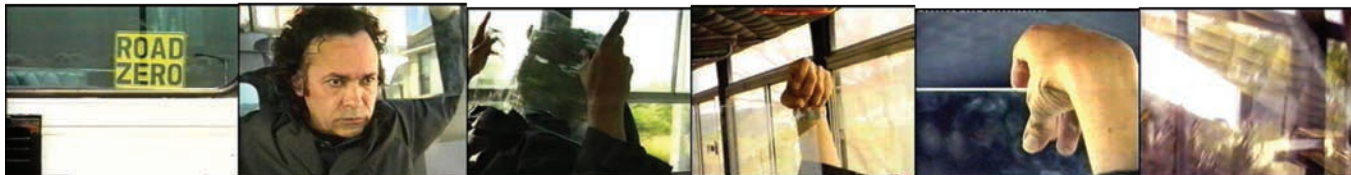
In the *Miniature Long March*, 2002-2005 (Fig. 12), **Qin Ga** similarly explores endurance through extensive walking and crawling, and by having a map of his journey tattooed onto his back by tattoo artist Gao Qiang. In 2005 he crawled across the Luding Bridge in Sichuan Province as part of *The Long March—A Walking Visual Display* organised by curator Lu Jie, and then travelled 3,000 miles over the Himalayas and the Kunlun Mountains for a month. The journey, which Lu Jie describes as “taking to the road in search of utopia”, retraced the historical Long March of the Chinese Red Army (1934-1936), which is believed to have travelled 6,000 miles in order to strategically escape the Nationalist Kuomintang troops. Led by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPA), the troops travelled from Jiangxi Province to Gansu Province in an epic journey across snowy mountains, that has been recorded, and some say mythologised, as the “Long March spirit”—a spirit of extreme endurance. As writer and filmmaker, Sun Shuyun, writes, this “founding myth” of Communist China has been upheld as a model of fortitude and survival, and Chinese people were often told: “If you find it hard, think of the Long March; if you feel tired, think of our revolutionary forbears.” She asserts that, “Decades after the historical . . . [Long March], we have been spurred on to ever more Long Marches—to industrialize China, to feed the largest population in the world, to catch up with the West, to reform the socialist economy, to send men into space, to engage with the 21st century”⁸.

Central to Qin Ga’s concern in the *Miniature Long March*, which consists of 23 photographic prints and a documentary video, is the use of his own body as an “artwork and a Long March object”⁹. In 2002, Qin started the project remotely, recording onto his flesh the journey of other artists who produced projects at particular sites with symbolic import along the historic Long March route. At first, he considered producing the tattoo on a horse, but felt that, “this type of pain should be borne by myself” as a way of embodying and recreating the memory of the historic event.

In his 2006 film, *The stranger who came with a book in the crook of his arm* (Fig. 13), **Brent Mestre** also grapples with the disjuncture between event and memory, as well as the desire to articulate the unspeakable and un-representable by submitting his own body to acts of endurance. In his paper, *Scrubbing Ground: Tragedy and the un-representable in the South African landscape*¹⁰, he relays the facts of the tragic event that triggered his 2006 film: “On the 25th August 2000, John Mosoko Rampuru, was killed by his white employer, Piet Odendaal, who tied his body with wire to the back of his pick-up truck and dragged it for 5km A trail of his body’s traces could be followed throughout the town until it finally reached the office of the perpetrator, who was found consuming alcohol and medication”.



Fig. 13. Brent Mestre, *The stranger who came with a book in the crook of his arm*, 2006, stop-frame animation film. Courtesy of the artist.



In the 'memorial' work *The stranger who came with a book in the crook of his arm* that responds evocatively to this horrifying event, Mestre's character, a stranger, scrapes along the ground as if being dragged without agency, but he also seems to generate his own slithering movement as he "snakes his way through the grass"¹¹. The slippage that occurs in the process of stop-frame animation whereby multiple frames are stitched together to create the illusion of motion, is significant, as this "gap, liminal space, or threshold" becomes, for Mestre, the place of the un-representable and the unsaid¹². In this work, the character, who falls between victim and perpetrator, scours the earth aimlessly, inscribing or "writing [his body] into the land" to the sound of a dirge-like song that is "played in reverse in an unending return to the beginning – running and rubbing against the grain of the sequential narrative"¹³. "I too use my own body", says Mestre, "to be reclined into the land, horizontal in a state of internment, speaking back to the land". Rather than following already-trodden paths, this character forges his own path into "the undergrowth, an underworld"¹⁴.

In this exhibition the concept of making way is far from linear. Not only is sequential narrative disrupted, as Mestre suggests, but the destination, and even the origin, of the journey is often unsettled, positioning the process of making way as key. With certain types of movement, such as forced removals or migration, even when a destination is reached, the process persists, for not only does the impossibility of return continue to haunt, but the impossibility of 'truly arriving'—being comfortably accepted as part of the socioscape—plagues the everyday.

It is this impossibility that is often explored in **Randolph Hartzenberg's** works, and the suitcase, a symbol of transience, alludes to this ongoing process that denies a settled destination. Suitcases or suitcase-like structures appear in works such as *Unplugged* (1993) from the *Domestic Baggage* series; the 1996 *Salt Theatre* installation at the Castle of Good Hope; *Salt and Time* (1997); *Road Zero* (1997); and *Three Days* (2012), a new installation at Fort Selwyn. In the *Road Zero* video (Fig. 14), Hartzenberg goes on a circumambulatory journey across District Six that was flattened by the apartheid government in order to make way for the apartheid ideology of racial segregation. Riding on a bus destined for "ROAD ZERO", the artist takes a sheet of glass out of his suitcase and holds it behind his head. According to Hartzenberg, the close proximity of the glass to the head indicates the corporeal notion of memory in both the mind and the body¹⁵.

As the bus drives through the razed District Six land, the glass pane reflects the surrounding landscape, operating as a kind of memory board or memory pane; a threshold between the past and future reconstructions of the past, with the mnemonic moment being in the present. "Memory does not occur in the cocoon of the mind, isolated and detached from external sources; instead it is always located on the borderline of the body . . . always the in-between, always becoming, always in the present, always enacted through the 'now' of bodily experience" (Roberts and Roberts 1996: 86). As such, memories of particular events can change with current circumstances, opening up memory in a performative way; opening up the road.

Fig. 14. Randolph Hartzenberg, stills from *Road Zero* video, 1997. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 15. *The fence that runs along the Zimbabwe/South Africa national border*, 2010. From the *Border Farm* project coordinated by Thenjiwe Nkosi, 2009-2011. Photo: Nison Dube.
 Fig. 16. *Dulibadzimu Theatre Group members reenact Limpopo River crossing*, 2010, still photograph from *Border Farm* (32:00), 2011. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Mildred Banda.

As a way of dealing with memories that continue to push into the present and the future, a group of 'border jumpers' who illegally crossed the Zimbabwe-South Africa border, reenacted their crossing, which included climbing through barbed wire and wading across the Limpopo River. In **Thenjiwe Nkosi's** film, *Border Farm* (Figs. 15 and 16), members of the Dulibadzimu Theatre Group speak about the impossibility of returning and the impossibility of fully arriving. Even once the apparent destination has been reached, Norman Masawi explains that, "Some of us prefer to stay close to the border . . . it's closer to home"¹⁶. The so-called place of arrival does not become home, "but for now, it's where we stay"¹⁷.

Actual borders, like all liminal zones, are potentially dangerous places, for a liminal or threshold experience needs to come to an end so that a person is safely reintegrated into society (van Gennep 1960). In this case, the liminal space is the Limpopo River that, rather than being a fixed line, is a constantly moving force: "If you try to stand in one place the water actually digs sand underneath your feet, and it takes you away. You have to keep moving"¹⁸. Most performers in *Border Farm*, make it clear that South Africa was never a planned destination, and as such it remains an in-between space: "I am thinking of going somewhere else . . . I think I will go somewhere"¹⁹.

Moving and pausing. Moving and pausing. Never completely arriving.

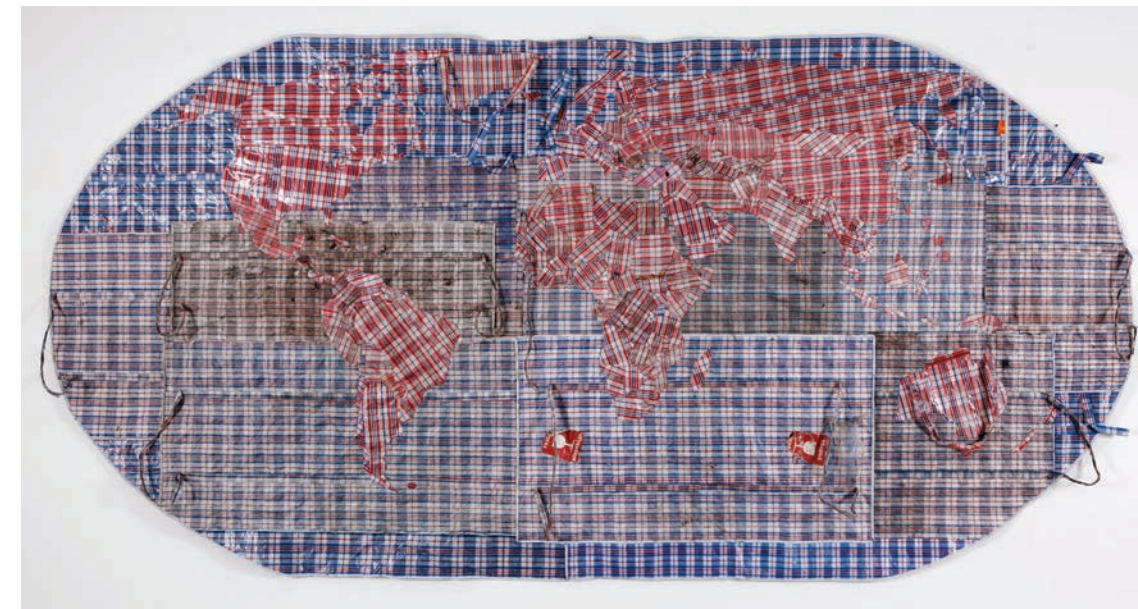


Fig. 17. Dan Halter, *Rifugiato Mappa del Mondo*, 2011, new and used plastic mesh bags. This work was stitched together by Sibongile Chinjojo, a Zimbabwean refugee currently living in South Africa. Courtesy of the artist and Round About Collection.



Fig. 18 Dan Halter, *Space Invader (Johannesburg taxi rank – port of entry)*, 2009, video (3:04). Courtesy of the artist and Whatiftheworld Gallery.

MIGRATION AS PERPETUAL PROCESS OF ARRIVAL

When migrants step into this exile, they huddle in national enclaves, constructing micro-cities and mini-nations. Some, fearing xenophobia from locals and the cops, dare not step beyond invisible boundaries.
(Percy Zvomuya 2010: 180)

Artists in *Making Way* move beyond romanticised, elitist forms of global movement and reveal the fact that there is a “power-geometry” to space-time compression (Massey in Cresswell 2004: 65). As Massey points out, there are those who tend to do all the moving and the communicating, “but there are also groups who are doing a lot of physical movement who are not ‘in charge’ of the process in the same way . . . there are those who are simply on the receiving end of time-space compression” (Massey in Cresswell 2004: 65). This does not mean that a clear-cut distinction can always be drawn between advantage and disadvantage, between active and passive movement, or between voluntary and involuntary migration, for migrants often straddle specific classifications (Simone 2000: 432). However, as **Dan Halter** reveals in *Rifugiato Mappa del Mondo* (2011) (Fig. 17), there are global tendencies that reveal where privilege lies.

In this work Halter, with the help of Sibongile Chinjojo, stitches together a world map made from the cheap nylon bags produced in China that are commonly associated with migration. Faded and tattered red, blue and white checked bags are used to map the countries that people often try to escape, whereas the brighter, newer bags map the most desirable destinations—destinations of relative opportunity and wealth; destinations more often than not in the north and the west. While multinational companies declare that the world is becoming smaller, Homi Bhabha (1992: 88) reminds us that, “The globe shrinks for those who own it; for the displaced or dispossessed, the migrant or refugee, no distance is more awesome than the few feet across borders or frontiers”.

In Halter’s work *Space Invader (Johannesburg taxi rank – port of entry)* (Fig. 18), he deals with the process of migrancy—the experience of the journey and the perpetual ‘arrival’—that continues once a person lands at his or her destination. Filmed at a taxi rank, a point of entry for many foreigners from other African countries, the work plays on the notion of aliens arriving from out-of-space by referencing the 8-bit Space Invaders motif. An aerial view of the taxi rank reveals this motif that is compiled out of the nylon bags sometimes referred to as China totes, or, as they have been recently named in South Africa, Zimbabwe bags. People on the ground run around moving the bags one at a time, so that the motif ‘floats down’ like the aliens in the Space Invaders computer game. The aim of the game is to shoot the aliens before they land. However, once foreigners do land in South Africa, they are often derogatorily referred to as *amakwerekwere*, and through regular reference to their ‘alien-ness’ they are reminded that their arrival can never be complete.

Recently the Nando’s chicken restaurant chain in South Africa produced a television commercial that advertises variety in their menu by referencing socio-cultural diversity as an alternative to South Africa’s bad reputation as a xenophobic place. ‘Foreignness’ becomes a concept in the advertisement that is extended to all who are non-autochthons, ranging from Cameroonians, Kenyans and Nigerians, to Europeans, Indians and Chinese, and more controversially to Swatis, Sothos, Tswanas, Vendas and Zulus. Group by group these ‘foreigners’ are humorously blown up in puffs of smoke (a bit like the exploding Space Invaders motif), as if being eradicated from the South African landscape. The advert ends with the punch line, “Real South Africans like diversity”. Reflecting an inward-looking approach, the television broadcasters SABC, DSTV, M-Net and e.tv banned the advert, arguing that it perpetuates xenophobia, rather than challenges it. The advert has, however, found an eager audience on YouTube, revealing the problem of maintaining an insular, introverted approach that defines ‘home’, ‘nation’ and the ‘inside’ in a limited way. Further, the *Sunday Times* printed a full-page advertisement laid out in storyboard format titled, “The pro-diversity ad broadcasters don’t want you to see”²⁰. In light of Afrophobia and Sinophobia, clearly what is needed is a more extroverted approach to place and an extroverted way of being in the world. “Is it not possible” asks Massey, “for a sense of place to be progressive; not self enclosing and defensive, but outward looking?” (Massey in Cresswell 2004: 63-64).



Fig. 19. James Webb, *There's No Place Called Home (Guangzhou)*, 2005, C-print from an ongoing site-specific installation. Courtesy of the artist. Image text: Calls of South African carnivorous birds concealed in Chinese trees, Guangzhou.

Fig. 20. James Webb, *There's No Place Called Home (Great Wall)*, 2005, C-print from an ongoing site-specific installation. Courtesy of the artist. Image text: Calls of a Golden-bellied Flycatcher broadcast from speakers concealed in a tree along the Great Wall of China.



South African artist, **James Webb**, suggests, in fact, that there is no longer any place that we can really consider home²¹. In his ongoing sound installation series, *There's No Place Called Home*, which is a “worldwide intervention,”²² he plays sound recordings of birds endemic to one region on speakers hidden in the trees of a foreign region. In 2005 he placed the calls of South African carnivorous birds in Guangzhou trees (Fig. 19). The sound of Somali Ravens could be heard in Dusseldorf, and he has produced similar works in Japan, Argentina, Paris, Jordan and Marrakech. According to Webb, “Bird vocalizations are generally used to mark territory and attract mates, and the project’s audio is mixed so as to sound as lifelike as possible within the discrepant environment”²³ (Simbao 2012: 6).

The 2005 photograph *There's No Place Called Home (Great Wall)* with text on the image that reads, *Calls of Golden-bellied Flycatcher broadcast from speakers concealed in a tree along the Great Wall of China* (Fig. 20) references the calls of birds native to the western Panama region and parts of Costa Rica that were placed in trees in China. As Webb writes, “There are many subversive elements in this image. This is a foreign bird that has . . . invaded the site and has marked its territory through its native song, maybe even tried to attract mates in the process. The guardian lion to the right side of the tree has not stopped or deterred our intrepid bird”²⁴.

Many birds migrate, and in the context of human migration, ‘foreignness’ and potential xenophobia, birdcalls allude to name-calling, such as “*Makwerekwere*, *Magribanga*, and *Grimba* – insulting names directed at the unwanted foreigner” or the “spectral alien” (Murray 2003: 447). In his 2006 works *There's No Place Called Home (Johannesburg)* (Figs. 21 and 22) with the accompanying image text, *Calls of restricted-range Chinese birds in Johannesburg trees, Joubert Park, Johannesburg* and *Calls of non-migratory Nigerian birds in Johannesburg trees, Joubert Park, Johannesburg*, Webb plays with South Africans’ fears that have grown out of stereotypes constructed around Nigerian and Chinese people. By choosing restricted-range birds and non-migratory birds, Webb plays on the fact that Chinese and Nigerian people are today notorious for moving with global flows. In a new 2012 installation, Webb places the calls of a Taiwan Yuhina bird in a tree just outside the Provost Prison in Grahamstown. The Taiwan Yuhina tends to join other species in mixed flocks and its call sounds like a bit like “twi-MI-chiu”, resembling the phrase, “we MEET you”²⁵.



Fig. 21. James Webb, *There's No Place Called Home (Johannesburg)*, 2006, C-print based on an ongoing site-specific installation. Courtesy of the artist. Image text: Calls of non-migratory Nigerian birds broadcast from speakers concealed in South African trees, Joubert Park, Johannesburg.

Fig. 22. James Webb, *There's No Place Called Home (Johannesburg)*, 2006, C-print based on an ongoing site-specific installation. Courtesy of the artist. Image text: Calls of restricted-range Chinese birds broadcast from speakers concealed in South African trees, Joubert Park, Johannesburg.



Fig. 23. *Chewa nyau* masquerade masks at the Kulamba Ceremony, Eastern Province, Zambia, 2005. Photos: Ruth Simbao.
 Fig. 24. Gerald Machona. *Ita kuti kunaye (Make it rain)*, 2010, photographic print from the Ndiri Cross Border Trader Performance series. Courtesy of the artist.

Gerald Machona uses the historic migration of the Chewa *Gule Wamkulu* masquerade performances as the impetus for his contemporary performance art, which intervenes into South African spaces of xenophobia. The Chewa people of Malawi brought the *Gule Wamkulu* tradition into Zimbabwe during the 15th to 17th century Maravi invasions and during early 20th century labour migrations in southern Africa. Three layers of negotiating the distance between insiders and outsiders, between familiar people and strangers are played out. According to Mapopa Mtonga, the Chewa *nyau* masquerades often commented on strangers—both visitors who came in the form of traders, or invaders who came in the form of colonists²⁶. In this first layer of negotiating distance, *nyau* masks and costumes explore differences and at times subvert belief systems, such as Christianity, that were not only imposed onto Chewa people but also drove the *Gule Wamkulu* masquerades underground during Colonialism. The Maria, or Malia, figure is a well-known female masked figure that is gentle in her demeanour but subtly references the *nyau* tradition's battle with Christianity. The *mulungu*, or *muzungu* Caucasian settler was portrayed with bright pink, sunburnt skin, the Chinese trader was portrayed with narrow eyes, and the Arab trader was portrayed with a long narrow face and sometimes wore stilts to reflect the tall impression created by the long flowing robes worn by Muslims (Fig. 23).

The second layer of negotiating distance occurred when some Chewa people migrated to Zimbabwe and worked as 'aliens' on mines and farms in a country that was predominantly Ndebele and Shona. As such the *Gule Wamkulu* performances became a signifier of 'Chewa-ness' for people residing in Zimbabwe who at times faced xenophobic name-calling such as *mabwidi* or *mabvakure*. Machona engages with these historical ways of distancing and stereotyping by creating a third layer of negotiation in the form of contemporary performances that comment on the xenophobia Zimbabweans face when they move to South Africa and are labelled *amakwerekwere*.

In the first of a series of performances, Machona references some of the strong gestures that the *Gule Wamkulu* figures perform. The masquerade dancers are famous for kicking up dust, both literally and figuratively²⁷. In his performance about a cross-border trader who goes to South Africa to make money, Machona dances on a rooftop in Harare near to the Roadport Bus Terminus where one can catch a bus to South Africa (Fig. 24). His face is covered in a paper mask made from decommissioned Zimbabwean dollars and by reversing the footage Zimbabwean dollars fly into his hands and he pockets the money. This work was partly inspired by a Bonga Maffin song *Mari Yebhepa* (Paper Money), particularly the line, "Mother, I am going to Jozi with paper money".

Machona has since developed other performances based on this figure that wears various versions of Zim-dollar masks. In different social contexts the figure acts out specific occupations that are typical of immigrants in South Africa. For example, in a beautifully woven mask he performed as a DJ in *Ndiri DJ Performance* at the Waiting Room in Cape Town (Fig. 25), and at the Youngblackman Gallery he performed as a barber cutting 'chiskop' hairstyles. In collaboration with Bettina Malcomess who constructed a bar from leftover materials from the 2010 World Cup, Machona performed as a barman (Fig. 26). For the performance video he stood for an hour as a barman at the corner of Long and Buiten streets in the Cape Town CBD. Long Street is the tourist hub of bars and restaurants, where one often sees European visitors as patrons and African immigrants as barmen and waitrons. The name Buiten means 'outside' alluding to the construction of 'inside' and 'outside' in terms of visitors, foreigners and accepted 'locals'.



Fig. 25. Gerald Machona. *Ndiri DJ (I am a DJ)*, 2010, photographic print from the Ndiri DJ Performance series. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 26. Gerald Machona. *Waiting for Tip*, 2010, photographic print from the Ndiri Barman Performance series. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 27. Gerald Machona, *From China, with Love*, 2012, photographic print for performance *From China, with Love*. Courtesy of the artist.



In a new performance for *Making Way* titled *From China, with Love* (Fig. 27), Machona expands his exploration of ‘foreignness’ to include those on both ends of the China-Africa debate. In collaboration with Chinyanta Mwenya, a Zambian who recently learnt Mandarin when he studied in China, he plays with the influx of *zhing zhong* (cheap or low quality goods often associated with Chinese imports) to Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa. In contrast to the mass production of *zhing zhong*, known as *fong kong* in South Africa, Machona carefully crafts objects out of decommissioned Zimbabwean dollars and then stitches labels onto them that read, “Made in China”. As such, he alludes to current global socio-economic shifts, which have resulted not only in Chinese objects pouring into Africa and elsewhere, but also in many Africans seeking opportunities for informal trade in places such as Guangzhou. Sometimes referred to as the ‘world’s factory’, Guangzhou is host to numerous Africans, mostly in the trading areas of San Yuan Li and Xiaobei Lu, where streets are “lined with multi-floored commercial buildings teeming with tiny shops that sell cheap goods that range from electronics, to fabrics to wigs” (Simbao 2011: 17). It is important to recognise that xenophobia exists on both sides of the China-Africa debate. While the *fong kong* hype has negatively stereotyped Chinese people, in Guangzhou the media sometimes refers to the ‘African problem’. As Li Zhigang suggests, the mistrust is mutual (Simbao 2011: 18).

In the short film titled *Sino*, South African filmmaker **Lebogang Rasethaba** displays poignant subtlety in terms of xenophobia in the context of China-Africa relations²⁸. Rasethaba completed a Masters degree in filmmaking at Beijing Normal University, and produced two short films about Africans living in China titled *Sino* (2010) and *Metro* (2011). The third of the trilogy, *Cosmo*, is still in process.

Instead of rehearsing the typical story of Africans being treated badly in Guangzhou, Rasethaba unravels a much more complex narrative that reveals Africa’s own forms of Afrophobia rather than simplistically pointing fingers at Chinese xenophobia. In *Sino* (Fig. 28), two African students—one Anglophone, the other Francophone—share a room at a Chinese university residence. While the Francophone African has been there for longer and understands Chinese culture, the newly arrived Anglophone African drowns in his misunderstanding of local society. Rather than grouping together against the Chinese, tensions rise between the two African students. Not only does the Anglophone African need to come to terms with his own ignorance of Chinese culture, but he also becomes aware of his own prejudice against a ‘fellow’ African. Drawing from his own experience of studying in Beijing, Rasethaba reflects upon “contra-flow diaspora” in a way that conceptually challenges stereotypes of China-Africa relations and sophisticatedly moves beyond knee-jerk notions of solidarity or prejudice (Simbao 2012: 4). Such openness is critical to a theorisation of diaspora that moves beyond linear, unidirectional analyses of global flows.

Fig. 28 Lebogang Rasethaba. *Sino*. 2010, still from video (19:43). Courtesy of the artist.



MADE IN CHINA: ‘... MUST-GO!’

Nigerian artist **Dotun Makun**, who studied at Rhodes University in South Africa, similarly complicates stereotypes that are produced in the intra-continental diaspora. In his series of paintings, *Ghana-Must-Go* (2011), he explored transnational movement commonly associated with Nigerians. Through a process of working with live models, Makun created sophisticated portraits of professors and university students working and studying in South Africa (Fig. 29). However, he subtly included Africans of other nationalities in the series even though this body of work is expressly about the Nigerian diaspora. As such, as a portrait painter, he questions the assertion that ‘Nigerian-ness’ or ‘South African-ness’ can be read in facial features, complicating issues of stereotypes and visual distinctions. This notion of facial recognition became particularly pertinent during the 2008 outbreak of xenophobic violence when people, even South Africans, were targeted simply because they supposedly looked or sounded ‘foreign’.

The backgrounds of Makun’s portraits of ‘Nigerians’ living in Grahamstown, South Africa, are made up of patterns from the cheap vinyl bags made in China. These bags, usually associated with forced migration, refugee status and poverty, are referred to in Nigeria as Ghana-Must-Go bags, owing to Ghanaian refugees being expelled from Nigeria in 1983 and having to hurriedly pack up all their belongings in these large bags²⁹.



Fig. 29 Dotun Makun. *Lester: Ghana-Must-Go* and *Prof Adesina: Ghana-Must-Go*, 2011, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

In **Vulindlela Nyoni’s** print *Murambatsvina vii* (Fig. 30), the Zimbabwe bag or Chinese tote could be interpreted as alluding to the increase of *zhing zhong* in Zimbabwe³⁰. The sweeping action represented in the print depicts the 2005 Zimbabwean government crackdown Operation Murambatsvina—translated from Shona as “to get rid of filth.” The government eradicated ‘slums’ in the name of urban renewal and sanitation, creating havoc in the lives of millions. Due to the fact that the livelihoods of informal Zimbabwean traders, including vegetable-sellers, flower-sellers and curio hawkers³¹ (Martin 2007: 235) were crippled when their wares were confiscated and buildings were razed to the ground, some speculate the clean up was aimed to diminish local Zimbabwean competition for newly arrived entrepreneurs from China who were welcomed by Mugabe’s *Look East* policy³².

Speaking of Operation Murambatsvina, Zimbabwean police commissioner, Augustine Chihuri, declared, “We must clean the country of the crawling mass of maggots bent on destroying the economy”—the “maggots” being Zimbabwe’s “poorest of the poor” living on the outskirts of cities who, according to Martin (2007: 234), were punished for MDC support in the main towns during the 2005 elections³³. The perception of some is that these people were cleared away for the benefit of the Chinese³⁴. In the following year in the run-up to the Zambian elections, Michael Sata, leader of the Patriotic Front that was then the opposition party, derogatorily referred to Chinese investors as “bogus Chinese infesters”³⁵. More recently he toned down anti-Chinese sentiment, and when he was announced President in 2011 he publically welcomed Chinese investment as long as it benefited Zambia and not just China³⁶.

The Chinese totes or Ghana-Must-Go bags have become almost synonymous with the movement of poor or destitute people who make their way to other lands in search of safety and opportunity. While they are also referred to as Turkish suitcases or Bangladeshi bags, they could generically be referred to as ‘must go!’ bags, as they evoke an urgent need to be on the move, denying the possibility of true arrival. Made in China, they allude, further, to Chinese economic venture into other parts of the world, as well as perceptions in parts of Africa that the Chinese ‘must go’, and perceptions by some in China that African traders are a problem and ought to leave.



Fig. 30. Vulindlela Nyoni, *Murambatsvina vii*, 2012, screenprint, etching and chin-collé. Courtesy of the artist.



Opening up the symbolism of the ‘must go!’ bag beyond typical associations of migration, **Chen Qiulin’s** 2006 video, *Colour Line* (Fig. 31), reveals a different form of making way. In this video, which is named after the red, blue and white construction tarp, a similar material used in the making of China totes, the artist grapples with the removal of local communities along the Yangtze River that had to make way for the building of the Three Gorges Dam. The Three Gorges project, referred to as Sanxia Gongcheng, began in 1994. About 1.3 million people were forced to relocate and close to 1,400 villages and towns have been flooded, radically changing the landscape and topography with “the emergence of miragelike new cities above the rising water” (Wu 2008: 13).

As Wu Hung (2008: 6) writes, “Response in the West, perhaps predictably, has been largely negative” whereas “Chinese response has been more varied and nuanced”. Some argue that the power produced by the dam, the largest hydroelectric project to date, is much cleaner than the coal that was being used, and that the new, modern buildings that residents are being moved to provide better amenities for people.

Chen Qiulin grew up in Wanxian, and after she returned in 2002 and witnessed the destruction of her home, she produced the video *Rhapsody on Farewell* (2002), followed by *River, River* (2005), *Colour Line* (2006) and *Garden* (2007). *Colour Line* opens with a scene of buildings being pulled down while the artist, wearing angel wings and a dress made from striped construction tarp, hovers amidst the rubble (Fig. 32). “Like a guardian spirit of the house, she perches on the exposed beams, seemingly prepared to travel with the dismantled building to a new home. . . .” (Wu 2008: 17).

Throughout the video, suggests Wu (2008: 17), the artist appears to embody two conflicting emotions, “one pulling her back to the past, the other yearning for a new life. Such ambivalence is also manifested in many images of the video. The ruins are covered with the construction cloth: Is it a demolition site or an imagined construction site? . . . Chen Qiulin embodies two desires—to protect the old and to encourage the new. Remaining silent throughout the video she belongs to a liminal moment between past and future”. The lines on the reams and reams of construction tarp also function as a border zone between then and now, between nostalgia for the demolished wooden houses and the excitement of modern, new apartments. At one point the tarp threatens to swallow up a group of young boys also dressed in red, blue and white (Fig. 33), but at another point Chen drags the undulating tarp along like a celebratory dragon float that ushers in the new year. Rather than didactically reprimanding or condoning Sanxia Gongcheng, the fairy- or angel-like figure in *Colour Line* provides gentle console as she metaphorically escorts residents to the new world rather than offering grandiose reprieve.

In Chen’s 2007 video, *Garden* (Fig. 34), a group of migrants “deliver huge bouquets of peonies in ornate ceramic vases to the new city” (Wu 2008: 17). While *Colour Line* was filmed just before the flooding, *Garden* represents life moving forward once the new, transformed city has been erected on higher ground and the Binjiang Road embankment is in place. The flowers, however, are fake. According to Chen, in Chongqing there are lots of migrant workers who have come to the city from rural areas, for they heard that there were fortunes to be made. “[T]he fake flowers”, she says, “symbolize the dream of becoming city people” (Chen in Wu 2008: 77). “The reality is not what they imagined it to be. The money has been very difficult to earn. Someone once praised the flowers I grew saying, ‘These flowers are so beautiful, they look fake’. I felt like they were just like me, full of dreams. To them, having a dream was a good thing. They did not feel that it was in any way bad I felt that this dream was so fake that it was lovely” (Chen in Wu 2008: 78).

Fig. 31 - 33: Chen Qiulin. *Colour Line*, 2006, still from video (8:08). Courtesy of the artist and Long March Space, Beijing.



Fig. 34. Chen Qiulin, *Garden*, 2007, still from video (14:45). Courtesy of the artist and Long March Space, Beijing.

In the middle of the video, *Garden*, Chen makes reference to the legend, *The Romance of the White Snake*, which has been performed as an opera, a stage play and a television series. The story is about a scholar who falls in love with a beautiful woman only to find out that she is a thousand-year-old white snake that has taken on the form of a human. Wu (2008: 17-18) suggests that this is ultimately a story of healing, and he says that, in *Garden*, it is sad to see the ghosts from *The Romance of the White Snake* disappear, "because we suddenly realize that they symbolize, above all else, the city's historical memory. Is such erasure of historical memory a necessary condition of modernization?" Must elements of the past inevitably go in order to usher in new development, new traditions and new dispositions? The soundtrack of *Garden* at times includes an eerie noise that sounds like liquid being sucked up with a straw, evoking the action of draining, rather than flooding. The video suggests, though, that not all is drained of the old way of life, for the old overlaps with the new. The communal washing of laundry, for example, still takes place at the riverside, despite new apartment blocks that suggest a different and supposedly progressive way of life. Making way is a process, a dialogue between the old and the new.



Fig. 35. Chen Qiulin, *Garden*, 2007, still from video (14:45). Courtesy of the artist and Long March Space, Beijing.



Fig. 36. Maleonn. *Amber # 1*, 2008, photographic print. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 37. Maleonn. *Amber # 5*, 2008, photographic print. Courtesy of the artist.

MAKING WAY FOR NEW 'SCRIPTS'

Artists such as Maleonn and Kudzanai Chiurai explore, often in lighthearted ways, the perspectives of a new generation of young adults in China and South Africa who usher in new socio-political and socio-cultural 'scripts'. These 'scripts', however, are still in the making, and, rather than being prescriptive, are being tried on and revised in the process. The 'scripts' are sometimes absurd, and mostly theatrical, as the personas of leaders—past, present and imaginary—are rehearsed.

The curators of the 2010 Shanghai Biennale, which was themed *Rehearsal*, cite Brecht, who writes, "Actors in rehearsal do not wish to 'realize' an idea Rehearsals are experiments, aiming to explore the many possibilities of the here and now. The rehearser's task is to expose all stereotyped, clichéd and habitual solutions" (Brecht in Fan, Li and Gao 2010: 35). Further, they write:

'Rehearsals' are not formal performances During rehearsals, the theatre is no longer the designated stage for the performance of seeing and being seen, or a representational space that excludes reality. It is rather a space subjected to constant self-appreciation, interruption and deconstruction. Rehearsing finds itself in the no man's land between the onstage and the offstage, and hence falls into the limbo between theatre and everyday life (Fan, Li and Gao 2010: 36-37).

In a panel discussion that was part of the Biennale's summit, *West Heavens*, Sarat Maharaj challenged viewers to imagine rehearsals that are not scripted in the conventional sense: "What is Asia today?" he asked. "What is Modernity today, and what makes up the plethora of world modernities? Is it merely a rehearsal to be like a Western Modernity or can there be a rehearsal without a script?"³⁷ Speaking about India, China and Africa in a post-universal age, he argued that the Global South can create exciting new 'scripts' to perform, 'scripts' that are not rehearsals to become like the "big note of the West", but reflect stimulating aspects of the "small change of the universal" that add up to more than the big note³⁸.

Both Maleonn and Kudzanai play with a theatre of possibilities as they remix props of old regimes with the lightheartedness of youth. I first met **Maleonn** when he reconstructed his entire studio at the 2010 Shanghai Biennale. As the curators write, "Maleonn's studio is a theatre where both frontstage and backstage goings on are visible to the audience. Come and see all the 'actors' and 'props': observe Maleonn as he refines his 'script'; and watch him direct scene after scene. Maleonn's theatre also invites audience members to use the 'actors' and 'props' to create their own dramas" (Fan, Li and Gao 2010: 230).

Perrine Pautré (2009: 5) points out that Maleonn's real name, Ma Liang, references the Chinese folktale "Maliang and the Magic Brush", which is about "a young painter, who is as talented as he is heroic [and who] transforms reality with his brush to carry out kind deeds". Maleonn's father was the head of the Shanghai opera and his mother was a well-known actress and so, "an 'artificial' theatrical universe" has always surrounded the artist (Pautré 2009: 5). Maleonn himself used to be a Director, and Pautré suggests that the artist's natural "sense of stagecraft" is used to weave together ". . . fictional, romantic lives on stage [that] were early on contrasted with a particularly drab external reality. During the Cultural Revolution, his parents were sent to the countryside and so he stayed alone with his sister for many years. Left alone, the young Maleonn invented a salutary universe, a world of dreams and fantasies".

Maleonn opens his *Amber* series with the poetic words, "Amber. Memories killed by the time and those little beetles' cruel but romantic fates" (Maleonn in Pautré 2009: 21). In this series, yellowed posters from the Cultural Revolution decorate the interior walls of an apartment belonging to people of his parents' generation. Youthful characters act out the poses and gestures in the posters, often with the "grandiloquent body movements of Chinese opera" (Pautré 2009: 5). A young contemporary 'revolutionary' poses heroically with a gun, two young adults try to squeeze an enormous peach through a doorway, and others mimic the pose of Mao Zedong (Figs. 36 and 37). The giant peach recalls a 1963 poster by Gao Ruqian titled *A gift for Chairman Mao*, which depicts cute, chubby-cheeked toddlers delivering an enormous peach that is wrapped in a banner that states, "Long live Chairman Mao" (Min et al 2011: 49).



Fig. 38. Kudzanai Chiurai, *The Black President*, 2009, from the *Dying to be Men* series, ultrachrome ink on photofibre paper. Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery.

Fig. 39. Kudzanai Chiurai, *The Minister of Enterprise*, 2009, from the *Dying to be Men* series, ultrachrome ink on photofibre paper. Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery.



Similarly, **Kudzanai Chiurai** plays with old and new props, representing theatrical personas of leaders “whose roles have been overblown by the satirist’s hand and gaze” (Zvomuya 2010: 184). In *Black President* (Fig. 38), a young leader sporting a bright red jacket, a bowtie, medals, badges and a gold watch, cradles a flywhisk in his arm. “It’s the meeting of ostentation and bad taste” says Zvomuya (2010: 184), “with a bit of tradition thrown in for the masses”.

Other characters in the series include the Minister of Enterprise who lights a cigar with paper money (Fig. 39), and the Minister of Finance who dons a fur coat and gold chain. Calling it the “spin factor”, Miles Keylock asserts that, “these days style over substance is the operative political strategy. The truth doesn’t matter if the hype is enough—a dismal fact ritually exploited by everyone from the Bush administration, to the Mugabe regime”³⁹.

As the editor of *Lines Magazine*, Chiurai (2010: 6) explains:

More often than not the African black president is looked upon as a father figure and liberator, not to be questioned, and what is good for his family is the law of the land. The Presidency is seen as a rightful position and some have overstayed their welcome by manipulating constitutions and elections. They have all soon forgotten the rights-based governments they formed and the ‘One Man, One Vote’ principal they signed up to and even fought for. They have ditched all that for lives modeled on the ideals of our former European masters: Swiss bank accounts, private jets and mansions dotted from Monte Carlo to Manhattan.

On another level, though, these works are not just about African leaders, but are a commentary on leaders and issues of power in a much broader context, and were produced at “the convergence of major political events—elections in South Africa, the USA and Zimbabwe”⁴⁰. The series title, *Dying to be Men*, plays with stereotypes of masculinity and suggests that a flamboyant parade of style fails to match the substance of ‘real’ men. Like Maleonn, though, Chiurai seems to engage with the inevitably awkward shift from one generation to another. (A ‘real’ man in one generation might not be considered a ‘real’ man in another generation). Chiurai is neither entirely critical nor entirely celebratory of a new generation of leadership and its associated style. He is both playful in the way he pokes fun at stereotypes, and very serious in his social critique. In these works, Chiurai and Maleonn represent a new generation that is in the process of rehearsing without attempting to realise a particular idea. They are playing with ‘scripts’ in the here and now—messing them up and trying them on rather than simply repeating the well-known scripts of the past.

Vulindlela Nyoni’s prints, however, point to a less open-ended script. While Chiurai and Maleonn ‘dress up’ in the costumes of new styles, and play with old and new props, Nyoni’s cutting representation of society and leadership reveals a stale script of leaders who overstay their welcome, making way for little else. (The inclusion of Zimbabwean dollars in his work suggests a particular regime). In *Don’t Believe Everything You See on TV* (Fig. 40) and *Market Upturn* (Fig. 41), the figure’s eyes are covered over. Whether he is actively commanding the direction of the economy or dozing in front of his television set, this figure does not see, for the cock’s glove-like, or puppet-like, crest blinds his vision. The figure, associated with ZANU-PF through the reference to the cock’s crest⁴¹, becomes a blind actor, and in such a rehearsal he can only repeat the old script in his mind, thus practising rather than exposing habitual solution.



Fig. 40. Vulindlela Nyoni, *Don't Believe Everything You See on TV*. 2009, screenprint, etching and chin-collé. Courtesy of the artist and African Art Centre.
Fig. 41. Vulindlela Nyoni, *Market Upturn*, 2009, screenprint, etching and chin-collé. Courtesy of the artist and African Art Centre.

THE TRAP OF VISIBILITY AND THE DISCURSIVITY OF SEEING

They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately . . . visibility is a trap.
(Foucault 2008 [1975]: 5)

A number of the venues used in the *Making Way* exhibition in Grahamstown are associated with particular types of seeing and are designed in relation to strategic visibility. Fort Selwyn, for example, is placed on top of Gunfire Hill with a view of the city below. The cannons within the fort wall suggest that the position of the fort was constructed around the visibility of the enemy. The Provost Prison is based on a panopticon design, and consists of a double storey tower with narrow windows that open onto sightlines in the prison courtyard that lead directly to each cell. As such, a military guard placed in the central tower “sees everything without ever being seen” (Foucault 2008 [1975]: 6). As Foucault (2008 [1975]: 5) writes in *Discipline and Punishment*:

Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject of communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility.

Upstairs in the guard’s tower of the Provost Prison, **Wu Junyong’s** animation videos *Flowers of Chaos*, (2009) (Fig. 42) and *Cloud’s Nightmare* (2010) (Fig. 43) accentuate and play with the notion of seeing without being seen as silhouetted figures are viewed through the circles of binoculars. Animated hands pull on strings and manipulate puppets in an absurd “theatre of revelry” (Chen Xiaoyun 2011: 5) that explores issues of power, greed, monotony and futility. As Gao Shiming (2011: 3) writes, “For Wu Junyong, the world is a circus, life is performance, diverse yet monotonous”.

While Wu’s work reveals “voyeuristic observations toward the society, a malevolent yet self-entertaining voyeurism” (Gao 2011: 3), there are moments of reversal as close-up eyes stare back into the binoculars and a figure peering through binoculars is simultaneously viewed through another pair of binoculars, creating layers of seeing, rather than straightforward lines of sight. No longer is each individual securely in his place, for imaginary events break through the categories of the rational and the mundane: human beings fly, chairs and horse heads walk on stilts, men wear horsetails, and a figure rides on the back of a chicken. “We are not clear”, says Chen (2011: 5), “whether there is a reality only known by Wu Junyong behind this virtuality, or to Wu Junyong, the reality is just a theatre, a scene of changing props, a group of manipulated clowns, a mysterious formula of the world behind the curtain . . . clueless plots, carnival-like monkey business mixed with loneliness, and mechanical-like mischief”. Placed inside the Provost Prison, these works open up the “house of certainty” (Foucault 2008 [1975]: 7) and unleash a fiercely imaginative way of seeing the world in which “nothing has to be defined, [and] nothing has to be opposed in the same manner” (Chen 2011: 5). For Wu, “an alchemist who relies on his boundless imagination and persistence, the outside world is only a puppet of his innermost self” (Chen 2011: 5). The panopticon, as such, becomes a house of uncertainty, in which it is unclear what is being seen, who is looking at whom, and what sights or visions can be trusted.



Fig. 42. Wu Junyong, *Flowers of Chaos*, 2009, animation video (3:35), Courtesy of the artist and F2 Gallery, Beijing.
Fig. 43. Wu Junyong, *Cloud's Nightmare*, 2010, animation video (8:30), Courtesy of the artist and F2 Gallery, Beijing.





Fig. 44 Maleonn, *Déjà vu # 2*, 2005, photographic print. Courtesy of the artist.

Maleonn similarly plays with the failure of straightforward seeing. While, in Wu's *Flowers of Chaos* peripheral vision that falls outside of the rings of the binoculars is blank, in Maleonn's *Amber # 7* (Fig. 44) the viewer of the work sees what the figures peering through binoculars are unable to see. Two young men sit in a small apartment, a short distance apart, and peer at each other through binoculars as if a literal distance needs to be overcome. Perhaps the binoculars—the tools of seeing—are a crutch for dealing with a metaphoric or emotional distance, a distance that the viewer of the artwork cannot see. While one man casually lounges in a chair, as if he is unaware of being watched, the other man eagerly leans forward to offer him some flowers. Both protect the nakedness of their own eyes.

In *Déjà vu # 2* (Fig. 45), a goggled woman stands poised with a stick for the blind, about to make her way with the guidance of a rabbit. However, instead of guiding her, the little white rabbit, often associated in China with good luck, nibbles on a carrot while the woman patiently waits. It is not clear whether or not the woman is blind, or if the goggles are transparent or opaque, but apparent blindness becomes a metaphor for the uncertainty of clear-cut vision. The title *Déjà vu*, further emphasises slippage, for while you see or feel something in a flash that you think you have seen or felt before, you are not sure, for your imagination plays with your mind, confusing sight, memory and an entire universe of the potentially unreal. Seeing makes way for a discursive window to the world.



Fig. 45 Maleonn, *Déjà vu # 2*, 2005. Courtesy of the artist.

The Victorian *camera obscura* in the Observatory Museum was used in the 19th century as a means of locating people on the streets of Grahamstown. With remarkable clarity, the photographic image projected onto the *camera obscura* dish captures people on the street below who have no idea they are being watched. In *Performance Obscura*, a new collaborative performance produced for *Making Way* and *Retinal Shift*⁴², the image of the performer, **Athi-Patra Ruga**, is captured via the mediation of the *camera obscura* by the photographer, **Mikhael Subotzky**. The 'official' audience stands inside the *camera obscura* tower, and only views the 'live' performance through the mediated image, while 'accidental' audience members on the street watch Ruga perform whilst being watched themselves. As such, the 'accidental' audience unwittingly becomes part of the observed performance.

While one might assume that the unseen audience in the tower is the privileged audience based on physical position and the fact that it is protected from surveillance, in terms of access to the action of the live performance, one could argue that privilege is reversed and, in fact, everyday people on the street—those who walk on the ground—have access to the sounds and smells of the street that add richness to the layer of seeing. In his chapter, "Walking the City", de Certeau (1984: 131) argues that translation into visibility robs people of a certain richness that is experienced in the act of embodied walking, in the act of "composing a path". There is a failure to seeing; an inevitable blindness comes into play when vision is narrowed down to the eyes.

According to de Certeau (1984: 131), when systems attempt to "transform action into legibility" such as through the production of maps, there are other ways of being in the world that are too easily forgotten. The walker, the person who makes his or her way on the street, he says, taps into life in such a grounded, bottom-up way that a certain type of metaphoric blindness becomes privilege, rather than handicap:

The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below', below the threshold at which visibility begins. They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each others' arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poem in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness Escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible. Within this ensemble, I shall try to locate the practices that are foreign to the 'geometrical' or 'geographical' space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions. These practices of space refer to a specific form of operations ('ways of operating'), to 'another spatiality' . . . and to an opaque and blind mobility characteristic of the bustling city (de Certeau 1984: 128).

Reread, the bird's-eye view of the fort on the hill, the sightlines of the guard's tower or the silent vantage point of the *camera obscura* no longer necessarily constitute privilege. It takes a certain type of vision to open up the road and to make way.



Fig. 46. Maleonn, images from the making of *Maleonn's Mobile Photo Studio*, 2011-2012. Courtesy of the artist.

UKUVUL'INDLELA

A number of works in this exhibition make way in a grounded manner, and as such the pathway or road, both literal and conceptual, becomes central. As bodies walk, crawl, drag and scrape along the ground, place persists as process, constantly being restructured, re-experienced and re-membered. It is interesting to note that memory is conceptually linked to a pathway in the phrase "to go down memory lane". This pathway, though, veers off in multiple directions as old ways and previous traditions are restructured, replayed and rehearsed, sometimes actively, sometimes subconsciously, and at times rather randomly.

In **Maleonn's** recent body of work titled *Maleonn's Mobile Photo Studio* (2011-2012), the artist takes his viewers down memory lane, but, in doing so, he puts the tools in their hands to recognise the ways we 'reinvent' the past (Figs. 46 and 47). Opening up his studio of theatrical backdrops, costumes and props, he encourages his sitters to fabricate and to explore imagined or elaborated identities, in a similar way to the West African photographers Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibé. While Keita's props became signifiers of modernity, Maleonn's props delve into the past and at times include the absurd. "We make beautiful yet fragile dreams", he says, "yearning for a life slightly better than the reality, while at the same time turning a blind eye to the fact that everything is fading and disappearing"⁴³. A significant aspect of this project is the fact that Maleonn takes his studio with him on the road. Travelling across China in his mobile studio truck, he opens the curtains of his moving stage so that people in 55 different cities in China can play before his lens.

Driving a mobile studio, crawling along the Great Wall, rowing across a dried up dam, wading through a river, or "botanizing on the asphalt", artists in this exhibition take to the road literally and metaphorically, opening up pathways for new traditions, new dispositions and new ways of being.

"There is an energy about the road and the road generates its own life" (Fox 2000: 459). *Vula Indlela!*



Fig. 47. Maleonn, *Maleonn's Mobile Photo Studio*, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.



Endnotes:

¹Interview with Wang Zhiyuan, November 2008, published in the guidebook for the White Rabbit exhibition “The Tao of Now,” January 2010.

² <http://www.ru.ac.za/albanymuseum/exhibitions/fortselwyn/>. Accessed 5 May 2012.

³ Walking by Sarah E Marks. <http://www.tbsa.org/articles/WalkingMeditation.html>

⁴ This performance was initially titled *Paperman or Information Man*, but was changed by the artist to *Walking into Africa in a Chinese Way*.

⁵ This term was coined by Gao Minglu and is also referred to as the '85 Art New Wave.

⁶ Gao (2005: 192) suggests that for some Confucian scholars, “the Wall was to be perceived as a tangible reminder of the capacity for human cruelty, as well as a symbol of Chinese conservatism that blocked China from the outside world”. This perception changed by the end of the 19th century and Sun Yat-sen “openly declared the wall as a symbol of Chinese identity” for the purpose of national unity. The Sino-Japanese War of the 1930s, then “solidified the Wall as a national symbol and a national monument” (Gao 2005: 192). Many well-known Chinese artists, such as Xu Bing, Zhan Wang, and Wang Jin have produced artworks that play a role in opening up the meaning of the Wall, turning it into a “malleable sign with space for transformation and dialogue” (Gao 2005: 205).

⁷ Lu Jie, “Qin Ga: ‘Miniature Long March’” (Interview with Qin Ga), *Artlink Magazine* 23: 3, 2005. <http://www.artlink.com.au/articles.cfm?id=2013>. Accessed 14 October 2011.

⁸ Sun Shuyun in Adams, Martin, “Long March to mythology”, *Asia Times*, October 24, 2006. <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/HJ24Ad01.html>. Accessed 26 January 2012.

⁹ Lu Jie, “Qin Ga: ‘Miniature Long March’” (Interview with Qin Ga), *Artlink Magazine* 23: 3, 2005. <http://www.artlink.com.au/articles.cfm?id=2013>. Accessed 14 October 2011.

¹⁰ *Scrubbing Ground: Tragedy and the un-representable in the South African landscape*. Conference paper presented at the University of Derby, Affective Landscape conference in the UK, 2012.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Personal correspondence, Cape Town, August 2001.

¹⁶ Masawi in *Border Farm* film by Thenjiwe Nkosi.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Border Farm* film by Thenjiwe Nkosi.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Sunday Times*, June 10, 2012, page 7. The advert asserts that the broadcasters who banned the advert have “made the decision for you. Unlike our broadcasters, we’re giving you the right to choose”.

²¹ This discussion on James Webb’s series *There’s No Place Called Home* was first published in *African Arts* First Word: “China-Africa: Research Approaches”, pages 1–7.

²² See James Webb’s website, <http://www.theotherjameswebb.com/noplacecalled.html>.

²³ Personal correspondence with James Webb, 8 January 2012.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiwan_Yuhina.

²⁶ Personal conversation with Mapopa Mtonga, February 2004, Lusaka, Zambia.

²⁷ When I saw Chewa *nyau* dancers perform at the Chewa Kulamba ceremony in Eastern Province, Zambia, a group of masquerade figures got up and demonstratively walked out in protest when the then-Minister of Agriculture gave a speech. These masquerade figures are frightening—they are allowed to contravene, but they should not be crossed.

²⁸ This discussion on Lebogang Rasethaba’s film *Sino* was first published in *African Arts* First Word: “China-Africa: Research Approaches”, pages 1–7.

²⁹ It is important to note that the expulsion of ‘aliens’ took place in waves and was not simply unidirectional. In 1969 many foreigners were expelled from Ghana, and in the 1970s Ghanaians were welcomed in Nigeria due to the oil boom. When the oil boom slowed down in early 1983 about 700,000 Ghanaians were expelled by Nigeria, but shortly afterwards some were invited back. In 1985 an estimated 100,000 were again expelled. Encyclopedia of the Nations. <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Ghana-MIGRATION.html#b>. Accessed 16 June 2012.

³⁰ This discussion on *Murambatsvina* was first published in *African Arts* First Word: “China-Africa: Research Approaches”, pages 1–7.

³¹ Martin (2007: 235) writes that at Victoria Falls “woodcarvers were attacked, their carved hippos, giraffes and elephants thrown on the fire.”

³² Ncube, Pius; Bate, Roger; and Tren, Richard. AFM report: *State in Fear: Zimbabwe’s tragedy is Africa’s shame. A report on Operation Murambatsvina—“Operation drive out the filth”—and its implications*. http://www.fightingmalaria.org/pdfs/state_in_fear.pdf. Accessed 11 November 2010.

³³ “The outcome was that ZANU-PF gained 78 out of 120 contested seats; the MDC only 41 But significantly the MDC managed to retain its support in all the main towns. The repercussions for urban voters soon followed” (Martin 2007: 234–235).

³⁴ Ncube, Pius; Bate, Roger; and Tren, Richard. AFM report: *State in Fear: Zimbabwe’s tragedy is Africa’s shame. A report on Operation Murambatsvina—“Operation drive out the filth”—and its implications*. http://www.fightingmalaria.org/pdfs/state_in_fear.pdf. Accessed 11 November 2010. This report raises the question in a section titled, “The Chinese Puzzle.”

³⁵ Robert Chisanza, “Zambians get rough with China,” Mail and Guardian Online, Feb. 9, 2007. www.mg.co.za/2007-02-09-zambians-get-rough-with-china. Accessed 15 December 2010.

³⁶ “King Cobra and the Dragon: As China increases its economic ties in Africa, has the continent entered a new era of colonialism?” *Al Jazeera* report, January 2012.

³⁷ Sarat Maharaj speaking at the *West Heavens* Summit at the 2010 Shanghai Biennale.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The Visual Arts Guide from the Mail and Guardian online. http://www.theguide.co.za/arts_detail.php?artsid=4100. Accessed 16 May 2012.

⁴⁰ The Goodman Gallery website, www.goodman-gallery.com.

⁴¹ The ZANU-PF logo consists of a golden cock standing in front of the rising sun.

⁴² *Retinal Shift* is Mikhael Subotzky’s solo exhibition for the National Arts Festival at the 1820 Settlers National Monument. Subotzky is the 2012 Standard Bank Young Artist Award winner.

⁴³ Artists’ statement at the 18Gallery Shanghai exhibition, *Maleonn Studio, mobile project*, 2011.



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The owners and the staff at MarsM, a store at MetLife Mall in King Williams Town; Eastern Cape, South Africa. Photographer: Jenny Gordon, 2012.

The Sensitive Nature of Its Materials: A Reflection on China-Africa

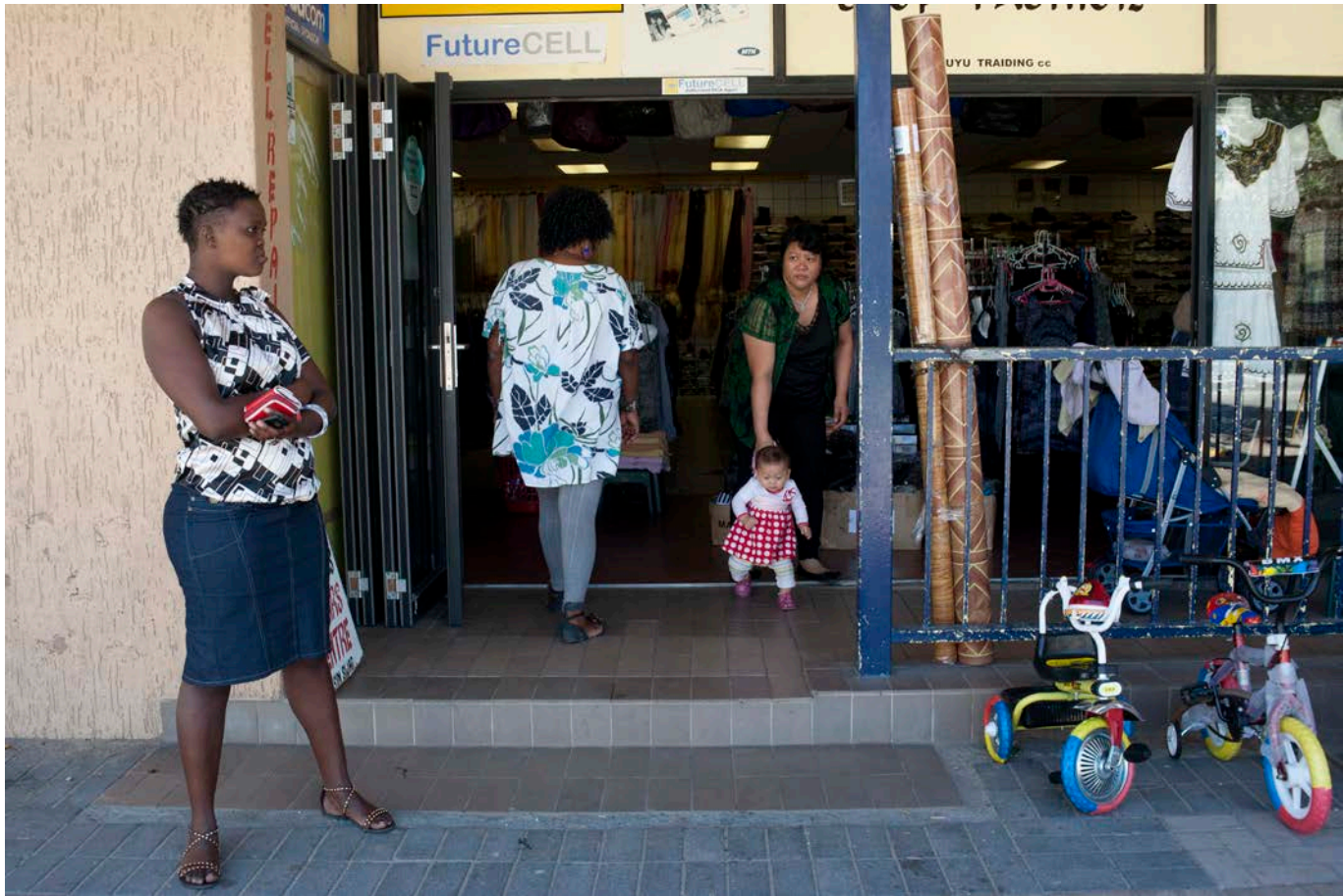
BY TU T HUYNH

At this point, that China has a presence in the African continent is well known. In the Eastern Cape of South Africa, due to my research on Chinese migrants in the province, someone is likely to tell me that there are Chinese people even in the remotest villages in the Transkei area. Although the impression is that they are everywhere, when I would ask where exactly are the Chinese people located, very few people can provide a clear answer. If the truth were told, except for those who work for Chinese employers, the few returning customers who try to talk with the Chinese entrepreneurs, and students and lecturers at schools where there are international students from China, the majority of the local people in South Africa have not seen a Chinese person and fewer know of a Chinese person.

Unlike other African countries, South Africa paradoxically has a longstanding Chinese presence, since the arrival of the Dutch East India Company in the 17th century (Park 2008; Yap and Man 1996). European colonialism, but also the development of industrial (mining) capitalism in South Africa, 20th-century international warfare (including the Cold War), and policies of the apartheid and post-apartheid governments influenced the ebb and flow of Chinese people as slaves, convicts, and indentured labourers (Harris 2006; Huynh 2008) and as independent merchants to South Africa up until the present time (Huynh, Park, and Chen 2010). The various Chinese communities (e.g., South African-born, Taiwanese, and Mainland Chinese) that have settled in the country over four centuries show a long-term historical connection between China and Africa. That there is still little knowledge about this population raises concerns about integration, but, more importantly, is a reflection of the way in which race has manifested in the country.

Regardless of the real, imagined, or hearsay presence of Chinese people in any particular place in South Africa, opinions about them are manifold. The gamut of opinions available in the streets includes: the availability of cheap Chinese goods allows (poor) people to consume things that they otherwise would not have been able to afford, Chinese businesses create employment opportunities, Chinese entrepreneurs exploit local people by paying low wages and selling low-quality goods that are not durable, Chinese businesses are taking economic opportunities away from locals, and Chinese people are kung-fu fighters. With the exception of the last stereotype, which is influenced by an explosion of Bruce Lee and Chinese (Hong Kong) martial arts films in South Africa in the 1990s, the opinions are mostly formulated around economic activities like consumption and employment. Moreover, they contradict one another as well as affirm and conflate with views about China's present influence in Africa that are expressed by the Western media, local policy elites, political and economic analysts, unions, and civil society. Whether the opinions are positive or critical, what has at times been neglected is that linguistic differences, cultural particularities, and long-lasting stereotypes generated by the West have contributed to half-perceptions that have come to represent the whole country of China, so massive and so culturally embellished, and the people.

International scholars and the Chinese government have attempted to broaden the discourse on relations between China and Africa, filling in gaps and counterbalancing some of the assumptions used to describe the relationship that have seemingly become quotidian. The academic literature on China-Africa has been expanding rapidly outside of Africa since 2005. The most analysed are the figures for trade and foreign direct investment (primarily in resource extraction) (Large 2008: 55) and the amounts of development aid (Brautigam 1998), all of which all have expanded tremendously within the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) framework that was initiated in 2000 by China and a few African countries. The research details the various economic and development activities as well as situates them in a global political context that includes America and Europe. It also addresses the areas where the engagement is uneven, but in addition concludes that African political elites need to step up to negotiate better deals with their Chinese partner(s). The strength of the research that sheds new light on the political-economy of China-Africa relations is also its weakness, which is the people who have accompanied and been affected by the circulation of goods and capital.



A Chinese-owned clothing store in Port Alfred; Eastern Cape, South Africa. Photogrpaher: Jenny Gordon, 2012.

Scholars in disciplines like anthropology, geography, linguistics, and sociology have started to examine the crucial connections that people are making in contemporary China-Africa relations. Research that focuses on migration flows and migrants exposes that migration has been occurring in both directions, with Africans increasingly going to do business, study, work, and settle in China (Bodomo 2012; Haugen 2012; Mathews 2011). Also, it details the diverse Chinese actors who come from various parts of China and are creating new Chinese communities and renewing long-established ones in numerous African countries (Mohan and Kale 2007; Park and Huynh 2010). The studies not only suggest that ‘China’ and ‘Africa’ are not homogeneous or discrete entities, but also elucidate the complexity of China-Africa relations at the ground level. As part of this shift in research focus, an interest in African perceptions of China in Africa has also materialised (Rebol 2010). This intervention is significant, as it aims to give voice to Africans. However, the fact that such research relies on surveys that ask questions kindled by the Western media, which broadly situate China as a foe or friend and a challenge or model (Sautman and Yan 2007), reinforces the power of the media. While the questions indicate the extent of the media’s influence in shaping competing perceptions, the respondents have little opportunity to reflect on whether she or he knows China or Chinese people and what informs her or his knowledge (even if it includes media coverage and local rumours). Nonetheless, while new research is trying to fill in gaps, correct misconceptions, and strike a balanced view by doing larger, longer-term studies as well as tapping into Chinese and African sources, the research, as one scholar rightly notes, [must reach] beyond concerns that dominate headlines and [address] a broader range of issues” (Large 2008: 58); that includes the issues of linguistic differences, cultural particularities, and existing stereotypes.

Gauging from her disciplinary background in African Art History, Simbao (2012: 1) makes a similar point: “Until recently little in-depth research has existed on human relationships at an individual or community level, and even less research exists on China-Africa engagement in terms of culture or the visual arts”. And, if people unselfconsciously look for other modes of communication like body language and drawing when language fails, then Simbao is right about the gap in the present China-Africa literature and the relevance of culture and the arts in relations building. There has been more focus on China’s FOCAC commitments to political and economic cooperation with African countries (Centre for Chinese Studies 2010) and less on the inclusion of the objective to strengthen cultural exchange as an area for cooperation. China only acknowledged the relevance of people-to-people and cultural exchange with Africa at the second FOCAC conference in Addis Ababa in 2003. Early ideas on how to achieve this end included training African professionals, expanding tourism, and hosting an African arts and China-Africa youth festival in China. At the 2006 FOCAC meeting in Beijing, the activities came to include sending Chinese agricultural experts and volunteers to Africa, setting up agricultural centres, hospitals and rural schools, and increasing the number of Chinese government scholarships for African students to study in China. Additionally, a number of African youths were invited to visit China to participate in the China-Africa youth festival and several Confucius Institutes (CIs) were set up to teach Chinese language and culture in African schools. By the fourth FOCAC meeting in 2009 in El Sheikh, a proposal was introduced to create a joint research and exchange programme to provide a platform for African and Chinese scholars and analysts of think tanks to have more exchanges and collaborate in formulating better cooperation policies. Among these activities to expand people-to-people and cultural exchange, the establishment of CIs in Africa (French 2006; Gil 2009; Paradise 2009; Simons 2009) has received more attention than other social developments, student exchanges, or the culture weeks and arts festivals that are equally influential in shaping views about particular cultures.



Simphiwe Bala assisting a customer at Xing Guan Trading Shop in Butterworth;Eastern Cape, South Africa. Photographer: Jenny Gordon, 2012.

There have been many festivals and art shows held in African countries and China, and African artists have been hosted in China as a result of China's African visiting scholars programme. Among them, the 'African Culture in Focus' event in 2008, sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Culture, was significant. A *China Daily* article reports that it consisted of exhibitions, dance performances, and conferences about African art from 29 African countries, as well as hosting African artists in Shenzhen to teach painting ('Out of Africa' 2008). Of similar importance is the 'Chinese Culture in Focus' event that took place in 2009 in 20 African countries. The *People's Daily* reports that it "show[ed] unique Chinese tradition and culture in all aspects" ('Cultural Exchange' 2009). The creation of a platform for Chinese and African performance and art ensembles, different genres and scales of art exhibitions, and the training of artists and performers does indeed encourage cultural engagement among the artists and between the artists and spectators. However, in such a state-initiated framework as FOCAC, it is necessary to ask ourselves: who is allowed to represent and what gets presented as Chinese and African culture through the performances and artworks.

As pointed out by Wallerstein (1990: 33), culture is puzzling because the concept is used to signify two phenomena: it is "the set of characteristics which distinguish one group from another, and . . . some set of phenomena which are different from (and 'higher' than) some other set of phenomena within any one group". While we can refer to the first as 'national culture' and the second as 'local cultures', it is not as easy to define the 'group' due to various factors like gender, ethnic, racial, and age differences, policies put in place by different levels of government to regulate people's mobility, definitions of citizenship, etc. As mentioned above, China is vast, but so is the African continent, so to get a sense of these places and the people, it is necessary to engage China-Africa at various levels, including the visual arts, in a way that entails thinking and seeing what is there and what is not there (Sullivan 2010: 133). Finally, if art (in all its forms) is culture and reflects its time, should 'traditional' art, such as masks, dances of cultural groups, and images of wild landscapes, as well as acrobatics, calligraphy, and martial arts, be the dominant representations of China and Africa? In the case of China, what is the role of contemporary or avant-garde art – that has mushroomed in the post-New China (post-1989) period, parodies China's transforming political life and consumer society, and has more exposure in Hong Kong and other major cities in Europe and America than in China (Lu 1997) – in conversations about China-Africa? This is not to suggest that, as spectators or consumers of art, we have to choose one over the other, but a suggestion to deepen our understanding.



Endnotes:

¹ From an energy policy and management standpoint, Feng and Mu (2010) begin to highlight the importance of knowing local cultures to reduce investment risks of Chinese companies in capital-intensive industries, such as oil, on the continent.
² www.focac.org. Accessed 4 June 2012
³ As part of this initiative, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) facilitated a meeting with representatives of African and Chinese research institutions, think tanks, and policy makers in Nairobi, Kenya on 28-29 March 2011 (www.codesria.org, accessed 4 June 2012).

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Top:Maleonn at the Shanghai Biennale. 2010. Photo: Ruth Simbao
Middle: Hua Jiming in Beijing studio. 2010. Photo: Ruth Simbao
Bottom: Doung Anwar Jahangeer at Rhodes University. 2012. Photo: Anna-Karien Otto

ARTISTS’BIOGRAPHIES

Compiled by Simone Heymans

ATHI-PATRA RUGA

Athi-Patra Ruga is a Cape Town-based artist who works at the threshold of fashion, performance and contemporary art. He explores and experiments with his body in relation to ideology, politics and society in order to challenge stereotypes within structures of power. Ruga has participated in numerous exhibitions and performance festivals including *Infecting the City*, Cape Town (2012 and 2009); *Ilulwane, Performa 11*, New York (2011); *From Pierneef to Gugulective and Dada South*, South African National Gallery, Iziko, Cape Town (2010); *Disguise: The Art of Attracting and Deflecting Attention*, Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town (2008); *Impossible Monsters*, Art Extra, Johannesburg, South Africa (2007); and *Doc. no3, Die Naai Masjien – Miss Congo*, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (2006). Ruga has participated in residencies in Switzerland, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and was recently included in the Phaidon book *Younger than Jesus*, which is a directory of over 500 top global artists under the age of 33.

BRENT MEISTRE

Brent Mestre is a Grahamstown-based artist working primarily in photography and video, and is currently a Senior Lecturer in the Fine Art Department at Rhodes University, South Africa. He works with themes of loss, longing and displacement, often using the landscape and natural surroundings as subject matter while simultaneously interrogating the documentary and historical function of photography as a medium. Mestre was the overall Award Winner of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum Biennial Exhibition in the Eastern Cape (2006) for his animated film, *A stranger who came with a book in the crook of his arm*. More recently, Mestre represented South Africa at the Bamako Biennale, Mali (November 2011 – January 2012) with his stop-frame animation *The stranger who licked salt back into our eyes* (2009) which incorporates footage from South Africa and Greece.

CHEN QIULIN

Chen Qiulin was born in Hubei Province and lives and works between Beijing and Chengdu, China. With a multifaceted approach she explores various mediums including performance, photography, video and installation. Chen considers and investigates the impact of urbanisation in China within her artworks and she has exhibited locally and abroad. She has produced the following solo exhibitions: *Hammer Project: Chen Qiulin*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2009); *Chen Qiulin: Recent Work*, University Art Museum University at Albany, State University of New York, Albany, NY (2007); and *Migration*, Long March Space Beijing (2006). She has also been involved in numerous group exhibitions and has shown work at the *6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia (2010).

DAN HALTER

Dan Halter grew up in Zimbabwe and currently lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa. Issues of dislocation, displacement and transmigration – often in relation to the Zimbabwean diaspora – inform his video, installation and intermedia works. Halter has been involved in several residencies in, for example, Scotland, Brazil and Switzerland. His solo exhibitions include *The Truth Lies Here* (2012) and *Double Entry* (2010) at Whatiftheworld Gallery, Cape Town; *Dan Halter / Mappa Del Mondo*, Nassauischer Kunstverein Weisbaden, Germany (2011); *Never Say Never*, Derbylius Gallery, Milan, Italy (2008); and *Take Me to Your Leader*, João Ferreira Gallery, Cape Town (2006). Halter has participated in group exhibitions such as 17th *VideoBrasil*, São Paulo, Brazil (2011); *Dak’art*, Dakar, Senegal (2010); *US*, South African National Gallery, Cape Town (2010); *Spier Contemporary*, Cape Town City Hall (2010); and 10th *Havana Biennial*, Havana, Cuba (2009). He was featured in the first and second *Johannesburg Art Fair*, Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa (2008/9).



DOTUN MAKUN

Dotun Makun is a painter from Ondo State, Nigeria, and is currently based in Lagos. He graduated with a Master in Fine Art degree from Rhodes University in 2011 where he majored in painting and participated in the *Visual and Performing Arts of Africa* research group (www.research-africa.com). His MFA exhibition, *ALIEN-Nation* (2011), considered themes of xenophobia, foreignness, alienation and stereotypes, and explored the complexities of the Nigerian diaspora. The process of working in a traditional studio portrait manner was integral to Makun’s work in this particular exhibition. Makun has exhibited extensively in Nigeria and group shows include *Romance with Iliad*, Wangboje Gallery, Pees Galleria (1999); *Women and War*, Goethe Insitute, Lagos (2001); *Colours of Life*, Nikon Noga Hilton, Abuja (2006); *International Art Expo Nigeria*, National Museum, Green House Gallery (2009); and *Treasures of Benin*, National Arts Theatre Lagos, Nigeria (2009).

DOUNG ANWAR JAHANGEER

Doung Anwar Jahangeer is a Mauritian-born artist/architect/activist and is based in Durban, South Africa. He has redefined restrictive and traditional notions of architecture by conceptualising and implementing an experiential, group participation initiative, “The City Walk”. This echoes his philosophy of a united space that exists without boundaries between members of society and their surroundings; “an architecture without walls”. Collaborating and working in multiple mediums such as performance, film, sculpture and installation, Jahangeer continues to integrate and interact with the public in the urban domain. Doung won the inaugural South African Award for the design of a mobile fold away shop for hawkers at the 2009 Design Indaba in Cape Town, South Africa. He co-founded an NPO, **dala**, which encompasses art and architecture for social justice.

GERALD MACHONA

Gerald Machona is a visual and performing artist who grew up in Zimbabwe and is currently based in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa. He completed his Bachelor of Fine Art degree at the University of Cape Town (2009) and is currently a Master of Fine Art candidate at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. Machona’s work engages with issues of migration, social interaction and xenophobia, and he uses decommissioned Zimbabwean dollars as a key medium which allows for integration between sculpture, performance, video and photography. He has participated in group exhibitions such as *A Night Show*, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town (2011); *The Geography of Somewhere*, Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg (2011); and *US II*, Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa (2010). Machona was selected as one of the top ten artists practising in South Africa by *Business Day* and the *Johannesburg Art Fair* (2011) and is a member of the *Visual and Performing Arts of Africa* research group at Rhodes University (www.research-africa-arts.com).

HUA JIMING

Hua Jiming was born in Huangshi, Hubei province, and lives and works in Beijing, China. Hua is a painter and performance artist who graduated from the Hubei Institute of Fine Art in 1992. Performance pieces by Hua include *Huge Glass—Dreaming Heaven* (1993), *Walking Feet* (1995), *The Coal Lake* (1996), *Crawling along the River Bank at Tongzhou* (2001), and *Crawling on the Great Wall* (2001). He has participated in various group exhibitions including *Time and Space*, Art Museum of the Daegu MJ, South Korea; and *New York Chinese Contemporary Art Exhibition*, Asian Arts Centre, Manhattan, New York (2008). In 2010 he participated in the *Infecting the City* performance festival in Cape Town, South Africa, where he performed *Walking into Africa in a Chinese Way*.

JAMES WEBB

James Webb is a Cape Town-based artist working with both large-scale installations in galleries and museums as well as unannounced interventions in public spaces. His work explores the nature of belief and dynamics of communication in our contemporary world. Webb won the Absa L’Atelier Award in 2008 and has participated in numerous residencies in Norway, France, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Brazil and Japan. He has been involved in group exhibitions such as *Articulating Works and Spaces* – the 3rd Marrakech Biennale; the 2009 Melbourne International Arts Festival; and *The History Of A Decade That Has Not Yet Been Named* – the 9th Biennale d’Art Contemporain de Lyon. Webb’s solo exhibitions include: *Aleph* at Goethe on Main and *Terms of Surrender* at the Absa Gallery (both in Johannesburg, South Africa); *Untitled States*, MAC, Birmingham, United Kingdom; and *Prayer*, Djanogly Gallery, Nottingham (2010). Webb is the subject of a survey show at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in July 2012.

KUDZANAI CHIURAI

Kudzanaï Chiurai is a Zimbabwean-born artist, living and working in South Africa. His works fluidly draw from hip-hop, street art, youth culture and graffiti. He explores themes of urban space, exile, xenophobia, and displacement, as well as the constructed nature of African states and the performative guises of leaders. Chiurai has produced several solo exhibitions including *State of the Nation* (2011) and *Communists and Hot Chicken Wings: The Birth of a New Nation* (2010) – both at the Goodman Gallery Project Space, Arts on Main, Johannesburg; *Dying to Be Men*, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa (2009); and *Yellow Lines*, Obert Contemporary, Johannesburg (2008). He has also been involved in numerous group exhibitions within South Africa and internationally such as *Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK (2011); *Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now*, Museum of Modern Art in New York (2011); *Johannesburg Art Fair*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg (2009); and *Dak’art*, Dakar, Senegal (2006). This year he is participating in the prestigious *Documenta 13* in Kassel, Germany.

LEBOGANG RASETHABA

Lebogang Rasethaba is a South African filmmaker who moves between Johannesburg and Beijing. In 2007 he went to China where he completed a Masters degree in film studies at the Beijing Normal University. Rasethaba’s films include *Xenophobia in Paradise* (2006), *Sino* (2009) and *Metro* (2010). His works often explore themes of place, displacement, xenophobia, resettlement and social relationships in the African diaspora, particularly the diaspora to China. Rasethaba has also produced music videos for Spoek Mathambo in South Africa, and Hip-Hop’s DJ Wordy in China.

MALEONN

Maleonn was born in Shanghai, China, where he currently lives and works. Graduating with a major in graphic design from the Fine Art College of Shanghai University (1995), Maleonn’s quirky, theatrical and often absurd photographs have been exhibited extensively in China and abroad. Solo exhibitions by Maleonn include *Pure Satire*, 2902 Gallery, Singapore (2011); *White On White*, Galerie Magda Danysz, Shanghai, China (2010); *The Kingdom of Illusions*, Paris-Beijing Galerie, Paris, France (2009); and *Days on the Cotton Candy*, Kasia Art Project Gallery, Chicago, USA (2008). A recent solo exhibition at the 18Gallery, Bund, Shanghai in December 2011 was the departure point for Maleonn’s “Mobile Studio” project in which he will tour across China in a truck that houses his photographic equipment and studio props, taking photographic portraits of audiences along the way. Maleonn has participated in a number of group exhibitions in Australia, Italy, Denmark and China. In 2007 he was selected among the most important 50 international contemporary visual artists by MAC Magazine, Japan.



QIN GA

Qin Ga was born in Inner Mongolia, China, and is currently based in Beijing. He works in photography and performance and has exhibited in China and abroad including the 5th *Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia (2006); *Renovation: Relations of Production*, Long March Space, Beijing, China (2005); and *A Second Sight*, 2nd Prague International Biennale of Contemporary Art, National Gallery Prague, Prague, Czech Republic (2005). Qin's solo exhibition *The Miniature Long March 2002 – 2005*, Long March Space, Beijing (2005) reflected his personal concern with China's history as he turned his body into an artwork and a Long March object.

RANDOLPH HARTZENBERG

Randolph Hartzenberg is a Cape Town-based artist and lecturer at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology who works in painting, printmaking, installation, video and performance. Hartzenberg's solo exhibitions include *Map of the Neighbourhood*, Metropolitan Life Gallery, Cape Town (1996); and *Domestic Baggage*, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa (1994). Group exhibitions that Hartzenberg has participated in include *Facing the Past: Seeking the Future: Reflection on a Decade of Truth and Reconciliations Commission*, Iziko SANG, Cape Town (2006); *Kwere Kwere/Journeys into Strangeness* at the Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town (2000); the *Johannesburg Biennale* (1997); the *District Six Outdoor Sculpture Project*, Cape Town (1997); *Faultlines*, Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town (1996); *Thirty Minutes*, Visitor's Block, Cape Town (1997); and *Siyawela: Love, Loss and Liberation in South African Art*, Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery, UK (1995).

THENJIWE NKOSI

Thenjiwe Nkosi was born in New York, and grew up in Harare and Johannesburg. She is a painter, video artist/filmmaker who divides her time between studio work and the field of collaborative practice. She received her MFA from New York's School of Visual Arts and is currently an artist in residence at the Bag Factory Artists' Studios in Johannesburg. Her recent projects have been collaborations with artists in the Zimbabwe/South Africa border region, where she has followed her interest in art as social practice. In 2011 her work appeared in several exhibitions, including VANSAs 2010 *Reasons to Live* in a Small Town at Goethe on Main in Johannesburg and at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Rio De Janiero in the show *(Re)constructions: Contemporary Art in South Africa*. Her film *Border Farm* (2011) – a collaborative film project – appeared in the Next Future Program at the Fundao Calouste Gulbenkian in Lisbon and in Contemporary African on Screen Film Festival at the South London Gallery.

VULINDLELA NYONI

Vulindlela Nyoni is a Zimbabwean-born artist currently based in the Western Cape, South Africa where he teaches printmaking at the Fine Art Department at Stellenbosch University. He received his Master of Fine Art degree from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2007. Nyoni has a particular interest in the dynamics of collaborative printmaking and his work deals with the politics of representation, self-representation and personal narrative. Solo exhibitions include *form>FUNKTION*, ArtSpace Berlin, Germany (2009); *Earthbound*, Printmakers' Gallery, Arkansas State University, USA (2009); and *Settling In*, Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg (2009). He has participated in numerous group exhibitions which include *Contemporary Reflections: New Art from Old*, Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal (2009); *Diminutive*, ArtSpace, Durban (2008); and *Print 08*, Bell-Roberts Gallery, Cape Town (2008).

WU JUNYONG

Wu Jungyong was born in Fujian Province and lives and works as a practising artist and part-time lecturer at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, China. Wu's satirical animated videos often reveal issues of excess and power within the world. Wu has produced several solo exhibitions, which include *Rumour*, F2 Gallery, Beijing (2011); *Duet*, Art Issue Projects, Beijing (2011); *Cloud's Nightmare*, Fabien Frys Fine Art, Los Angeles (2010); *Totalitarian Portrait*, F2 Gallery, Hong Kong (2010); and *The End of the Rainbow*, Ifa Gallery, Shanghai (2010). He has participated in various group exhibitions such as *In the Heat of the Sun*, Gallery Hyundai, Korea (2011); *End to End*, Harvestworks Digital Media Art Centre, New York (2011); and *The History of Etiquette and The Tao of Now*, Ifa Gallery, Shanghai (2010).



Ma Yue, Mandie van der Spuy, Marius Vermaak and Ruth Simbao at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), Beijing, 2009.

CONTRIBUTORS

RUTH SIMBAO

Ruth Simbao is Associate Professor of Art History & Visual Culture at Rhodes University and has a PhD in African Art History from Harvard University. Before she started her PhD she worked as a freelance curator and arts writer in Toronto, Canada, and was a curatorial intern at the Art Gallery of Ontario and the National Gallery of Canada. In 1998 she was a Research Fellow at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. For two years Simbao lived in Zambia and conducted fieldwork research on performance in relation to cultural festivals. Her current research is on issues of ‘place’, space, site-specificity, diaspora, xenophobia, the Global South and cosmopolitanism in relation to contemporary art in South Africa, Zambia and China. Simbao has published in various journals including *Third Text*, *Parachute*, *African Arts*, *Mix*, *Art South Africa*, *De Arte*, *NKA: Journal for Contemporary African Art*, *The International Journal for African Historical Studies* and the *Journal of the Contemporary African Art: New Approaches (JACANA)*. She has written essays for exhibitions in Toronto, Chicago, Denmark, Washington DC and South Africa and her work has been translated into Portuguese, Spanish and Danish. Simbao has presented her work in academic conferences in South Africa, the USA, Jamaica, Hong Kong, Australia and Canada, and in 2010 was a keynote speaker at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, Portugal. In 2009 she was the recipient of the Vice Chancellor’s Distinguished Research Award and is currently the Project Leader for the Rhodes University Humanities Focus Area: Visual and Performing Arts of Africa (www.research-africa-arts.com).

TU T HUYNH

Tu Huynh is a Mellon post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Sociology at Rhodes University. She is also one of the organizers of the Chinese in Africa/Africans in China Research Network. She grew up in southern California and completed her PhD in Sociology at Binghamton University in upstate New York. Her PhD thesis examined the role of Chinese indentured labor in the restructuring of race and economy in South Africa in the early 1900s. Her current research projects explore the issues of migration and identity formation among Chinese and Indian women in Gauteng province and Chinese migrants in the Eastern Cape province.

SIMONE HEYMANS

Simone Heymans is a MFA candidate and completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts at Rhodes University with two distinctions and a third major in Philosophy in 2011. She is a member of the Golden Key and has placement on the Dean’s Merit list. Heymans was a runner up in the Rhodes University Fine Art Department 4th year essay competition for *China and Africa: ‘Place’, Transnationalism and the Global South*, and presented her paper during the Rhodes University Confucius Institute China week (2011). For her final undergraduate exhibition “*Spilt Milk?*” Heymans paralleled various global natural and environmental disasters with parochial domestic disasters, to elucidate the pathos of distance and the manner in which detachment stifles our capacity for comprehension and compassion. Alongside the series of prints was a sensory and experiential installation of a simulated post-apocalyptic kitchen. Simone is looking forward to expanding on this theme and experimenting further with pushing the boundaries of traditional printmaking with contemporary methods and materials. She also has the opportunity to explore collaborative printmaking at a two-month internship at Warren Editions in Cape Town this year.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Photographs in Tu T Huynh’s essay were taken by Jenny Gordon.

Jenny Gordon lectures photo-journalism at the Rhodes School of Journalism and Media Studies. She spent five years as Director of the Market Photography Workshop in Johannesburg and also arranged workshops for developing photo-journalists for World Press Photo. She has taught at UCT, UWC, City Varsity and Allenby College. Her freelance career spans over 25 years and her photographs have been published in many books, magazines, newspapers and on the web. She has exhibited in South Africa, Europe and America.



Doung Anwar Jahangeer, *Walking the Pink Line*, 2007, Courtesy of the artist