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**DAK'ART**  
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8<sup>e</sup> Biennale de l'Art Africain  
Contemporain



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19, avenue Hassan II  
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**Van Der Schiff  
Lucas Johannes**

**> INSTALALTION  
AFRIQUE DU SUD**

Lucas Johannes Van Der Schiff est né en 1969 en Afrique du Sud. Il est titulaire d'un Master of Fine Art (MFA) à l'Académie Minerva en Hollande. Il a également étudié aux Universités de Pretoria et de Cape Town. Conférencier, Johannes Van der Schiff enseigne les arts numériques au Michaelis School où il a mis en place un programme de Licences dans les nouveaux médias. Il vit et travaille à Johannesburg.

Ses sculptures et installations ont été plusieurs fois exposées en Afrique du Sud et à l'étranger. Il est lauréat en 2006 du « Public sculpture competition » de l'Association pour les Arts Visuels de Cape Town.

«Peerball», «Stansaak» et «Hangball» constituent des objets interactifs. La réception que le visiteur fait de l'œuvre participe à sa mise en valeur. Aussi l'artiste l'invite à s'appropriier les « outils » mis à sa disposition. Outils, qui, de par leur caractère ludique, constitue d'excellent moyens de décompression.

Lucas Johannes Van Der Schijff was born in 1969 in South Africa. He is the holder of a Master's degree in Fine Art (MFA) from the Minerva Academy in Holland. He has also studied at the Universities of Pretoria and Cape Town. A lecturer, Johannes Van der Schijff teaches digital arts at Michaelis School where he has put in place a Bachelor programme in new media. He lives and works in Johannesburg.

His sculptures and installations have several times been exhibited in South Africa and abroad. He was the 2006 prize-winner of the « Public sculpture competition » granted by the Association for Visual Arts in Cape Town.

«Peerball», «Stansaak» and «Hangball» are interactive objects. The visitor's reception of the artwork partakes of its valorisation. So the artist invites him/her to appropriate the « tools » put at his/her disposal. Tools, which, by their playful character, constitute some excellent means of decompression.



**"Pearball 2 Brown"**  
Galvanised and painted mild steel, stainless steel, aluminium, brass, leather, rubber  
66 x 90 x 30cm



**"Pearball 2 White"**  
Galvanised and painted mild steel, stainless steel, aluminium, brass, leather, rubber  
66 x 90 x 30cm

of skin. Meaning is only acquired within cultural references and contexts. The word »black« is one of those words that are so overly charged in terms of their history as well as with regards to their contents, that they bear the potential to open up the most diverse discursive fields. | **Ibrahima »Piniang« Niang's** video animation »21st century« deals with urbanity in Africa and it is set in a huge and chaotic city. The artist composed a collage of buildings and people, some of which he had torn and cut from paper, others had been created digitally. In the dull grey-in-grey of the city we can hardly discern a human being, they seem to have shut in themselves in the massive buildings; here or there we see a car or the shadow of an airplane, but at most times only birds flying over the roofs of the city. »Piniang« criticises the ever expanding cities which impede the development of communal living and cause isolation. He regards this as the result of a false belief in progress which orients itself towards Europe and the USA, and equates large, imposing buildings with success and growth. »Piniang« opposes this cultural homogenisation as a consequence of globalisation. Urban planning must be guided by the culture of living of the people, and not reversely. To ignore local peculiarities will lead to mega-cities without an identity, like the cities we are presented in »21st century«. | The designer **Anira Prebay Ranarivelo** creates modern jewellery from natural materials. She was born in Madagascar and lives and works in her native country, which is a foundation and an inspiration for her art. Her objects are inspired with the Madagascan spirit they possess a traditional appearance, continuing the aesthetic heritage of Madagascar. Due to its geographical isolation, the island is the habitat of a unique flora and fauna. While examining her homeland and her roots, the designer has come across the most diverse materials which she uses for her creations. Seeds and grains of all kinds and colours, terracotta, Zebu horns, pearls, stones, bast, silk, vegetable fibre, and corals have become the basis of her work. With a sensitivity to aesthetics, she accentuates the essence of these materials. Her necklaces, chains and bracelets possess great sensual and tactile qualities. Anira Prebay Ranarivelo has a talent to form and process the materials, to utilise structures and textures, thus highlighting their beauty and elegance without concealing a certain coarseness and primitiveness. Occasionally, nature reveals mysteries of beauty to us which we are not able to define. Anira Prebay Ranarivelo successfully transports these manifestations in her jewellery. The items appear as if they had only been borrowed from nature, they testify to the unique wealth of the nature and landscape of the so called »red Island«. | In the hope for a better future, countless people attempt to illegally migrate from Africa to Europe or the US every year. It is hard for us to understand the motives of the refugees who undertake this dangerous journey, and we can hardly imagine how they would build up a new life once they have reached their destination.

**Judith Quax** deals with this global phenomenon in her work »Immigration Clandestine«. In Senegal, she has photographed the rooms occupied by young men before they risk their

lives in the attempt to reach the Canary Islands in small fishing boats. The photographs show personal items that have been left behind and reveal something of the immigrants' former living conditions. Texts by families and friends describe the circumstances that led these young men to this step, and what has become of them. Some of them have reached Europe, some have died and others have vanished. »Immigration Clandestine« affords insights into the lives of people whose faces we cannot see, but whose traces speak to us very clearly. The emptiness of the rooms is tangible and becomes an allegory for grievous absence. Judith Quax is successful in creating an intimate encounter with the lives of Senegalese immigrants in her sensitive documentation. These are touching images and stories that tell about the dream of Europe – and about the cruel reality that is the risky journey to the putative »golden West«. | **Athi-Patra Ruga's** visual and conceptual language is not based on South-African iconography, but is rather rooted in fashion and pop culture. As a trained fashion designer, he has a complex understanding of power and representation as communicated and practised by fashion. For his video performances, the artist dresses up, playing characters he himself created, and goes to public spaces. The costumes and extravagant gestures serve as a means of self-invention, and they challenge social norms. »Miss Congo« is a video installation that consists of three films which were shot during an artist-residency in Kinshasa, Congo. On each of the three screens, we see the artist himself: Miss Congo, absorbed in the meditative activity of embroidery. Somewhere between city and periphery, he seems out of place as he pursues a handicraft that is usually considered as dull, primitive and, in particular, unmanly.

In Athi-Patra Ruga's second video, »... after he left«, the artist struts about different places in the city centre, dressed in body suit, fishnet stockings and red high heels. In this sexually provocative outfit, he parades with a lamp-shade on his head towards a taxi rank, where a prostitute is said to have been raped shortly before, or he climbs the façade of a church, wearing a motorcycle helmet. The artist challenges the establishment and the social standards it promotes. His work is centred around the body and its constant confrontation with all kinds of structures, ideologies, politics or dogmas. Athi-Patra Ruga is not necessarily dependant on an audience; the video functions as a witness and proof of his intrusion. On the thin line between concealing and revealing, between masculinity and femininity, Athi-Patra Ruga examines subjects of identity, race, and gender. | Having grown up in South Africa under the Apartheid regime, **Johann van der Schijff** is sensitive to cultural and ideological conflicts. Many of his works are based on questions of power structures in society. »Punch Bag«, »Hangball« and »Peerball 2« look like training equipment for boxing. Each displaying a black and a white face, they seem like a peculiar mixture of leather fetish, Janus face and African mask. Accurate workmanship and shiny leather remind us of an aesthetics familiar from car exhibitions or the displays in lifestyle shops.

The curious apparatuses force the viewer into a position in which he or she has to actively relate to the art: they practically invite us to hit them, and leaving the general temptation aside, the question also remains whether one would take on the white or the black face. The disarming directness of Johann van der Schijff's work provokes to reflect upon and reconsider one's own decision processes and categories. The sculptures function like a satirical comment on South Africa's obsession with race classifications and latent xenophobia. | **Guy Wouete's** oeuvre always encompasses elements of social criticism, too. In the videos shown in this exhibition he deals with historical events.

The film »Codes...« basically consists of four elements: a book cover, a text, and two mouths, one of which is silent, the other one talks. The text we hear and read is an extract from the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen from 26 August 1789. While this text declares equal rights and liberty for all people, the book whose cover we are shown has entirely different contents: the »Code Noir« is a decree enacted by King Louis XIV in 1685 to regulate the legal status of black people. This decree, considered a juridical monstrosity, was not fully repealed until 1848, that is, almost 50 years after the Declaration of the Rights of Man. In his work, Guy Wouete questions the value of basic rights and their realisation, which are affected by the interplay of various powers until today.

Ouidah is a historical city in the Republic of Benin, the former slave-trade centre in the region. A monument for the victims of slave-trade was erected there, the »Porte de Non Retour« (Gate without Return). This monument plays a crucial role in Wouete's video »Ouidah Return«. We see a man walking on the beach towards this gate, where a group of people has gathered. We also hear traditional music of the kind that served as a means of communication over long distances in the villages. The man however never reaches the group; whenever he seems to be in their vicinity, he returns to his point of departure, the viewer awaiting his arrival in vain. The filmic metaphor is not only to be regarded as an allegory for the victims of the history of slavery: a pale trace of a pair of shoes is repeatedly faded in – a symbol for the young people who lose their lives on their paths into migration even today.

**El Hadji Mansour »Kanakassy« Ciss** | 1957 geboren in Dakar, Senegal | lebt und arbeitet in Berlin, Deutschland und Dakar, Senegal | 1973–1977 Studium am Institut National des Arts du Sénégal, Bildhauermeisterklasse, Dakar, Senegal | **Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl)** | 2008 DAK'ART 2008, 8. Biennale zeitgenössischer afrikanischer Kunst, Dakar, Senegal | 2007 »Holydammit«, NGBK Berlin, Deutschland; »One World Village« Installation, Berlin-Alexanderplatz, Berlin, Deutschland | 2006 DAK'ART 2006, 7. Biennale zeitgenössischer afrikanischer Kunst, Off-Programm, Dakar, Senegal | »Zeitgenössische Kunst von Künstlerinnen und Künstlern aus Afrika«, Kunsthaus Viernheim, Deutschland | Kontakt: [www.mansourciss.de](http://www.mansourciss.de) – [mansour.ciss@gmail.com](mailto:mansour.ciss@gmail.com)

**Cheick Diallo** | 1960 geboren in Mali | lebt und arbeitet in Frankreich | 1995 Studium an der École Nationale Supérieure de Création Industrielle – ENSCI, Diplom in Möbeldesign, Paris, Frankreich | 1991 Studium an der École d'Architecture de Normandie, Diplom in Architektur, Rouen, Frankreich | **Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl)** | 2007 Möbelhaus Kinnarps, Orgeval, Frankreich | **Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl)** | 2008 Design INDABA, Kapstadt, Südafrika; DAK'ART 2008, 8. Biennale zeitgenössischer afrikanischer Kunst, Dakar, Senegal | 2007 Gwangju Design Biennale 2007, Südkorea | 2004–2007 »Afrika Remix«, museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf, Deutschland; Hayward Gallery, London, Großbritannien; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, Frankreich; Mori Art Museum, Tokio, Japan; Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, Südafrika | 2006 DAK'ART 2006, 7. Biennale zeitgenössischer afrikanischer Kunst, Dakar, Senegal; »Design made in Africa«, Moda Museum of Design, Atlanta, USA | Kontakt: [diallo.design@gmail.com](mailto:diallo.design@gmail.com)

**Saïdou Dicko** | 1979 geboren in Déou, Burkina Faso | lebt und arbeitet in Dakar, Senegal | seit 2006 digitale Videoarbeiten und Installationen | seit 2005 als Fotograf tätig | seit 1994 als Maler tätig | **Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl)** | 2008 DAK'ART 2008, 8. Biennale zeitgenössischer afrikanischer Kunst, Off-Programm, Dakar, Senegal | 2007 Théâtre Flamand KVS, Brüssel, Belgien; Galerie Vue Suspendues, Pont en Royans, Frankreich | **Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl)** | 2008 »Africa now!«, Weltbank, Washington, USA; »L'Homme est un Mystère #3«, Galerie CDDP, Saint-Brieuc, Frankreich; MC2a Migrations Culturelles aquitaine afriques, Bordeaux, Frankreich | Kontakt: [disaou62@hotmail.com](mailto:disaou62@hotmail.com)

**Sokey Edoth** | 1955 geboren in Tsévié, Togo | lebt und arbeitet in Togo | 1989–1990 Studium der Bildenden Kunst an der Université des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux, Frankreich | 1984–1986 Studium der Philosophie an der Université de Lomé, Togo | **Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl)** | 2008

### Dak'Art 2008

Musée de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire and Galerie Nationale, Bamako  
May 9–June 9, 2008  
Dakar, Senegal

#### First Impressions

Kinsey Katchka

The 2008 Dak'Art Biennale of Contemporary African Arts marked the eighth edition of this important event on the continent, one that has been a critical launching point for many artists from Africa into a more global forum. Alongside the Biennale's main art exhibitions at the Musée de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire at Place Soweto and the Galerie Nationale on the other side of downtown, the Salon de Design, a fashion show, colloquium and, in recent years, an expanding "OFF" program have provided ample discursive grounds and alternative spaces throughout the city for engaging with contemporary art forms from Africa and elsewhere.

From a curatorial perspective, I found this edition to be more limited than in the past, though the work of a number of compelling emerging artists selected for the main exhibitions stood out. Achille Komguem's (dit Achil-lèka) video "Precarite" captures the constant movement and precarious traffic patterns of Douala's urban environment while metaphorically evoking the touch-and-go nature of urban life. Nandipha Mntambo's digital print series "Silent Embrace" (Fig. 1) is at once visceral and pristine; the large-scale prints' cotton rag paper texturizes the imagery of animal hides that read as if they are stretched over a voluptuous female body. Were they modeled by someone whose human form was digitally extracted, or is it a trick of the eye? Zakaria Ramhani's haunting portrait mirages in "Visage de ton autre 3," composed of script from which faces clearly emerge, challenge the notion of self and other in an age marked by global terrorism and interrogate the role of language in the formation of (in)distinct identities and stereotypes. Johann van der Schijff's seemingly playful kinetic sculptures invite viewer engagement, such as a leather punching bag in the form of a head, one half dark brown-black, the other ivory (Fig. 2). The



physical violence inflicted on one or both colors alludes to the fate of all peoples involved in the racial tensions that underlie many world histories, including that of apartheid in the artist's South African homeland. In each case, these artists' works represent thoughtful reflection on self and society, speaking to their multifaceted identities as artists, citizens, humans, and Africans.

While thirty-six artists from thirteen African and three diasporic countries were represented, Senegal exhibited ten artists, which many participants perceived as disproportionate. This has occurred frequently in the past and has been the subject of recurrent criticism, especially since many of the same Senegalese artists have been consistently represented. It would perhaps not have been striking to those visitors new to the festival, but was decidedly apparent and frequently discussed among those that follow contemporary African arts and attend Dak'Art regularly. Repeat attendees also often made comparisons to the ambitious tour-de-force of the 2006 Dak'Art, at times lamenting the backwards step in a Biennale that has been seen as "improving" over time. However, perhaps it is difficult to speak in terms of qualitative "progress" with such a forum, where circumstances surrounding the planning, administration, and budget are so much in flux.

Indeed, even if many people did not find the 2008 Biennale particularly exciting, it did demonstrate the complex, ongoing politics at play, including the ever-present tension between Senegalese artists—many of whom are of the opinion that they merit special representation in what they consider a domestic art event—and the broader continental purview that underlies the Biennale mission. This gets at the heart of matters that, throughout the years, have threatened to destabilize the Biennale. Inevitably one must revisit this forum's key purpose and objectives, and how

these should be cultivated in successive editions. Is it appropriate for Senegalese artists, as members of the host country, to have a special presence within this continental framework? In a nation where the government has a long history of supporting modern/contemporary art and artists, and with the Biennale being a primary forum for contemporary art organized by the national government, it is understandable that some artists have a sense of entitlement in this event as other sources of support have dwindled over time.

Where experience is concerned, should this be approached as a forum for celebrating the most accomplished artists on the continent, or for exhibiting and launching promising artists who may not yet have had the opportunity to attain visibility and expand professional networks, an aspect in keeping with the Biennale's asserted objectives for cultural development? Perhaps some balanced and more clearly defined combination addressing the various stakeholders merits careful consideration at this juncture. While Biennale objectives have been articulated in the past, the declarations have been in broad language that has been difficult to implement and realize.

This review is, of course, subjective, as people experience events of this scale in very different ways. To this end, instead of one review, the editor invited several writers to respond to the 2008 Dak'Art Biennale and to reflect on its many facets, nuances, challenges, and great possibilities.

*Kinsey Katchka is associate curator of modern and contemporary art at North Carolina Museum of Art and adjunct professor at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [kkatchka@gmail.com](mailto:kkatchka@gmail.com)*

## A View from the South

Carol Brown

It is ironic that, just as the Dak'Art Biennale was opening, further south on the continent, in South Africa, there was a wave of xenophobic hatred which led to countless attacks and murders. These were symbolized by the now famous "Burning Man" photo, beamed across the world, of Ernesto Alfabeto Nhumuave, a 35-year-old immigrant from Mozambique who was burnt alive in Johannesburg on Sunday, May 18, 2008, in a wave of xenophobic attacks. This outrage had been brewing for some time, as many South Africans have felt that their jobs and resources are being taken by refugees from neighboring countries such as DRC and Zimbabwe. Even more ironic, many of those countries had provided shelter and sanctuary for anti-apartheid activists in earlier years.

While politicians fail in their initiatives to unite the African continent and to realize President Mbeki's dream of an African Renaissance, maybe artists can play a larger role. It would be idealistic to believe that art events could solve these problems but it is possible that they could provide liminal spaces where people from different areas could come together in an atmosphere of sharing and mutual understanding. Just possibly such encounters could reduce the level of suspicion between people from different countries on the continent.

If strategic advantage means anything, then Dakar is the perfect place for a pan-African biennale. Situated on the westernmost tip of Africa, it is halfway between Johannesburg and New York and is also one of the easier African cities to access and negotiate in terms of infrastructure. Given these drawbacks, as a South African I was surprised by the small number of visitors from my country present at the Biennale. South African art followers, curators, and artists flock to Venice, Kassel, Basel, and the other 240 or so biennales every year, but not many go to Dakar. We do not participate in any meaningful way, and rather than consolidating our resources in Africa, we still look to Europe and America for artistic approval. It is true that the exhibition standard at Dakar varies with each edition and that year after year we hear the refrain that the Biennale cannot survive. But somehow it does, and it is now the most sustainable biennale on the continent. Nonetheless, it is still a problem that it receives insufficient financial support and suffers from an inadequate infrastructure.

There is no doubt that this event has enormous potential in bringing local and other African artists to a wider audience. But, apart from the problem of infrastructure, another important issue to consider is that of curatorial input. The overall head of the curatorial committee this year was Maguèye Kassé, a professor of German, assisted by two African

(opposite)

1 Nandipha Mntambo  
*Silent Embrace* (2007)  
Digital prints on cotton rag paper;  
173cm x 91cm (68" x 36")  
Edition of 5 + 2AP

PHOTO: TONY MEINTJES, COURTESY OF  
MICHAEL STEVENSON, CAPE TOWN

(this page)

2 Johann van der Schijff  
*Slaansak / Punch Bag* (2005)  
Galvanized and painted mild steel,  
stainless steel, aluminium, brass,  
tanned leather, rubber; 152cm x  
160cm x 90cm (60" x 63" x 35½")

PHOTO: GEOFF GRUNDLINGH, COPYRIGHT  
JOHANN VAN DER SCHIJFF 2005

artists and one European museum curator. The previous Dak'Art had a lead, African curator assisted by seven others based throughout Africa, Europe, and the United States, each concentrating on a particular geographic area; hence, the result was a stronger selection, with eighty-five artists from twenty-eight countries, including the diaspora. This year's selection yielded only thirty-six artists from sixteen countries. Small pickings from a continent of fifty-three countries.

The theme of this year's biennale was "Africa: Mirror?" which is appropriate because it invited the continent to look at its failures and successes. Many African countries have celebrated or are about to celebrate their fiftieth anniversaries of independence from colonial rule. This year alone, the list includes Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, and Niger. More than ever, Dak'Art needs to undergo a period of self-reflection, one that will hopefully help it to consolidate its position as the largest and longest-running platform for contemporary African art. Responding to critic Holland Cotter's *New York Times* review of the group exhibition "Flow," art historian Sylvester Ogbechie posed on his blog a question related to the context of contemporary African art.

If this context is truly global, why are curators not exhibiting the works of African artists who live and work in Africa, to enunciate their particular aesthetic and political orientation or at least get their viewpoint about how they see themselves in relation to the global context? Do African artists always have to wait to be "discovered" by Western curators or discourses before they and their contexts of practice assume global importance? (<http://aachronym.blogspot.com>, April 2008).

I add to that by commenting that Africa should not only be exhibiting its own artists but creating more infrastructure in which to do so. The context of the Biennale is able to offer solu-

tions to these problems. It could be the powerhouse of contemporary African art and become a dynamic space attracting the world. Dakar is ideally placed to do so and hopefully a wave of renewed vigour will sweep through the city before the next Dak'Art.

CAROL BROWN is a South African independent curator and writer, part-time curator of the Constitutional Hill art collection, and the KwaZulu-Natal editor of the website [www.artthrob.co.za](http://www.artthrob.co.za). [cbrown.durban@gmail.com](mailto:cbrown.durban@gmail.com)

## Major Themes

Ferdinand de Jong

At the latest Dak'Art Biennale, artists addressed a wide range of themes, but one received exceptionally wide coverage, namely the international migration of Africans to Europe, which was dealt with by artists of various nationalities and in a variety of media. This migration has become increasingly problematic, not least as a result of the changing immigration policies which have turned Europe into a fortress, forcing migrants to adopt increasingly desperate methods to arrive at their destination. This has led migrants to embark on hazardous journeys in fishermen's vessels that sail from beaches on the West African coast to the Spanish Canary Islands. In spite of their capable crews, these *pirogues* regularly shipwreck, and the aspiring migrants often drown in the ocean. Every year, thousands are estimated to die in this undignified fashion. As rising levels of unemployment on the African continent leave aspiring young men with no other option than to risk their luck in Europe, the Senegalese have encapsulated the predicament in the apt phrase *Barça ou Barsakh* ('Barcelona or death').

The "In" program (official selection) of the 2008 Biennale featured at least four African art-

