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PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONAL ART
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SPECIAL
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OMENELICK
2ºATO



POINTS OF VIEW AFRO-BRAZILIAN PERSPECTIVES

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OMENELICK 2°ATO

For the past six years, the magazine *OMenelick 2°Ato* has been regularly publishing print and digital content that argues for Afro-oriented artistic production in Brazil and in other areas of the African Diaspora. We strive to recover essential biographies for the development of thought in the arts as well as to follow the ideas of a new generation of artists emerging in the twenty-first century. We persist on this path with resilience, motivated by our love of art and by the awareness that the artistic works we present express the plurality constituting us as Brazilian people. *OMenelick 2°Ato* continues the earliest project of São Paulo's Black press, the *O Menelick* journal, which was in print for six months in 1915.

We are the only Brazilian magazine in print to cover the production of work by the Black Diaspora in various artistic modes, bringing these efforts together in order to ensure a critical appraisal that locates and contextualizes the work of Black women and men in film, theater, music, literature, and visual art. And so we are honored to partner with Contemporary And in this endeavor, for it is through encounters such as these that we forge new paths, new narratives, new trajectories.

THE OMENELICK 2°ATO TEAM

NABOR JUNIOR

is a journalist
and founder of

OMenelick 2°Ato.

LUCIANE RAMOS-SILVA

is an anthropologist, choreographer, and
community arts organizer. A doctoral
candidate in performing arts, she is a
member of the editorial advisory board of the
Magazine OMenelick 2°Ato.

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Over two years ago, we published a conversation with Walter Mignolo on decoloniality. The interview became one of our most-read pieces and was the first time that we expanded our focus on topics concerning African perspectives in South America. Around the same time, we traveled to Brazil and started conversations which developed into close exchanges with creatives and collectives such as Lanchonete.org, based in São Paulo, and the cultural magazine *OMenelick 2°Ato*. What may have seemed obvious from the start became even more clear to us in the process: the connection between Africa and South America. The link the Black Atlantic creates between the experiences, problems, debates, and productivity of cultural producers from African perspectives is crucial to the issues and people C& wants to provide a platform for.

The reality for most Afro-Brazilian artists today is still a state of invisibility within the Brazilian art scene and beyond. One example for this that remained with us was that of Rosana Paulino, who in 2010 was the first Afro-Brazilian artist to achieve a PhD in visual arts in Brazil. The first Black artist to receive a PhD in visual arts in the US was Jeff Donaldson — in 1974. With this C& print issue focusing on Afro-Brazilian perspectives as well as the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo commencing this month, we continue to strengthen our focus on the connections between Africa and South America. We are especially happy to be co-editing this special edition with the amazing editorial team of *OMenelick 2°Ato*.

THE CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) TEAM

THE TANGLED HISTORIES OF DISCONNECTED PLACES

There are contextual parallels between Brazilian and Zimbabwean politics, says artist **LUCIA NHAMO**, who recently completed a residency in Salvador de Bahia.



Lucia Nhamo, *100, 000, 000, 000, 000...*, 2014. Installation detail.
Currency, money counter, Zero Halliburton Centurion case, HD video, live performance. Courtesy of the artist



Lucia Nhamo, *Free Fall: A Chronology of the Zimbabwe Dollar*, 2015. Installation detail.
3-channel video animation, custom-packaged peanuts, LED screen, glass case, defunct
currency, video, live performance. Courtesy of the artist

CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) Tell us a bit about your multimedia artistic practice. How did it all start?

LUCIA NHAMO My interest in video began at Wellesley College in Boston where I did my bachelor's degree. My drawings became increasingly sequential and I had the urge to create movement. A conceptually based practice lends itself to interdisciplinary investigation, so during my time at Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh) pursuing my MFA, I expanded my interest in multiplicity through an exploration of printmaking, sculpture, and animation.

C& Your video *Portrait of a Decade: Zimbabwe 1999–2009*, was shown at the 11th edition of the Bamako Encounters – African Biennale of Photography in 2015 and won an award there. Can you talk about your inspiration for this project and how it came into being?

LN I made *Portrait of a Decade* in 2011. It felt like a time when, as Zimbabweans, we could collectively take a breath and reflect on the last decade of socio-economic upheaval. Through my mother's personal recollections of daily experiences during this time, the film meditates on the effect national politics have on personal perceptions of reality. The viewer is only allowed to see ordinary people's feet and hands as they perform daily rituals, in contrast to archival footage of government officials that shows faces and complete bodies. Donald Donham's essay "Staring at Suffering: Violence as a Subject" has served as a blueprint for me in terms of thinking about alternative ways of representing trauma. He highlights our responsibility for contextualizing situations in ways that emphasize the complexities at play and reject an essentialist approach to the subject matter. The desire to resist sensationalism is what draws me to the work of Doris Salcedo. There is no melodrama in the representation of memory and loss in her work, which deals with the history and silent trauma of the disappeared in her homeland of Colombia.

C& Socioeconomic aspects in the Zimbabwean context play a central role in your video *Free Fall: A Chronology of the Zimbabwe Dollar*. Why did you choose this subject?

LN Though we officially stopped using the Zimbabwe dollar in 2009, it remains an ominous symbol of the dire economic realities that culminated in 2008. The question and threat of the “return of the Zim dollar” is a constant sense of foreboding that permeates day-to-day life while we walk the tightrope of economic instability and political precariousness. “It’s not politics, it’s life,” as Ngugi wa Thiong’o writes.

C& Please share with us how you go about making such a multimedia installation. For instance, how do you work with the space?

LN I start with a key element and then build an experience around it. The space you have to work in will always dictate the form and experience of the piece. With *Free Fall*, the key element was the three-channel video animation that was then mediated through a fictional airline. All the corresponding elements of the installation were employed towards that fiction: I performed as a flight attendant and served people peanuts; the peanuts came in custom packaging, with custom-printed napkins, served from an actual refurbished airline cart; the loop of the videos is dictated by the script of the boarding and in-flight safety announcements; there is a “duty free” area with display cases presenting defunct Zimbabwean currency.

C& In your exploration of counter-narratives, how important is the concept of memory and archives to you, also in terms of images?

LN The serial anthology *Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art* is the result of an editorial alliance between the MIT Press and the London-based Whitechapel Gallery. Introducing their edition on the archive, Charles Merewether writes that one of the chief



LUCIA NHAMO
was awarded the Goethe/Lanchonete residency prize at Bamako Encounters in 2015. The Goethe Institute and Musagetes/ArtsEverywhere support the juried prize of a two-month residency for an artist from Bamako Encounters with Lanchonete.org in São Paulo. The residency prize is awarded to a female artist whose work broadens and/or challenges perspectives on contemporary African migrations.

above Lucia Nhamo, *Portrait of a Decade: Zimbabwe 1999–2009*, 2011. Video still. HD video.
below Lucia Nhamo, *Fuck You Chocolates*, 2014. Installation detail.
Solid chocolate casts of the artist’s hand.
Courtesy of the artist



Lucia Nhamo, *Portrait of a Decade: Zimbabwe 1999–2009*, 2011. Video still. HD video.
Courtesy of the artist

characteristics of today’s society is the “increasing significance given to the archive.” Merewether’s concept of the “counter-archive” or the “counter-monument,” in which artists work through “a form of re-collection of that which has been silenced and buried,” informs my work as an artist. My urge to remember is tied up in the same principles that Avishai Margalit outlines in his book *The Ethics of Memory*, and is very much related to Derrida’s notion of archive fever as being a “searching for the archive right where it slips away.” Both personal and institutional archives continue to play a significant role in the work of practitioners who seek to problematize the past. When it comes to the impulse to create a range of alternatives in response to the dominant ideology, the counter-monument in particular sets memory in motion, verifying human experience while disrupting the one-way absolutes of authority.

C& You just completed a residency in Salvador de Bahia, at the Vila Sul. Could you talk a little bit about your experiences there and the encounters that you had?

LN Salvador was an incredible experience. Through the Goethe Institute, I had the opportunity to exhibit work and give a lecture during a performance festival run by the Escola de Belas Artes. I gave a lecture on my work at the university, and for many, the contextual parallels of Brazilian and Zimbabwean politics were of particular resonance. I also embarked on a project centered around the gesture of unraveling: I wrapped myself up in 20 meters of white fabric and rolled down different *ladeiras* (slopes) and sites in the city. The video footage is wonderfully bizarre. It also prompted a delightful collaboration with performance artist Michelle Mattiuzzi,

who rolled for me just outside the Lina Bo Bardi “Coaty” building in Pelourinho, the city’s historic center.

C& What about your interest concerning the history of slavery in Africa and Brazil? How are you looking into this topic?

LN Zimbabwe doesn’t share in this legacy of transatlantic trade in the way that Benin does, for example. So while this is an incredibly important aspect of global history, it’s not a topic of personal resonance for me. I have, however, drawn tremendous value from the sentiments and historical investigation of artists that I’ve met here in Brazil who deal with this subject as part of their practice. You also cannot deal with the very grave contemporary issues around race in Brazil without confronting the repercussions of that deeply fraught historical legacy.

C& How do you see the relationship and connections between Lusophone artists and cultural producers from Africa and Latin America?

LN Language has been such a huge element and mediator of my experience here in Brazil. It has opened up an entire new awareness of the Lusophone world. I’ve been thinking a lot about early Portuguese trade and influence in what we know today as Zimbabwe: the introduction of maize as our staple crop, for example, and the integration of the Portuguese early settlers. I’ve also resolved to visit Mozambique. It’s right next door to us! I’m very much looking forward to an art-filled, in-depth experience that goes beyond the superficial tourist jaunt of beaches and shrimp.

COLONIAL GHOSTS HAUNT ACCRA'S JAMESTOWN

By THIAGO DE PAULA SOUZA



Street scene, Brazil Road, Accra Study Days, April 2016.
Courtesy of the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo

Brazil's history as the largest slave-owning country prompted a group of artists, curators, and researchers affiliated with the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo to visit Ghana in search of history.



Artist Serge Attukwei Clottey in his studio in Labadi, Accra Study Days, April 2016.
Photo: Gabi Ngcobo. Courtesy of the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo

I would suggest Kendrick Lamar's *Alright* as a soundtrack to this piece. Imagine how conflicting it can be for young Black Brazilians to form their identity while growing up surrounded by mostly negative references to Blackness. Brazil received more slaves than any other country in the Americas – around 40% of the people forced to leave the African continent between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries were brought here. We were the last country in the southern hemisphere to abolish slavery and we are the country with the second-largest Black population in the world, after Nigeria. Human trafficking created a complex and terrible transatlantic network that spanned nearly four centuries and contributed immensely to the formation of Brazilian society, influencing many of its cultural aspects. Official history in Brazil still silences the Black leadership in the struggle for abolition. And schoolbooks largely reproduce images of enslaved men and women only in submissive positions,

dehumanizing them and ignoring the numerous slave rebellions that arose throughout the slavery period, especially during the nineteenth century. One result of these rebellions was what's become one of the most iconic moments of the entire slavery period emerged – the deportation of former slaves back to West Africa. This return happened mainly to African and Brazilian-born freed slaves who lived in Bahia, where the main uprisings took place. During this period the region had a considerable number of Black Muslims, both enslaved and free, who participated in various rebellions. In 1835, the Malê Revolt took place, culminating in harsh punishments for those involved and deportation of freed slaves. This also extended to many of those who hadn't necessarily engaged in the rebellions, but who were seen as a threat to the empire. It was in those moments of tension that the first groups of freed slaves were sent to Accra, the capital of Ghana, settling in Jamestown, one of the oldest

parts of the city. Because of their technical skills they got involved in various activities such as jewelry making, construction and agriculture, and human trafficking itself, which was practiced extensively in the region. This showed once again the complex social web that had formed around the transatlantic slave trade. Having poor command of the regional languages, this group often used the expression *tá bom, tá bom* (Portuguese for "it's all right") when struggling with communication. On this account other residents dubbed them Tabom people. In April, as part of the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, we began Dias de Estudos em Acra (Accra Study Days) with a group of artists, curators, and researchers. The initial theme was the search for memories, possible continuities and traces left by the Tabom, as well as confronting the colonial ghosts that prowl the Jamestown area. In between walks in Labadi, a visit to the Makola market, and seminars, we had

a meetup with a group of local artists at Brazil House, located on Brazil Road, also in Jamestown. The house is part of an architectural complex built by the Tabom people. After a renovation that happened in 2005, which coincided with a visit by the then Brazilian President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, it now functions as a sort of cultural center. The ruins of what once were public squares where slaves were sold surround the building. And what became clear was how these spaces that once were of fundamental importance to the local economy are now completely abandoned, almost as if in an attempt to erase a period that doesn't evoke pride in anyone. The ghosts were there but the Tabom people were not. After their arrival, the Tabom received a number of privileges and also got involved in various commercial and political activities, which helped them build up their own network of influence. This would also grant them some prestige in Ghanaian society and gradually they moved away from the area that first welcomed them. The presence of Black people on the streets of Accra startled me from the beginning, even if I expected the population of Ghana to be mostly Black. Growing up in Brazil, where I got used to seeing Black men and women working mostly as domestic help or taking up roles at the bottom of the social pyramid, had a detrimental effect on my imagination. And thus it came as a surprise to find here young Black artists, Black curators, and Black researchers. In the end, I came to realize that the colonial ghosts were very much alive inside me, and that things were still very far from *tá bom*.



from top Houses and sea view, Accra Study Days, April 2016.

Traditional boats, Accra Study Days, April 2016.

Museum educator Thiago de Paula Souza (right) with artist Dineo Seshee Bopape (left),

Accra Study Days, April 2016.

all images Courtesy of the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo

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WHEN THE GENERALS RULED AND BLACK CULTURE MATTERED LESS

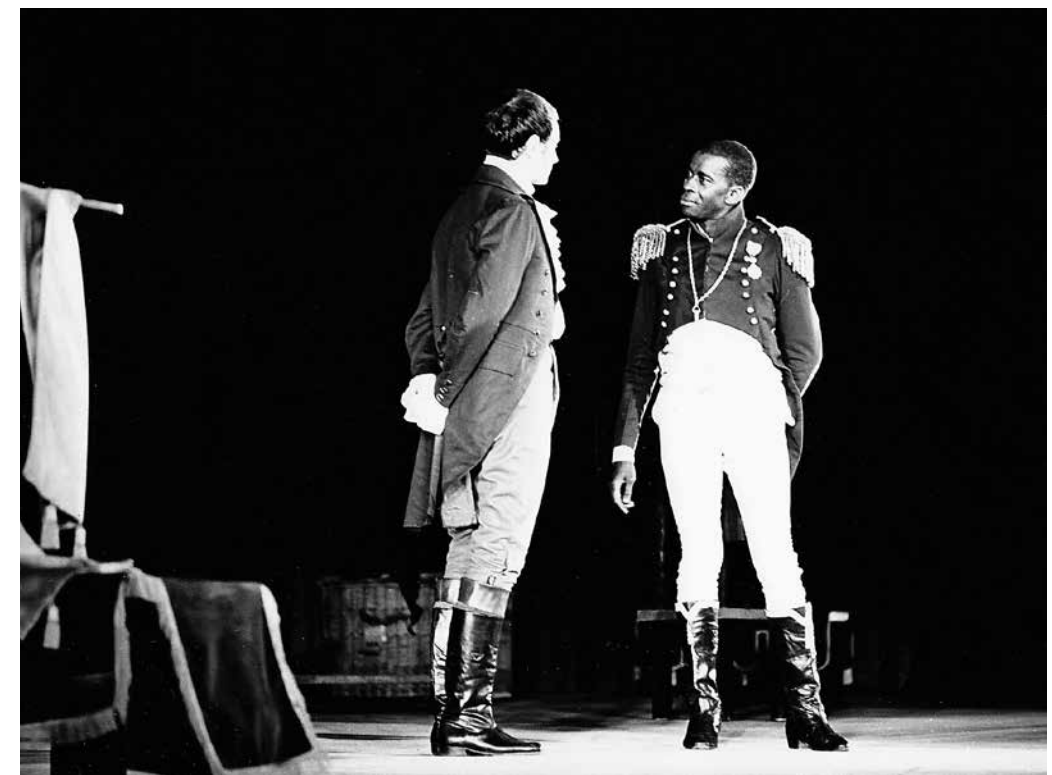
By CÉDRIC VINCENT

ABDIAS DO NASCIMENTO was a prominent Afro-Brazilian scholar and radical theater maker who troubled Brazil's presence at three important festivals for Black African culture.

Pastinha já foi à África / Pra mostrar capoeira do Brasil (Pastinha went to Africa / to show Brazilian capoeira). These words are taken from *Triste Bahia*, a song by Caetano Veloso, from the album *Transa* (1972). They refer to Vicente Pastinha, a master of capoeira, who in 1966 traveled to Dakar, where the First World Festival of Negro Arts (FESMAN) was held – an unprecedented cultural event, the like of which had never before taken place on African soil. Over the course of three weeks, more than 2,500 artists, musicians, academics, and writers came together in Dakar. The list of participants reads like a who's who of the major figures in Black culture from the early to mid-twentieth century. The representatives came not only from the continent of Africa but also from Europe and the USA as well as Brazil, which was the only country from South America to feature at the festival. It had an ambitious aim, claiming at once to be the expression of and vehicle for a new society grappling with

the promises of African independence. The project was based on the idea of Négritude, a philosophy proclaiming the power of “Black culture” on the global level. “For the defense and illustration of Négritude”: this is how the Senegalese president and poet Léopold Sédar Senghor solemnly characterized the project in his inaugural address. Vicente Pastinha was one of the forty-three members making up the Brazilian delegation, whose ranks included – besides capoeira performers – singers, painters, sculptors, and dancers from a samba school in Rio de Janeiro. Agnaldo dos Santos won the sculpture prize at the festival. At that time, Brazil was under military dictatorship and, at a diplomatic and commercial level, its participation in the festival was in keeping with its rapprochement with the countries of West Africa, principally Senegal. However, in spite of all the excitement, there was one noteworthy absence. Abdias do Nascimento – the founder of the Teatro Experimental do

Negro (Experimental Black Theater, or TEN) and the man who had brought Senghor's Négritude to Brazil – was expected to come. The TEN troupe had even rehearsed a play to be staged for the occasion. The festival was, after all, a wonderful stage for Afro-Brazilian artists to highlight their African heritage and contribute to this project for a global community through a shared Blackness. But in the end they were unable to participate due to censorship imposed by the Brazilian government, as Nascimento made known in an open letter published during the festival in the Senegalese weekly *L'Unité Africaine*, and then rerun in the pages of the influential journal *Présence Africaine*. In it he revealed the underlying political facts of the situation: the organizers of the Brazilian contingent had excluded the most militant Afro-Brazilians from the festival preparations. TEN kept going through to 1968, up until the point when Nascimento, driven into a corner by the



above Senghor arriving at the opening of the Festival mondial des nègres, Dakar, 1966.

below The play *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* by Aimé Césaire. Festival mondial des nègres, Dakar, 1966.

Courtesy of PANAFEST archive

AFRONAMENTOS: ART AND DIALOGUE AS A POLITICAL PLATFORM FOR TALKING ABOUT WHO WE ARE

LUCÉLIA SERGIO and **SIDNEY SANTIAGO KUANZA** of the São Paulo theater group *Cia Os Crespos* talk about their research project on the emotional lives of Black transvestites, cross-dressers, drag queens, and transgender people.

regime, was obliged to go into exile in the US. There he built up strong links with the leaders of the activist movements for civil rights and against racial discrimination. Brazil sent an impressive delegation consisting of diplomats, intellectuals, artists, dancers, musicians, and filmmakers to Lagos in 1977, for FESTAC, the Second World Festival of Negro Arts. The official publication celebrated the nation's peaceful incorporation of African traits and peoples, which the delegation displayed primarily through cultural manifestations like samba music and Afro-Brazilian religions. Nascimento was there too. However, he did not owe his presence to Brazil – he was a visiting professor at the University of Lagos. This undoubtedly offered him freedom of speech, which he made impassioned use of to assert his dissident stance in an intervention entitled *Racial Democracy in Brazil: Myth or Reality?* One can imagine the reply that he gave to this question. It showed how his thinking had evolved – his ideas were clearly influenced by the Pan-African and Afrocentric African American movements, as evidenced, in particular, by his espousal of the issue of “internal colonialism.” There is one more chapter in this story, which comes in the form of a conclusion. Nascimento's name can be found on the list of members of the advisory board for the Third World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar in 2010. He died a year later at the age of ninety-seven.



above An envelope made by the Brazilian delegation for FESTAC. FESTAC 77, Lagos, 1977.

below Cover of a magazine. FESTAC 77, Lagos, 1977.

Courtesy of PANAFEST archive



The performer Ézio Rosa in their performance debut *Não Coisificarás*, in Centro Cultural da Penha, São Paulo, 2015.

Photo: Vanderlei Yui. Courtesy of the artist

Viewing love as a priority in Black lives is a rather complex maneuver because it compels us to question our very emotions. We will likely encounter serious emotional barriers in terms of what we mean by strength, sharing or hiding feelings, the need for affection – often at odds with the exigencies of day-to-day survival – and, finally, the choices and desires that ultimately make us who we are.

Racism and feelings of supremacy among whites did not evaporate once slavery was abolished, and the lingering legacy of slavery continues to be passed on from generation to generation in terms of how we love. According to bell hooks, the Black

feminist writer from the United States, “we think we’ll jeopardize our survival if we let ourselves go and yield to our emotions.” That is what we learned from a slave system: to dismantle our affective ties. We were forced to believe that we only have control over our lives when we repress our emotions or pay little or no attention to our families, not giving them any affection, or when we teach our kids and siblings not to cry when they witness racism or discrimination. When affection is considered to be as important as survival and the fight against racism, we come to realize that oppression and forms of domination have compromised the very existence of Black people. When

racism impacts emotional health and feelings, it leaves permanent marks and weakens us to the point that we are unable to fight for who we are. As a symbolic field of imagined sociabilities, art opens a space for possibilities and experimentation with other tangible realities. Accordingly, many artists have explored issues related to emotional life and its interplay with society, especially emotions and identities that depart from the norm.

In this context, we as researchers at *Cia: Os Crespos de Teatro e Intervenção* completed an audiovisual survey of stagecraft (2011–2015) that delves into the



The performer Ézio Rosa during the event *Rolezinho das Bichas Nagô*, São Paulo, 2015.
Photo: Vanderlei Yui. Courtesy of the artist



Aretha Sadick performing on Paulista Avenue, the main street of São Paulo, 2015.
Photo: Mandela Crew. Courtesy of Nabor Jr.



The actor Sidney Santiago playing Madame Satã in the show *Cartas a Madame Satã ou me Desespero sem Notícias Suas*, 2014.

Photo: Roniel Felipe. Courtesy of Cia Os Crespos

emotional lives of Black women and men, examining how slavery impacts on our ways of loving. Entitled *Dos Desmanches aos Sonhos: Poética em Legítima Defesa* (From Wrecks to Dreams: Poetry as Self-Defense), the project, conceived under the City of São Paulo’s theater funding program Programa Municipal de Fomento ao Teatro, involved research, production, and a five-show tour. In an attempt to create poetry that transcends this boundary, we have focused on our experience as an “encounter” in order to understand emotional contexts and diverse identities. Field research spanned bars, porn movie theaters, squares, diversity centers, offices, prisons, households, and a myriad of other physical spaces in São Paulo, where researchers engaged with men, transvestites, cross-dressers, drag queens, and transgender people of varying ages, though contact was predominantly with younger individuals.

Based on the listening experience, Os Crespos created a show that assembled the interviews alongside the mythical and transgressive figure of Madame Satã (Madam Satan, 1900–1976), a Pernambucan transvestite who spent part of her life in Rio de Janeiro. *Cartas à Madame Satã Ou Me Desespero Sem Notícias Suas* (Letters to Madame Satã, or, Hopeless Growing Desperate without Hearing from You) sets out to create a discourse in favor of love, while also discussing themes such as emotional life. The work also crafts a poetic statement in which love as a public act is considered to be a fight for one’s identity.

HEAD-ON

From the beginning, Cia Os Crespos have treated performance as a space for the body’s intervention and the audience’s relationship with the body. In this sense, the performance of certain artists has laid bare their experience as witness to an emotional life hemmed in by taboos. This body/witness not only represents the realm of potential affect, but also serves as a statement, a claim, and a debate.

With more than 14,000 Facebook likes, the Tumblr called *Bicha Nagô*, created to expose previously hush-hush situations,

shares everyday experiences as a safe space for discussing themes of sexuality and race. Using social networking, performer Ézio Rosa has branched out into artistic events organized to discuss the subject.

Rico Dalasam, hailing from Taboão da Serra in the state of São Paulo, has gained acclaim in various countries and recently released a new album, *Orunga* (2016). Emerging from legendary rap competitions regularly held at the Santa Cruz metro station in São Paulo, the rapper continues to weave groundbreaking narratives within hip hop culture. Embracing the principle that such culture was popularized for expressing unfiltered truth, Dalasam decided to talk about being gay, how he loves, how he sees himself within society, and, in turn, how society views him.

In his experiment against homophobia entitled *Meninos Também Amam – Um poema/manifesto cênico* (Boys Love Too: An On-Stage Poem/Manifesto), Inacaba Cia.’s Rafael Guerche has boldly attempted to build drama and staging that can open up a space for affection among equals. In the creative milieu of young theater students, his initiative is poetically striking, showing nude figures making love in public, unleashing love and emotion. The actor, performer and costume designer Robson Rozza – as he calls himself – was once an introverted, introspective child. Nevertheless, the lanky boy has transformed himself into a restless, fearless presence who won over the world.

Robson is the artist behind the persona Aretha Sadick Drag Queen, who is recognized not only for elaborate artistic performances but also for not shying away from speaking out about social insertion and civil rights. In a drama class at the Martins Pena School, the artist and his classmates formed a research and language collective in which he assumed the acting role. His interpretation of a monologue inspired by the feminine universe explored in the songs of Brazil’s famed singer-songwriter Chico Buarque drew the attention of a friend who urged him to wear the outfit created by the renowned Paranaense designer Henrique Filho for the 22nd edition of Miss Gay Rio de Janeiro, which he won. “It was totally unexpected and unplanned... The contest won me a ‘pass,’ and I could have seized on

more opportunities from that. But I wanted to distance myself from that world. I was very young,” he has said.

He retreated to his studies in fashion (which had given way to theater) and began working in art education. He was an artist-in-residence at the London 2012 Summer Olympics, where he had the opportunity to explore gay London nightlife and experience other contexts and aspects in the world of cross-dressing, transvestites, and drag queens.

Just after returning to Brazil, a friend who was organizing Rebola – a touring music festival – invited the artist to perform.

“Aretha was dormant and no longer relevant then, but she made a comeback at that festival and came back onto the scene.” Against all odds and – literally – not dropping the ball, Robson and Aretha remain one, sharing the same body and ideas. The artist currently participates in Drag-se, a collective of young Rio artists with a YouTube channel that takes a weekly, behind-the-scenes glimpse into the world of drag artists, raising awareness and urging the need for visibility and dialogue related to multiple identities.

“I’m trying to merge my knowledge of the performing arts, costumes, fashion design, and discussions on sexuality and gender. Like I said, I’m now Aretha Sadick the Drag Queen, but first and foremost I’m Robson Rozza, an artist.”

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AN ESSENTIAL GESTURE OF CULTURAL RESISTANCE

A round-table conversation with three collectives talking about the role of their artist-run platforms: in Zimbabwe, **MISHECK MASMU** of Village Unhu and, in Colombia, **ADRIANA QUIÑONES LEÓN** of Afroexistencia and several members of **LUGAR A DUDAS**.



above Cali Choreography Dancing Show. Ana Maria Millan and Monica Restrepo in collaboration with Liga Femenina de Baile, 2008. Screenshot taken from *calichoreography* by Proartes (YouTube)
below *Caja de Texto*. Curatorial project by Diego García, 2012. Manuel Ángel, Ana Montenegro, Javier Gutiérrez, Kevin Mancera. Photo: lugar a dudas. Courtesy of Diego García



Leonard van Munster, *Pink Villa Colombia*, Elopement, 2013.
Ephemeral intervention. Wood, polystyrene foam, nails, paint, glue, and recycling materials from the ruins of an ancient house. Courtesy of lugar a dudas

CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) Being artists, why did you choose to (co-)create an art space?

MISHECK MASAMVU We once created *Artist in Conversation*, an intervention to speak about the ills imposed by institutions against the artist. It was a good platform but it ended in disaster and unnecessary jabbering. I learned from it that real talk is when you present a product and talk about the product rather than speaking for or against an idea that is still in the imagination. We strongly believe that some form of a structure has to be built by artists around their practice, enabling them to develop organically, not have their work informed or prescribed by institutions or market forces.

ADRIANA QUIÑONES LEÓN The Afroexistencia collective emerges from the desire and vital need of its members to set forth on a path of collective action that utilizes artistic language and practices and social communication to contribute to the transformation of the unjust realities experienced by Global South communities. To this end, Afroexistencia inscribes itself as a chapter of this creative duty and impulse where the protagonist and historical subject is of African descent.

LUGAR A DUDAS lugar a dudas opened as an attempt to respond to the needs of Cali's art scene, in a historical moment when, despite the frenetic activity of several groups of artists, there weren't spaces to show their work nor initiatives that supported their practices. Institutions at the time, more than now, ignored those artists and acted based on populism without a clue of what cultural policies were about. So the project started as a gesture of cultural resistance. While the idea of creating a space was initiated by Oscar Muñoz and Sally Mizrahi, its implementation is the result of a collective effort. The project has been built over a decade with the participation of many artists and people who have contributed from different perspectives and disciplines to create possibilities of exchange and dialogue. We encourage readers to check out the list of our residents and guest artists on our website: lugaradudas.org. lugar a dudas has also benefited from the support and collaboration of relevant artists from the city of Cali who have been part of the staff, coordinating all of our activities and making effective decisions defined through dialogue and group negotiation. Our goal is to foster an inclusive community rather than only a platform for the promotion of a few, so that's our reason to avoid, among other things, dropping certain names rather than others.

Over the years we’ve been exploring different ways of action. We’ve joined networks, experimented around cross-practices, participatory platforms, and formats, to expand the ways in which the artists can show their work and interact with their audiences.

C& Could you share the vision and the goals of your art platforms?

MM The vision is quite a difficult one to realize. The goals on the other hand are very simple. The goal is to improve our reality and conditions. Currently, Village Unhu offers studio spaces and accommodation to the artists. We run a residency program hosting artists for a maximum of three months. We have a created a contemporary exhibition and gallery space. The vision is to have a group of people or, at this stage, artists who ask questions and understand that not every question deserves to be answered in words. Through our work, we have a chance to initiate a new turn of events or experiences. The vision goes beyond encouraging the artists to keep their doors open to others in need. Through the platform we have a chance to look within ourselves and learn about others.

AQL Afroreexistencia endeavors to recover Afro-Colombian historical memory through paleography and ethnography while facilitating the re-appropriation of these memories – through diverse artistic, audio-musical, visual, and written languages – by the very communities they belong to.

LAD Beyond the visibility of tangible artistic products, which, of course, are an essential part of our interest, lugar a dudas places particular emphasis on issues that arise in today’s society with the intention of highlighting different points of view, bringing out contradictions and divergences to generate complexity and critical thought. The space, which is an art center that includes a documentation center, exhibition rooms, a residency program, film projections, seminars, workshops, and more, is currently redefining its vision towards the integration of the art scenes in the city with a broader community of academics, thinkers, social practitioners, writers, youth scenes, and other communities that act as cultural agents. Starting from the consensus of what an artist is supposed

to do, we are trying to create spaces where these suppositions are challenged, transformed, and redefined. In order to do this, we are enhancing our organization as a space for education, discussion, and criticism. Under the motto *Educación sin Escuela* (Education without school), we’re trying to explore new avenues, looking for fresh experiences, partners, and chances to learn from our mistakes and actions.

C& Please tell us a little bit about the respective names of your platforms: Village Unhu, Afroreexistencias, and lugar a dudas.

MM The actual name for Village Unhu was supposed to be “dunhu unhu.” We then settled for Village Unhu. Village at this stage does not refer to a “locus,” it is a *munyati*, an idea of collecting and unpacking various views and experiences. Just like the saying, a child is born to be raised by everyone, although our stories might speak to individual experience, the story is often about everyone. Unhu is not an idea or concept, Unhu is a footprint of humanity.

AQL The name Afroreexistencia makes reference to the varied and new forms of existence established by descendants of the African Diaspora in the particular regions they settled, as well as the ways they resisted enslavement, erasure, discrimination, and exploitation.

LAD lugar a dudas means “room for doubts,” a name that, undoubtedly, claims the right to think twice, to never be comfortable in any position, to exercise a healthy opposition while hesitating, even about doubt and negativity, through the exercise of action, organization, and cultural production. To have some room for doubts doesn’t imply stopping and refusing. It’s not a state of inaction but a statement in defense of the provisional.

C& How would you describe the artistic community in your context? How do you engage with it?

MM I know there are lots of creative sensitive “peoples” in Harare, so I am not sure if they would find me suitable to speak on their behalf. The artistic community in Harare is sensitive and above all it is sensible to rise above one’s precarious “realities.”

AQL We can think about the Afro-Colombian artistic community as a social protagonist that expresses itself through idioms, forms of knowledge, and traditional expressions that some call folkloric, and that are transformed by history and take on new forms. We understand our contribution as a revisionist historical perspective of Afro-Colombian cultural history. For example, we are currently preparing an illustrated publication that is the product of rigorous ethnographic archival research, but that utilizes a visual and written language accessible to any audience. This publication seeks to articulate the memory and identities of people of African descent suppressed by colonial processes because we believe that “the shortest path to the future is a profound knowledge of the past.”

lad Cali is a city with a population of 2.5 million. The city has an art museum, two commercial galleries, and five professional arts programs, each of them with different approaches. The lack of structured cultural policies has resulted in a wide range of needs in the different artist communities all over the city. Artists respond



above Misheck Masamwu, *Life of a Lone Hair*, 2016. Oil on canvas.
Courtesy of the artist.

right Misheck Masamwu, *Crosses*, 2016. Oil on canvas.
Courtesy of Goodman Gallery



to this institutional precariousness through self-organization, DIY ethics, temporary initiatives and, in general, a rich set of informal practices. lugar a dudas works locally, fostering artists’ initiatives and facilitating access to information, knowledge, and possibilities to reinforce these different local initiatives, as well as their ways to interact in meaningful ways.

C& With reference to your many forms of collaboration, can you talk a bit about how you see the role of education in your artistic practice and in relation to your art space?

MM The role of education could be seen as a sham. The role of educating has been reduced to transferring information without it translating from real experiences. To dwell only on words and speak of a quotable history is to neglect one’s present reality and experience. One must work, even if your work is speaking from the heart about what you know, not what you have been told.

AQL The place of cultural education and arbitration is fundamental, thus it is necessary to draw connections between academic intellectual production and other epistemic subjects through the mediation of artistic languages in the codification / decodification of discourse.

lad It has been crucial for us to strengthen the relation between artistic and pedagogical practices. We incorporated the slogan *Educación sin Escuela* as a statement that guides our action and

unifies our mission, offering space and opportunities for practitioners to implement new forms of work and organization, to build networks, to connect the local to an international community of cultural agents, institutions, and peers, and, finally, to produce complex layers of thought, practice, and affection. We are learning to learn from those who come to learn from the space. We are thinking about entanglement, about the need to effect and be affected by others at a distance.

C& Misheck, can you tell us a little bit about your contribution to the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo?

MM The work can only be painted at night, usually around midnight. It has become a ritual. It seems like time stands still, a time undecided. My work concerns doubt about reaching a clear state of mind. To commit to a life’s worth, defying the risen night spirits.

C& How did you come up with this idea?

MM I guess I am frustrated to learn that knowledge drawn from imagined fear holds my reality hostage. Why must I live in fear of tomorrow?

AFROREXISTENCIA afroreexistencias.wordpress.com
LUGAR A DUDAS lugaradudas.org



Afroreexistencia, Adriana Quiñones-León,
Miradas anónimas, protagonistas olvidados, 2012. Stencil.
Courtesy of Afroreexistencia

BLACK LITERATURE, LITERATURE OF THE PERIPHERY? A BLANDISHMENT TO READERS ALREADY TIRED OF THE STRUGGLES AND CRIES FROM SWEET, UNCERTAIN LABYRINTHS?

New Afro-Brazilian literature, writes **ALLAN DA ROSA**,
is a literature of discovery and sprawling charm.

The writer, community educator, and historian Allan da Rosa unpacks Black and peripheral aesthetics in literature with a focus on writing that traverses Brazil’s complex social history. Whether textually, through discussions, at *saraus* (soirees), or in everyday life, da Rosa is in the thick of things, examining the urgent desires in the fissures, styles and themes that Black writers and writers of the periphery proclaim with substance and in a broad scope, while maintaining an awareness of the inevitable dilemmas present in the trajectories of this literature springing forth from contexts lacking in privilege.

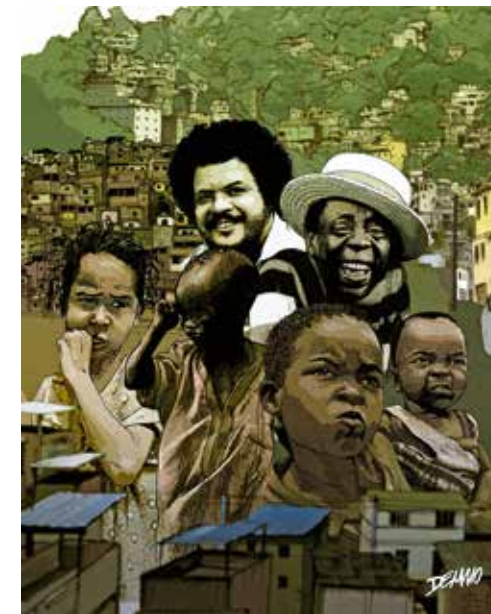
It is a literature
attentive to the tactical
scheme of its time,
becoming a window.

Words embroidered by Black hands, that sneak around and persist in urban crevices, signaling at the top of winding stairs or with their feet deeply in the muck. The periphery is a fertile pavement, fighting for a history that takes homeboys into account, this water in so many basins. It is a literature attentive to the tactical scheme of its time, becoming a window. One that won’t slip easily into an intense praise of speed that manifests itself everywhere – on train lines, on keyboards, in impatience. (A delicate time in which pieces with 10 or 30 lines are called “long”... but we’ll come back to these mumblings later). Literature that considers our contradictions, our love for the backyard and for the street,

our growls and the licking of our paws, because following the pack without thinking about the sniffing isn’t hard. There’s a Congolese saying that teaches: “Together we are strong, but in a crowd we’re hypocrites.” Literature that ruptures the edges of the predictable, that plays with form, prime for a letter sent from jail, for riddles, for a bitter sip of spit, for staring at the ocean. That dances inside every human being, among the petals and barbs of that which is fashioned between the “individual” and society. That doesn’t yield to the heavy pressure of the moment: that of writing to be “liked.” Which is to say, literature that doesn’t content itself with a poster’s image, but rather with the words in its veins. A letter calling for hands at the street fair, for the morning sun on a Sunday in the favela, for the quiet of flashes sparked by a library’s intimacy: this fertile garden. That is recited at *saraus*, also leading to doubts macerated in anger, led by cries, shouting and screaming. That gets sweaty in the singing, in the harmony between the trumpet and the drums, but that seeks out melody and rhythm in the very words of a text and makes an instrument of the electric imagination and labyrinths in the heart of the reader. Populist misery is writing merely to please. It is by now a traditional temptation in Black art, understandable from south to north after legalized slavery, and it is shriveling and drying up in militant clichés. Can a verb be a cousin once removed from the majesty of the *berimbau*? That in pitch, tone, and resonance opens up

various meanings for each different person listening, whether by the wheel and skin of time or by the conditions in the city, the beat of the drum, wire, coins, and calabash warning that it is going to set off or stand guard, to play slyly or to cut something off at its knees. Like revealing secrets without killing off the mystery. Literature that gives accounts of reflections on what constitutes community, idealized as though at some point in history it had been homogenous, presented as though it were not incredibly complex. There are so many points of view and the distance between belief and skepticism is vast: can a text be a home? If so, is the roof there for good or are we looking at one night in a hotel? There is much wisdom and spillage emerging in the lyrical malocage of Akins Kinte’s texts, in Jenyffer Nascimento’s cutting, scintillating chronicles, in the snares of Dinha’s laconic irony, in Fábio Mandingo’s pen and in his bitter, gloating labyrinths, in the mischief of Salvador’s postcards, in the malice that sways against the passing of time in Walner Danzinger’s pieces, in the majestic shenanigans and heartache of the alleys traversed by Maria Tereza’s weary feet. A literature observed that also grows stiff when understanding is hampered by talk of a group of Black people entering universities; it winds up being misunderstood, given the squareness of the format or the vice of using terminology miles away from the ears of the slopes, alleys, and wagons. Lives that we paint, that carry us, scooping us up and shining in intimacy and in literature

“Black literature dances in the ancestral challenge of organizing its own system and sharing its values, ethics, and philosophies, combining the mission to cry out with the gift of being able to ask.”



Alexandre De Maio, *Untitled*, 2016. Digital illustration.
Courtesy of the artist

“Populist misery is writing merely to please.
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that ensnares us in style, this magnet, this pleasure. Reflecting the times or acting as a thumb under our hammer when we build our desks. That lives sharply in the skin of the text, without thousands of codes to solve, without truth hidden beneath tons of detritus and ornamentation. That brings fundamental questions to the crossroads and that gives posters hanging in the window or on a Facebook wall the maximum slip. Literature that treads, that has weight, sifting the crystalline out of the wet earth and hard asphalt of our inner fervor. That at the heart of our loneliness shows us how from within we are intimately entangled with both yesterday and tomorrow. Comparing, identifying, and surprising us with what is grounded in the here and now and cunningly facing what doesn’t fit in this scheme. An immense but necessary kind of cunning, the force of thought. Beyond the blackness of snapshots or what rattles the audience and invites their applause, beyond the “militancy” that shows up in times of YES X NO on social networks and their virtual gallows. There are times when the Ku Klux Klan and South African apartheid sum up what lynches us, and there are times when they don’t. And it is in these problems where the traps lie, the arguments of those who still spew the same tired logic claiming everything is a class issue. The chasms between the subjective, between “feelings” and handcuffs, so constricting and concrete. The ever-present violence that has a color and an accent as well as a postal code and quick feet. Tripping over our contradictions. It is there that this literature might be a source of nourishment, with its unexpected plots and turns. Adding to our deaf ears and strengthened there by the blood of rap, blues, and jazz, and of the pulse of drums and poetry of fire and serenity, from the *quilombagens* of the Brazilian slave revolt to today, what constitutes African history

in the Americas, full of gaps that don’t fit easily on the flag. Strengthening our doubts. Reflecting on this together. Without giving any more gold to the barons, whether from our minds or our pockets. On these Brazilian paths, not fleeing from these ideas of “racial democracy,” of harmonic racial miscegenation, and of “we are not racists,” which don’t deserve two minutes of reality or two centimeters at the cemetery, from the revolving door, chains, textbooks, or TV shows. And not even from the simplistic idea of a biracial society that might take into account realities and arguments from the US but that doesn’t always come to a boil in the thousand crevices and ledges here, in these Brazils of our ruptures and mirrors. Faced with a system which constantly implies that we are something between animals, robots, and merchandise, thorns between the remote control and the uniformed nightstick, Black literature dances in the ancestral challenge of organizing its own system and sharing its values, ethics, and philosophies, combining the mission to cry out with the gift of being able to ask. Clearing the fog and fostering understanding of the whys and ways of our existence, doing what we do, braiding with reason and spirit the coordinates of time and place, the notes composed in our hearts and the maps of desire. With subtlety in the undergrowth or with an ax sharpened to perfection and care for each line. As was already much discussed by Black writers in the 1980s, in meetings with a hunger for building critical thought fomented in the schools and in the kitchens of Rio de Janeiro’s state-run children’s homes, which led to the book *Criação crioula, nu elefante branco* (Creole Creation: Naked White Elephant). This blow to literature, which was tied up with prepared speeches and which got mucked up with clichés, by unforeseen twists, also yielded the singularity of works by Cuti and by Conceição Evaristo, which

today give off the heat of having traveled lonely roads in the company of those who don’t see, but read. Black and peripheral literature is a literature of discovery, loss, mistakes, vacillations, and a sprawling smattering of charm, from the bathroom’s stink to the dancehall’s perfume, from the grinding, sweaty happiness in the ankles of someone backing away from a kiss still on the lips, from the uniform sticky with grease to learning to eat with chopsticks. It is a literature that becomes literature, vital, a sweet mango in which we smear our intelligence and which is always made new when it becomes entangled in the head and heart, wrists and belly, in the calluses on fingertips and in the thick of hair. Through vibrant webs or through fragments of the Black Diaspora, whether strong or shrinking, here and there with lineages, composition, the possibility of leaving clichés behind by observing, creating, stylizing – and diving deeper, with pleasure and fire, into the many spheres of retaliation and into the history of each piece of straw in our nests.

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A NEW KINGDOM OF SISTERS AND BROTHERS

A wave of new Afro-Brazilian dance and theater in São Paulo is promoting ethical positions that transgress existing hierarchies and build new audiences, write **JÉ OLIVEIRA** and **LUCIANE RAMOS-SILVA**.



Performance: *Movimento Número 1: O Silêncio de Depois*, 2013.
Photo: Zeca Caldeira. Courtesy of Coletivo Negro

In the last decade, the city of São Paulo has seen a flourishing of productions that, using dance or theater as a base, face Black experience and examine how this reality mobilizes artistic acts within the labyrinths of the Diaspora. These are dramaturgic approaches which capture and recreate memories, interpreting history from perspectives that distrust established modes. These are artists who create in an attempt to redefine values that were crumbling along the way, owing to numerous displacements, silences, and inequalities. These are not outcries, but rather artistic strategies with an eye toward change.



Grupo Fragmento Urbano, 2015. Photo: Carlos Machava. Courtesy of Fragmento Urbano

BODIES EMBODIED – WRITINGS AND RE-IMAGININGS

Within the particular field of dance production, among the various actions involved in the search for utterances and listenings for the body, approaching the political via aesthetics and poetics has been addressed with care and depth. In a constantly changing scenario for the city's cultural politics, where we question an absence of works by Black artists in the contemporary arts scene, creators move from Africanized perspectives, rejecting clichés and stigmas created by dominant discourses, and giving tension to the soothing statements that ignore the racial hierarchy present in the country's dance history. These ideas – of rooted feet, spiraling torsos, and arms and legs drawing curving paths, traveling distances and coming back to wholeness – pierced legitimate positions of power, even occupying the academic sphere, with theories, procedures, and references that point to what the cultural critic and feminist bell hooks defines as transgression: pushing against boundaries. In the piece *Dikanga Kalunga* (2014), by Nave

Gris Cênica Company, choreographed and performed by the dancer Kanzelumuka, the varied universe of traditional Bantu expression was the seed for a creation that endowed the body with the elements of ancestral relationships and archetypes of these cultures, so deeply present in the socio-cultural makeup of Brazil. And this piece was not a frivolous collage dressed up as “reinterpretation,” but rather a thoughtful appropriation of conceptions of space, time, and Black experience. Elucidating the transversalities of gender, race, and class relations, the dancer and actor Kleber Lourenço, in the piece *Negro de Estimação* (2007), imprints on the bodies of his characters their respective states, while their ironic discourses elucidate the submissive positions assigned to them for being Black, gay, poor, and from the northeast of Brazil. By coming back to and returning dignity to bodies and cultural expressions seen as *fora da ordem*, that is, not in keeping with the prescribed norms, these artists are situating dance in a just place: as an area of knowledge production. At this crossroads, investigating language is a key element. The young

Fragmento Urbano Company, interested in the creative, technical, and symbolical possibilities of urban and Brazilian dance, approximate and interweave the dance genres that accompany their lived landscapes. Originating from the periphery and educated at the intersections of hip-hop culture and the popular traditions of Northeast Brazil, the group feeds on tradition as a manifestation of continuity and invention. In mobilizing creative energy from the landscape of Black experience, these artists bring to the forefront ideas about the body overlooked by hegemonic spaces and discursive practices, which broaden the possibilities of understanding who we are as Brazilians in the face of the tensions and contradictions surrounding us. Blackness is not simply an accessory or an equivalent to dance, it isn't contained in the material, but rather, developed: in the body and its ancestry. Understanding what we are made of implies distilling the ways and means of perceiving what unites us and what makes us distinct. Nothing other than moving critically.

HUMANITY ONSTAGE

Returning our attention to theater created from the Black social experience, we will consider several characteristics present in contemporary theatrical productions of the following groups: Os Crespos, Capulanas Cia de Arte Negra, and Coletivo Negro, with a special emphasis on the “civilizing effects of theater with racial concerns”¹ as a guiding concept for this consideration. Among the poetics these groups wield and proclaim, notable is the confrontation and construction of possibilities regarding racism and its effects (emotional, psychological, and social), which seek to make the invisible visible and existent beyond subaltern experiences.

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A term that approaches and is in dialogue with a concept developed by the psychoanalyst Maria Rita Kehl in “Radicais, Raciais, Racionais: a grande fratria do rap na periferia de São Paulo” (Rap’s Civilizing Force on the Outskirts of São Paulo).

Each group, according to its own method of investigating relevant themes to Black experience, and not least among the artists themselves, operates within two major spheres: at the level of symbolic expression when creating and elaborating other forms of representation, and at the level of social experience when performatizing its issues and problems, thereby influencing reality and proposing presence in fields historically remote to Black people, such as theater in Brazil. Apart from the ethical and aesthetic foundations underpinning their work, these groups also have the massive and devoted presence of Black audiences. It seems that the term “audience” isn’t sufficient to describe the magnitude of what happens at these encounters. The characteristics and manner in which the events unfold resemble what the psychoanalyst Maria Rita Kehl identifies as being established in the relationship between the São Paulo-based rap group Racionais MC’s and the homeboys who follow them: “brothers and sisters” may be the term best suited for describing those who share and bear witness to these creations. The idea of brotherhood expresses the

feelings present in these encounters, which are mediated by art in the establishment of an alternate reality – one of kinship, a kingdom of sisters and brothers – according equal respect to those who perform as to those who witness. The notion of brotherhood becomes even more appropriate when we consider that many Black men and women are paternal orphans. The aim is to create a relationship of care, celebration, and education among all those who experience theatrical events put on by the groups. Capulanas, founded by Black women and women from the country’s periphery, in the performance *Sangoma* (2013) dedicates itself to questions surrounding Black women’s health, deepens these questions, and demystifies certain notions (such as the one leading to the belief that Black women have a higher tolerance for pain, which results in discriminatory and neglectful treatment in public hospitals). By upending these stereotypical perceptions of the body, the artists recover care, love, and healing. In *Cartas à Madame Satã* (2014), Os Crespos examines intimacy among Black

men and the preconceptions and curtailed sociability accompanying this experience, imbuing it with affection. The necessary restitution of dignity also comes up in the work of Coletivo Negro, which, in the piece *Movimento Número 1: O Silêncio de Depois...* (2011), addresses the dispossession of Black populations since the first African exodus, in addition to the petty game of market logic, which gleefully sells everything and everyone under the guise of progress. To artistically promote the broadening and deepening of these questions – including the subjective, affective, and the pedagogical face of racism and its implications – is one of the primary endeavors of this generation of artists. Even so, Brazil’s non-Black population is absent or distant from these concrete efforts and constructions. Far from cordoning off these issues, these artists propose the humanization of society as a whole through the inundation of greatly expanded notions of humanity and through the mobilization of values officially silenced by the complex legacies of slavery and racism in Brazil.

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FRONT COVER
Genilson Soares, *Pontos de Vista* (detail), at “Uma Prancha Encostada na Parede,” 11th Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, 1973, Photo: Gerson Zanini. Courtesy of the artist

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Performance: *Negro de Estimação*, 2016.
Photo: Murilo de Paula. Courtesy of Kleber Lourenço



Capulanas Cia de Arte Negra, *Sangoma*, 2014.
Photo: Chaia Dechen. Courtesy of Capulanas Cia de Arte Negra

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HYBRIDIZING EARTH, DISCUSSING MULTITUDE,
BUSAN BIENNIAL 3 SEPT - 30 NOV

BOGOSI SEKHUKHUNI

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE, KAMPALA ART BIENNIAL 3 SEPT - 2 OCT

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KEMANG WA LEHULERE

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THE ABCs OF DALTON PAULA: FROM AFRICA TO BAHIA AND, OF COURSE, CUBA



Dalton Paula, *Unguento*, 2013. Video.

Photo: João Pedro Matos. Courtesy of artist

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Brazilian artist **DALTON PAULA** talks to *OMenelick 2°Ato's*
ALEXANDRE ARAÚJO BISPO about his interest in drawing, Black
history, performance, botany, and Afro-Brazilian religious practices.



Dalton Paula, *Comunhão*, 2009.
Oil on canvas and silver leaf. Courtesy of the artist

OMENELICK 2°ATO How did you become interested in visual art and what is your training?

DALTON PAULA It started when I was a teenager, from reading manga comics such as *Knights of the Zodiac*. I collected copies of the magazine *Herói* and would copy the drawings using carbon paper and then color them in with colored pencils. Now I'm aware that it was this "coloring in" that brought me to the arts. I also had the opportunity to study at the School of Visual Art in Goiânia, which was right next to the city's Contemporary Art Museum, and both institutions were really thriving at that time, with the mounting of exhibitions and visiting artists who shared their experiences with the students. At fourteen, I was able to meet and work with artists such as Arthur Bispo do Rosário, Farnese de Andrade, Coletivo Corpos Informáticos, and Marco Paulo Rolla. This was an important contribution to my own training, which was further refined in the visual arts course at the Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG).

OM2ATO You recently came to São Paulo to do a residency at the studio of Rosana Paulino, an important artist for understanding the Black presence in contemporary art. What was this experience like?

DP Rosana Paulino, apart from being important in the field of contemporary Brazilian art, is committed to education, because she is always guiding and training new artists. I am one of those students, and her involvement was crucial to the refinement of my work. In 2007, I sent an email asking for help and for more information about her work, and Rosana responded immediately; she took me under her wing and has been tremendously supportive. The residency at her studio was an extension of this process, which was already happening indirectly, via conversations about the presentation of work (the portfolio), the materials used, and the coherence between an idea and its

visual representation, in addition to suggested readings, writings by artists, and other points of reference. Also, the need to develop the practice of drawing, as the artist's notebook was a focal point for her. This facilitated repeated experimentation, photographing the results and archiving them in order to compare them with earlier creations, so this practice has helped me a lot, particularly in developing my drawing skills in addition to painting.

OM2ATO As with your biography, does your social experience appear in your work?

DP My personal history and experiences as a Black man pervade my work, sometimes in a direct way, as when I inhabit this character-body that situates itself in urban spaces, or in inhabiting a movement, as in the task from the 2011 video *O batedor de bolsa* (Purse Beater); but this is also addressed indirectly, as a kind of game, playing with the pre-established, making use of the art of the Mandinka people, approaching it, dodging it, being imposed.

OM2ATO The artist Divino Sobral in the article "Dalton Paula e a arte de amansar senhores" (Dalton Paula and the Art of Taming Men) examines how you confront public spaces when situated in realistic situations. Can you explain how your interest in ritual is related to your work in *Rota do fumo*?

DP In presenting these performances there is a metaphor of the body as a means, as a vehicle, similar to the Afro-Brazilian sects in which divinities inhabit the bodies of their sons and daughters. This ritualistic dynamic informs my artistic work, and, implicitly even, spirituality governs the shaping of the characters, determining the power of that body. Thus, in order to reach other layers of meaning that are silenced or inhabit the realm of the secret, the magical, and the enchanted, I explore the theme of ritual in this work. This approach allows me to show that it's about a ritualistic plant, one with magic potential that is

widely used in indigenous cultures and in an array of African sects. In general these uses and knowledge are developed in villages, in the *terreiros* and *Quilombos*, Afro-Brazilian public squares and settlements of resistance, and I'm very interested in this spatial aspect. This act of creating multiple forms of spatiality and specific types of knowledge is a political act, a defense strategy, a means of survival, one which is both constant and constantly changing.

OM2ATO Can you tell us a bit more about the role of your journey to Cuba and Bahia in conceiving *Rota do fumo*?

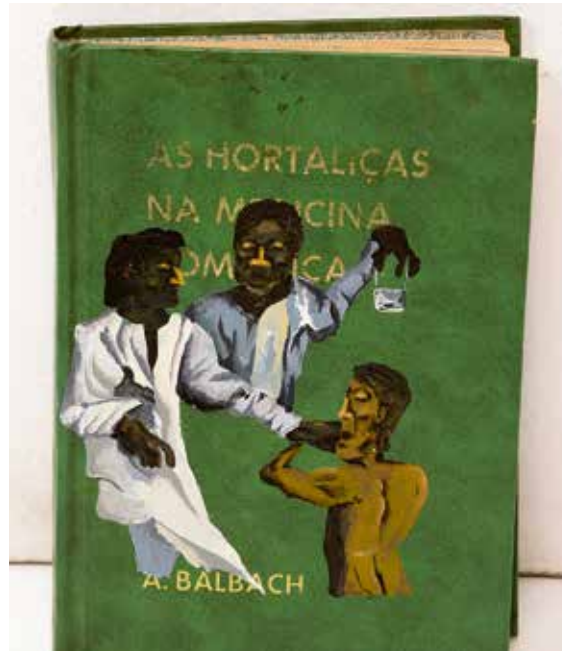
DP My interest in Cuba is as a place that received the African Diaspora and in the Afro-Cuban social and cultural forms that developed there, as well as the similarities with regard to modes of production – for example, the cultivation of sugarcane or tobacco – in addition to its differences, such as the political regime. I'm interested in this place which produces the most famous cigars in the world, and the various uses of tobacco, including as part of the religious realm of Santería. Bahia has always caught my attention, especially because it has the largest Black population outside the African continent, and also because of the tobacco farming and production of cigars there, which is historically relevant to the region's economy. So I'm interested in thinking about how this Black population served as manual labor enslaved in this system of production, but not only that, how it was and is able to be maintained, reworking its cultural and artistic practices, its religiosity under what are still extremely adverse conditions.

OM2ATO In *Rota do fumo* you demonstrate profound interest in Brazil's early history, examining the subaltern process of the Black and indigenous populations, but you also manage to demonstrate an understanding of more complex forms of resistance, such as the use of plants. Can you tell us a bit more about these frequently necessary, everyday investigations into the sacred?

A VISIONARY WHOSE AIM IS TO TRANSFORM CULTURE

DP I look back at the historical past in order to better understand how power relations and, especially, the process of enslavement, inscribe themselves on what we experience in the present, which allows me to catch glimpses of potential questions and future trends. This historical investigation, which also utilizes other points of reference, such as botany as well as Afro-Brazilian and indigenous religious practices, traffics in the official record but with a focus on the anonymous, the histories and narratives that are usually disregarded. In them, I find the sacred in its everyday dimension, understanding it as resistance because it's inseparable from life, from nature, from the temporal space in which it's located; it's an element that coexists in the midst of oppression, hence its importance. It is through this sacredness, reworked every day, that Black and indigenous populations are able to survive, to construct other forms of existence, to maintain their dignity.

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above and middle Dalton Paula, *Santos Médicos*, 2016. Oil on book.

below Dalton Paula, *A Cura A*, 2016. Oil on book.

Courtesy of the artist



Helen Sebidi, *Tears of Africa*, 1987–1988. Mixed media, charcoal, pastel on paper.

Photo: Helen Sebidi. Collection: the artist. Courtesy of the artist

Acclaimed South African painter **HELEN SEBIDI**, who is showing at the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, chats about home, land, history, and ancestral tears with **GABI NGCOBO**, **LUCIANE RAMOS-SILVA**, and **THIAGO DE PAULA SOUZA**.

LUCIANE RAMOS-SILVA Could you introduce yourself, bringing in the idea of home as a place where we can be, a place we can belong, and home as your place of art?

HELEN SEBIDI Home is my place of art. I believe that charity begins at home. Traditionally this was a moving home, not a home to own like we do now. You have to be natured in your home. I also need to communicate with other homes, that is my duty. Other homes means that you are building the human being inside, alone, and the being is held spiritually by those who help you to see the world. Those people will also say to you, “We don’t own this world, we are its messengers.” We have been given the task of a messenger to transform culture and to communicate. My grandmother used to say to me, “I am built inside you.” It is therefore my duty to move this world as well.

LRS Thinking about land and country, tradition, community, could you elaborate on those spaces you came from? In Brazil we don’t have much of a connection with the histories and realities of South Africa, so could you tell us about it?

HS I would start with the land. Our people were working on the land in order to follow the path that the Creator had given them. Then the European community introduced pensions, but our people said: “We don’t want to be given money from those people. These people want to take our land that was given to us by the Creator to do work for Him.” They rejected the pension because they believed that what they had been born for is what they have to work for. So traditionally I would say, the seeds were planted by the Creator and when the reward comes, we have got it here in our hand, we worked for it. We must know our seed and that is the only way that we will save growing cultures, communicating cultures. Before that happens, we will suffer. Africa was the first continent that was built and made by God, by reality. The Creator knew what He was doing. I am proof of who I am and I still say, I will never ever join

someone else’s culture without communicating. My grandmother died in 1981, she pointed at me with a big finger and told me, “You are not going to work for white people, your parents have been taken by white people, but you are not gonna be taken.” As I travel around, I take with me all the seeds she planted in me.

GABI NGCOBO I would like to take a cue from your description of Africa and the complexities of Africa as a continent in order to speak about the work you will show at the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, *Tears of Africa* from 1989, which you created before the car accident you were involved in in August 1989...

HS ... even before my understanding of the continent. During the conflicts in the townships of Johannesburg, I happened to see death. I happened to have blood all over my clothes when a child was shot. I had left the Johannesburg Art Foundation and moved to Alexandra (a township) to teach, and the same things happened there. I was shocked. The people who came from Europe brought their culture to our continent. They stopped those who came from rural areas because they knew they would come and demolish the town. And when you went to the rural area as a township person, you used to be stopped and told not to come back.

GN Stopped by whom?

HS Stopped by the white people. We had to report at the police station to be allowed to sleep in the township, otherwise we were arrested. You would go for six months; then, when you came back you were caught and went to jail because you had crossed the border against the law. It was a protective measure that was helping them to keep our people working for them. That is a kind of slavery that made our people much more severely dominated because they left their work and when they were supposed to pray they had to pray to white people, even today. So of course we made them richer and richer.



Helen Sebidi, *Life's Work*, 2012.
Helen Sebidi's home in Parktown, Johannesburg.
Courtesy of the artist © 21 Icons



GN What do you think about showing *Tears of Africa* in Brazil? What do you hope for the people seeing this work?

HS The people who see this work could think of how to help our people to return to praying in the same way we learned at home. They could find their way back because their ancestors were shipped to Brazil as slaves, not knowing where they were going. So now they will have to get back to learning how they can pick up the seeds. Their freedom will come when they pick up the seeds.

GN When you say they can find their way back, do you mean this symbolically, through your work?

HS I think they will learn who they are and live who they are and be sure of who they are – in Brazil. Those tears of the ancestors will change, it will be love, it will not be tears anymore but it will be something that will help communication, and the chains of the tears will disappear. Because they will have their own seeds and they will know where they are going and what to do...

THIAGO DE PAULA SOUZA You will produce a new work for the Biennale, which will be shown together with *Tears of Africa*. I am interested in how you have been developing your work over the years; your skills, your techniques, your way of producing your art in the context of the new generations you have witnessed being born and growing. Could you also talk about the differences in generational spirit, especially because some younger people may think of themselves as the so-called “born frees”?

HS I don’t think there is any such thing as a born free person. Because born free people don’t understand – that is why I have spoken about ownership – that we don’t own ourselves. We need to move around and see things properly, knowing that we don’t own anything. When you don’t go to the other side, you don’t see what is there. It is like my work: I don’t know what I will be doing when I reach the studio in Salvador, Bahia. I will be surprised by what I bring back after visiting all the places I will be going to. My dreams are partly important for my production. But I also just start by playing and following what is coming from in here and from out there. In the end, that is where I am able to guide what I have been doing. It is spiritually awakening and I am quite happy to be able to work that way.

LRS To get back to *Tears of Africa*, it evokes a sense of people seduced by the life of the city, right? I am thinking about your transition and your experience in Johannesburg and outside of South Africa. Could you talk about those bridges?

HS There is a big gap between the rural areas and the city in South Africa. City life developed by stealing from the countryside; white people stole the skills of the rural population and claimed them as theirs. If there had not been apartheid in South Africa, the rural areas would have been well-developed and the world would have understood that Africa has the best forests.



this page Helen Sebidi, *Don't Let It Go*, 1991. Silkscreen on paper.

next page Helen Sebidi, *Mangwano Olshara Thipa Kabhaleng* (The Child's Mother Holds the Sharp Side of the Knife), 1988-1989. Acrylic on canvas. Collection: Iziko South African National Gallery.

Photo: Helen Sebidi. Courtesy of the artist

