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Athi-Patra Ruga  
*The Works 2006 – 2009*

**B  
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EVERY  
HORIZON  
THEREISANOTHERONE**

## WHATIFTHEWORLD

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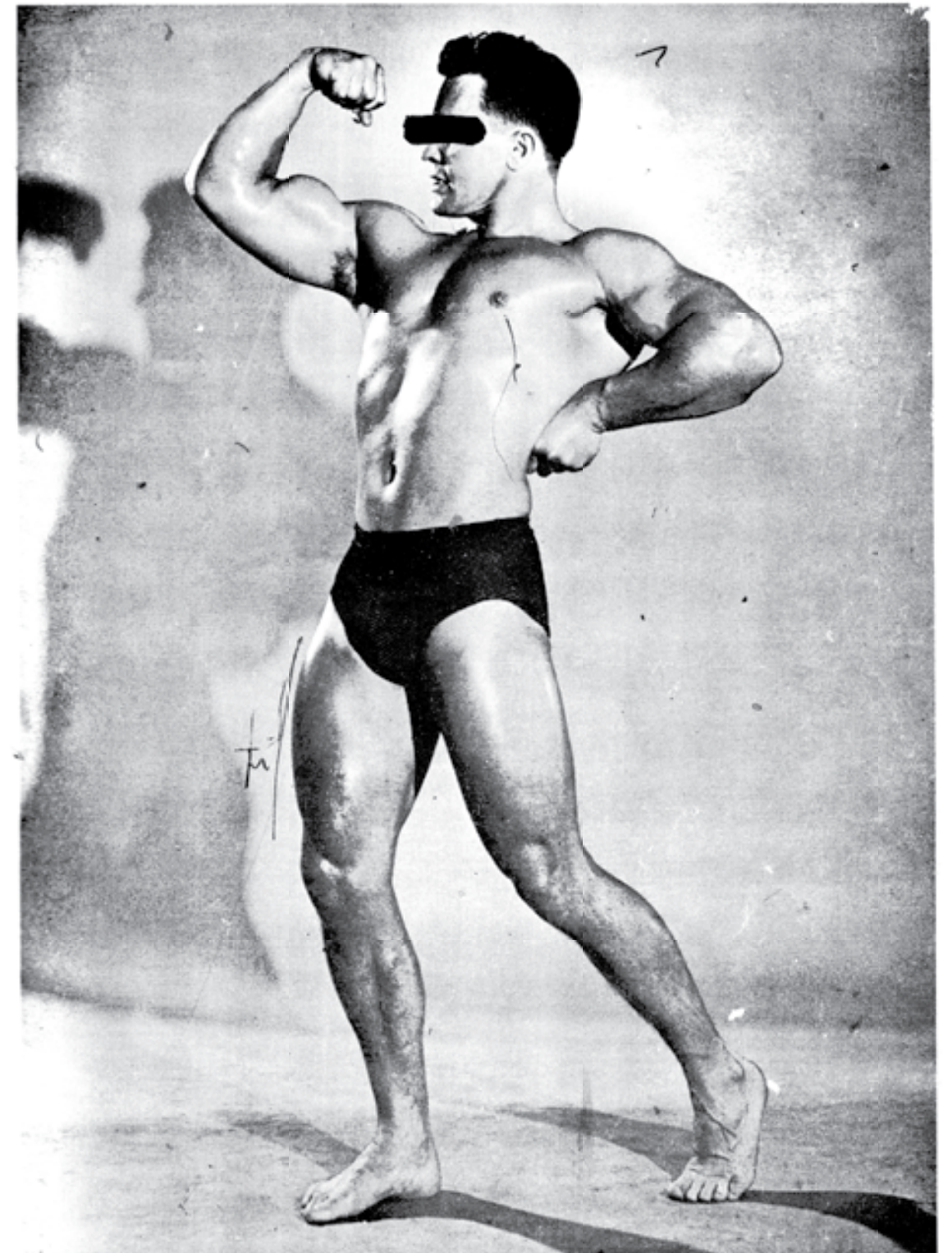
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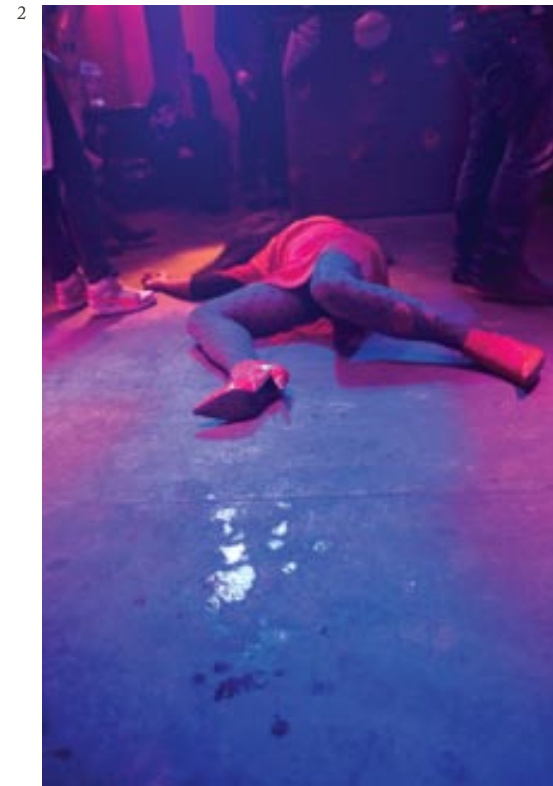


*A.P.*  
**WHY DE BOY**  
*2009*

# ATHI-PATRA RUGA'S PERFORMANCES

Showing the Invisible Side of Public Space

by Fiona Siegenthaler



What is Public Space?

Invisible Structures within a Visible Architecture

Athi-Patra Ruga can be found performing in any imaginable place: in cityscapes and the streets of Johannesburg, Kinshasa or Zürich; at taxi ranks, on the façades of churches, in gallery spaces or even – as in one of his latest works, ...*The Body in Question* – on a bed within a domestic context. However, if this listing appears to gradually range from the most public to the most private place, then it only does so because of a prevailing notion of the division between the public and the private, which has lost its validity in the post-modern era.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of public space has been experiencing a crisis in recent years. It is becoming increasingly difficult to define public space and its supposed functions. Ironically, this appears to be a consequence of democratization and the resulting legitimacy of a variety of meanings and values, which attribute different qualities to public and private space. In the South African context the combination of democracy and urban migration intensify this controversy, and the supposed public space often becomes a site of struggle for identities, customized rights and the right to the streets. In a way, a democratic state, city, or place, has to rely on public sensibility when it comes to defining what is allowed and what is prohibited in public space; who owns the right to use it or not; and, particularly in times of a liberalized economy, we need to question whether certain privately owned territories are perhaps more publicly accessible, than properties owned and governed by the state.<sup>2</sup>

Is Athi-Patra Ruga inhibited by these concerns when he performs in what we call public space? Does he heed ownership, properties and delimited territories? I would say no. It is not the city map, the property rights or the official status of a place that attracts him. Rather It is the sense that places are always imagined, defined and connected with feelings of longing or belonging – rather than inclusion or exclusion. Therefore, the diverse places in which he performs and later exhibits the photographic or video works that exist as a result of the performance, are also places of diverse audience.

1-2 *The Body In Question Part II*, 2008  
Intervention Mellita Sondstrom, Berlin



Ruga's performance sites range from the nocturnal streets of Hillbrow to the white cube of the gallery space. Because each place bears different memories and also is home to different audiences, every performance is conceived for its very special context and will relinquish or alter its meaning in another. In his practice Ruga shows a keen awareness of this contextual framework, and the question of "the public" is much more a question of the audience, the specific demographics of people in certain places than of the physical space itself.

Public space and the struggle for the "Right to the City"<sup>3</sup> is a significant topic of discussion in Johannesburg, a city in which Ruga has staged numerous interventions, not least because of the city regeneration plans and the numerous implications of this restructuring. The terms most frequently used in this context are those of exclusion and inclusion, exclusion in terms of the politically and often socially weaker city dwellers like immigrants, migrant workers, homeless people and the unemployed and inclusion of the liberal market, of investors and middle class labour who possess legal, political and economic rights.

The notion of inclusion or exclusion tends to reduce the discussion around public space to the question of institutionalized power. Exclusion ignores other, less visible powers operating in public space, creating the assumption that there is *one* acting power deciding on the inclusion or exclusion of passive others. Indeed, these power relations exist. The acknowledgment of this power relationship is particularly apt when made by a South African artist living in Johannesburg, the former model Apartheid city.

However, instead of simply assuming that public space, its limitations and its exact territory (if there is one that can be concretely defined) are superimposed on the people by the state, the municipality, the liberal market or the police, it is more interesting to question how people conceptualize the public space and their rights to it. For some, the streets of down town Johannesburg are a criminal no mans land and for others the nucleus of everyday life. Whilst some inhabitants escape the inner city on weekends, others remain to enjoy the tranquillity and the sunny city parks an indication that some feel at ease in certain places whilst others do not. This experience of security versus discomfort

is not necessarily due to enforced official regulations on who is allowed to be where.

The public space of a "contested city" – for example Johannesburg<sup>4</sup> – is not contested because of the architectural or infrastructural spaces. Rather the public space is the consequence or manifestation of a very different context – the one for defining, allowing and inscribing meaning. Public space is a place, where very different opinions, value systems and customs intersect. If certain values are shared in a community or neighbourhood, its inhabitants will feel a sense of belonging – those who do not share this value system may feel a longing – or an ignorance of the space both real and imagined that may result in a sense of alienation or displacement.

There are many aspects within public space that require a careful consideration, often fused in such a manner that it is problematic to determine which factor is responsible for a particular response. To capture *all* of these layers and to explore all possible experiences within this context, is almost impossible, because not only is every individual unconsciously influenced by his or her own "disposition"<sup>5</sup>, prejudices, experiences hope and fear, but also by social networks in which they are embedded and in which they develop permanently<sup>6</sup>. Innocence or *naivety is necessary* in order to re-explore the grounds with which its inhabitants may already have a sense of familiarity.

1 Jürgen Habermas: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Neuwied: Luchterhand 1962.

2 In this context, we also should keep in mind the notion of a public *sphere* which reaches beyond the physical space and includes media spaces like newspapers, journals, internet with all its communication possibilities, and new media in general. However, for the moment I will not deal with this issue.

3 Don Mitchell: *The Right to the City. Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York: The Guilford Press 2003.

4 For an overview on theoretical concepts of cities, see: Setha M. Low (Ed.): *Theorizing the City: The New Urban Anthropology Reader*, London: Rutgers University Press 2005

5 Pierre Bourdieu: *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press 1977.

## A Trustworthy Alien: Performance as a Mode of Exploration

It is exactly this naïve approach that, the protagonist of Athi-Patra Ruga's latest performance – *Trilogy*, adopts when climbing a church wall, posing and presenting herself at the Cape Town taxi rank or playing a kind of lonely "hide and seek" in the inner city of Johannesburg. Or at least it appears so at first glance. What is the reasoning behind reaching for a neon-lit holy cross? Provoking the almost exclusively male and often homophobic taxi drivers with feminine gestures? or climbing the fence surrounding John Voster Police Station?

One could conclude that God can only be reached through faith (or money), that women and homosexual men should be careful in taxi ranks and that John Voster Police Station is a threatening memorial of Apartheid terror, even though it is trying to regain its human face.

*Beiruth* ignores this "common sense", these fears and these shared memories. Obviously, she arrived from somewhere, or nowhere? In the cities of Cape Town and Johannesburg and is exploring them with greatest curiosity. All architectural dimensions are measured out, her body inserts itself into the façade of the church, senses the level of the fence surrounding the police station, tests out all kinds of manholes, corrugated iron constructions and simultaneously relishes the feeling of running through a flock of pigeons.

No matter how diverse the audience and context – whenever I show the performance photographs of *Beiruth*, there is a warm laughter rising in the room; surprise mingles with a sudden and unconditional sympathy for this strange, quite lonesome, faceless but somehow beautiful naïve creature. This response is extended and even amplified with the "afro-womble" attire worn<sup>7</sup> in the performance series *Even I Exist in Embo: Jaundices Tales of Counterpenetration*. Although totally alien, this creature has a deeply human appearance, and it is unquestionably met more amicability than many other city dwelling "aliens" migrant labourers or asylum seekers.

But what does this disguise mean? Although the artist dislikes the "unholy trinity of gender, race, gay"<sup>8</sup> it is impossible to understand his work in public space without referring – at least to a certain extent – to notions of 'othering'. However, the Other, in his case,

has two particular qualities which I would like to discuss here: Firstly, Ruga's figures (or the performing self) cannot be reduced to a single signifier – rather, their appearance is charged with so great a number of allusions that it tends to develop a *multiple and equally hyper- and invisible identity*. Secondly, with his performance, Ruga deals with an alternative *way to perceive, explore and experience* a given space other than the objectifying 'othering' of subjectivities.

The first argument is both obvious and complicated. The alien appearance of both *Beiruth* and the protagonist in the performance series *Even I Exist in Embo* draw on several optical strategies. For instance, the artist is often almost entirely covered with fabric or paint, preventing us from any direct conclusion about his race or sex. Adding to this layered ambivalence, his garment derives from diverse social contexts female and male, sports garments as well as those tailor made for the erotic world, Euro-American as well as Afro-Chic. This ambivalence is supplemented by an eccentric behaviour, which recalls codes of transvestite or camp aesthetics<sup>9</sup>. However because the protagonist denies any definite label or attributions of known types of social beings and behaviours, it cannot be categorized. And what cannot be categorized – what is embedded in our *doxa*<sup>10</sup>, but not in our epistemic system – remains unrecognised, hence invisible.

Perhaps, it is this very unrecognisable identity that acts as a catalyst in making the spaces "speak," The insertion of this persona has the ability to make us perceive and experience a given space differently. In the performance photographs of *The Naivety of Beiruth*, but also in the videos of *...after, he left* and *Atlantis*, the physical space of the city tends to become a stage, a backdrop for the actions of this alien.





1 *DANACH, GINGER*, 2008  
Cape Town, South Africa ~ Video Still ~ Duration 27:52 min

2 *...After He Left*, 2008  
Cape Town, South Africa ~ Video Still ~ Duration 27 min

3 *Hoochi Burlesque*, 2006  
Intervention Hillbrow, Johannesburg, South Africa  
Photographer: George Mahashe and Athi-Patra Ruga studios cc

4-5 *Hoochi Burlesque*, 2007  
Intervention Hillbrow, Johannesburg, South Africa  
Photographer: George Mahashe and Athi-Patra Ruga studios cc



Whilst the cityscape forms a backdrop for the actions of *Beiruth*, these actions simultaneously, *direct* the perception of the viewer to the very surroundings that are bodily experienced by the protagonist. In the context of the performance, the spaces only gain shape through this alien and its actions and not – as commonly understood – through the given architecture. The fact that *Beiruth* is alien to the environment and on unfamiliar territory allows her to act without prejudice and as a result we are forced to re-evaluate these previously familiar landscapes.

Essentially her intervention neutralizes or even deletes the imagery we have of these places by the very act of exploring them. Additionally, *Beiruth* – in opposition to her namesake Ruth in the Book of Ruth, is an aloof and independent presence. She *causes* reactions, but her own interaction with the humans around her is minimal. This duality is what allows her to expose the social and psychological construction of public space beyond the architectural structures. Her hyper-visibility which is present in the built environment but escapes categorization turns into an invisibility, making public space perceptible in its social and performative aspect rather than in its architectural qualities.



Above: *Miss Kongo Kinsbasa*, 2007  
Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo  
Video Stills ~ Duration 13:32 min

6 The role which these often invisible networks play within the life of inner city dwellers, for their survival as well as for their identity formation, is excellently described by AbdouMaliq Simone in his essay: “People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg”, in: *Public Culture* 16(2004) No. 3, pp. 407–429.

7 The term is mentioned in the interview between David Brodie and Athi-Patra Ruga dating July 2008, and refers to a previous statement by Ruga.

8 E-mail to the author dating may 19, 2009.

9 See: Susan Sontag: *Notes on Camp*, in: *Against Interpretation and other Essays*, 1966.

10 See: Pierre Bourdieu: *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press 1977.

11 Suzanne Lacy: “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys”, in: Suzanne Lacy (Ed.), *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art*, Seattle: Bay Press 1995, p. 19.

## Ephemeral Bodily Marks and the Consistency of Narration

Contrary to the common notion of “Art in Public Space” – frequently considered to involve physical art works situated in publicly shared places<sup>11</sup> and often commissioned by either the city administration or other influential private entities, Performance Art is ephemeral<sup>12</sup>. It rarely leaves any long-term traces and often vanishes as quickly as it appears. In terms of their transitory nature Athi-Patra Ruga’s interventions in public space are no different. Although these interventions activate traces of memory when interacting with politically, socially or historically charged places in the public domain, physical remnants of the performance within public space are fleeting and impermanent. Rather, parts of the alien’s body or some of its tools will find their way into the art gallery or the open studio.

There, they become part of an entirely new setting, and together with photographic and filmed documentation offer a partial reconstruction of the performance itself. This documentation is in no way a poor re-enactment of the actual performance, but provides a channel for surplus, for a continuation of a narration, and for a reconsideration of the role of the body within the chosen spaces.

In *Upstairs/Downstairs*, a group show curated by Bettina Malcomess at the Association for Visual Arts (AVA Cape Town 2008), Ruga performed a series of fight scenes, dressed as his character the *Inj’ibhabha* and painted black. The audience became witness to the performance as well as the black traces left on the walls of the exhibition space. These traces would remain for the duration of the exhibition however, unlike the *Anthropometries* by Yves Klein, which found their place on large paper sheets, they would be lost with the repainting of the exhibition space. The traces of body and action were not transformed into a collectable item, but instead ceased to exist. These traces, therefore, are a temporary, ephemeral residue of the fighting body, which allows for a continuation of the performance narrative.

I have experienced a perfect example of this consistency of narration: unfortunately, I was not able to attend the *Inj’ibhabha* performance but saw only the traces of the event that had taken place in the Gallery space

on April 1st, 2008. Some hours later, I incidentally ran into Ruga at The South African National Gallery where he told me about the performance I had missed. An hour later whilst we were sitting in a café and – again incidentally – I met someone who had seen the performance live. His description and interpretation of it was quite different to that of Ruga, but he had a lively memory of the event. Back in the AVA Gallery, I “read” the traces differently than before. The leftovers or “marks” of a performance are important links to the performance itself, but they only are so when accompanied a narrative.

Much of Ruga’s work does not only produce a narrative amongst those who have experienced it, but often extends to the objects themselves. In this case the “relic” becomes the real body and leads itself to a further performance. On the occasion of the open-studio taking place during Athi-Patra Ruga’s residency in Berne, he turned his studio into an installation, which became simultaneously a visualized narrative. In the installation Ruga screened the performance video of *Even I exist in Embo – Jaundiced tales of counter penetration*, which he had produced during this residency. Featuring the artist as an entirely black, sheep-like “afro-womble” in the streets of Zürich, it showed his live performance. The performance had been created in response to the xenophobic posters produced by the SVP<sup>13</sup>, a strong and controversial political party in Switzerland. With the performance, he engaged

with a current discussion about Swiss immigration policy and the explicit and racist means of visualising political opinions in public space. But whilst the black sheep on the campaign poster passively accepts being kicked out of the Swiss territory, the figure performed by Athi-Patra Ruga preferred to show itself in the public and roam the streets of Zürich during Election Day. It seemed to say proudly: "Look at me, am I not beautiful? Do you really want to kick me out? I love these streets, I am part of these streets, and they are my hunting fields as they are yours!"

While the real passers-by in Zürich had reacted with tacit irritation and occasional smiles, Ruga was also implicating an imagined Swiss audience. How would a radical follower of the party react? And for what action would he decide if he was determined not only to maintain the "truly" Swiss values but also the "truly" Swiss traditions?

With an ironic and equally funny twist, Ruga gave the answer: Lying next to the the projection of the performance, he was wearing the sheep costume. The "head" of the sheep had fallen off the body, and an arrow was imbedded in its 'afro-womble-body'.

This installation is one of the rare cases in which the narrative is continued by the artist rather than by the relics or documentation of the performance, and which, in this case, the death of the protagonist, also marked the end of the *Jaundiced Tales* and gave way for the beginning of a new work after returning to Johannesburg. When discussing the manifestation of performance *after* its enactment, it is important that we look at the early instances of Ruga's embroidery work. While the more recent *Watussi* series and other works have been predominantly produced in the studio, earlier embroidery work was the result of public performances as part of the *Miss Congo Trilogy*.

In the *Miss Congo* performances Ruga selected specific places, buildings and backdrops where he would work on his embroidery, at times in highly uncomfortable positions. Alluding to gender roles and their attachment to public and private spaces, he publicly stitched his embroideries, once precariously sitting over a little canal and in another instance in a nightclub, the final performance, took place in a deserted courtyard. Awkwardly positioned on his back with the embroidery cloth extended in front of

him he performed until he started to scream from muscle pain – testing his capacity of suffering and thus referring to seminal performance works by Marina Abramovi.

The embroidery, in this case, was not only important in terms of the subject being stitched but also terms of being the cloth accompanying Ruga's acts. Comparable to the Holy Mandylion which represents *and* incorporates Jesus through the traces of sweat, the embroidery work not only is a result of his effort, but also its manifestation; every stitch being part of the suffered moments which are in turn transformed into a physical texture. Through Rugs performance an activity often considered exclusively feminine and depending on the cultural context – a private and silent activity becomes very visible, confrontational and a vehicle through which traditional gender roles can be interrogated.

Now, years after the performance, the gallery or studio visitors may refer to the embroidery that resulted from this performance. Inhabitants of the Kinshasa neighbourhood, in which the performance took place, have other relics and memories of the performance. Quite surely they will recall this absurd situation whenever they pass the place which once was marked by a stitching and screaming Ruga. Thus, the performances by Ruga not only reconfigures existing memories thus reshaping ideas of public space, but also creates memories for the future by evoking narrations without really telling them. They are not so much a "clash between material and memory"<sup>14</sup> than a proposition to reconsider their interdependency.

<sup>12</sup> This partly also counts for the so-called "New Genre Public Art" which is very much based on (socio-political) engagement (see reference 11). In this paper, I will not consider this art form because, as already stated above, Ruga rather works with a singular figure, which provokes reactions and makes implicit statements that are not directly socio-politically engaged.

<sup>13</sup> SVP – Schweizerische Volkspartei (literal translation: Swiss Popular Party).

<sup>14</sup> Ruga in the Interview with David Brodie, July 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Till Förster: 'On ne sait plus qui est qui', p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> Till Förster: "'On ne sait plus qui est qui'. Öffentlichkeit zwischen Dorf, Stadt und Staat", in: *Paideuma* No. 48(2002), p 118 (transl. F.S.).

<sup>17</sup> Ruga in the Interview with David Brodie, July 2008.

## In Conclusion: Performing Public Space

Unhappy with the western notion of public space for African contexts, social anthropologist Till Förster proposes another concept of public space which should be understood as a "performative public."<sup>15</sup> This term implies that the public is produced through agency and in the very act of performing. Förster understands performance as a conscious behaviour of an individual towards other persons who share a common space, or rather, a common accessibility to a certain shared space. This concept makes sense, considering the fact that the public is not anymore bound to the (post-colonial) nation-state<sup>16</sup>. This applies even more for areas like inner city Johannesburg, where public space is no longer a space of institutional service and regulation but rather a contested field into which diverse actors project their ideas of common sense, of individual claims and of communal belonging or social longing. It has become, again with Till Förster, a "plurivalent [...], diffuse [...] public"<sup>17</sup> in which "public interventions" by the city administration is just some among many other acts in the public sphere of the city.

However, if we want to define public space in a way that also acknowledges the "invisible" and at times also unconscious acts of diverse actors, we also have to consider disembodiment as a kind of counter-statement to the performative and conscious marking of public space. This is one of the primary aims of Athi-Patra Ruga's performance: "By utilizing the medium of fashion I wanted to explore disembodiment with regard to the result of one not being aware of how things are made [...]"<sup>18</sup> With his hyper-visible appearance in contested places, his costume denying any clear identity but alluding to a whole range of constructed identities and unconscious production of (public) space, Ruga points with his performances to precisely these invisible structures of longing and belonging.

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## ALL HAIL, THE TERROR CAMP..

Why are tents triangular? Why is the triangle pink?

by Heeten Bhagaat

### *Camp*

So I am writing this to you,

You said your *Camp* was an action,

You said your *Camp* was a protest.

In 2009 what are you against?

Why?

Camp is an aesthetic sensibility wherein something is appealing because of its bad taste and ironic value. When the usage appeared, in 1909, it denoted: ostentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical, effeminate, and homosexual behaviour, and, by the middle of the 1970s, the definition comprised: banality, artifice, mediocrity, and ostentation so extreme as to have perversely sophisticated appeal.

From the earliest days, the notion of other has set itself out as that, a celebration of the other, a multiplication of that which chooses to be not, but in many ways still is. To celebrate otherness and reject the relative normality of function, of form, thus lends a perspicacious perhaps epiphanic experience to that of a clichéd, somewhat banal and run of the mill, revelatory experience.

Other is other, and as such does not need to share nor be compared to. Or does it have to? In the grand, if somewhat irritating polemic of chicken and egg, which came first, and what is one to the other? Can your action only be considered relevant as a reaction? If so, if the barrier were removed, then is this action, this protest redundant?

What is your non-camp? Who are you when you don't protest?

"*Camp* has become my way of life" I think I remember you saying.

There is another strand of thought wanting to develop...

\*\*\*

#### **CAMPING:**

Can camping, a verb, have two not too dissimilar definitions?

#### **CAMPING:**

The action of another, a thing/person dressed as another thing/person in a place that is not what it used to be [read: city]. Such that a man/woman in women's/men's attire, or being effeminate/masculine, in a place that is acceptable, that being in a city or other similar built up environment that is not what is used to be, thus a layering of unnatural elements, that in the context of themselves is completely "normal".

#### **CAMPING:**

Living outdoors in a tent, in nature, as nature intended. Again, save for the tent, a layering of natural elements that in the context of themselves is completely "normal".

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Can we then draw a similarity to the innate "nature" of these two definitions and come to the assumption that "camping" is normal, and as such not an action or a protest but possibly a form of lateral development of humanity?

This dovetails into some nether region which I feel needs to be explored in the context of this discussion, that being the intentional misogyny and its other sibling, embedded in the action and protest of camp. If the point of sameness is to celebrate and to be immersed in all things similar, the same, then why does the other need to be vilified, maligned, caricatured?

This action is one of anger, perhaps a plea, much like a terrorist who creates terror to call attention, but in the final act, is so beyond a normative response that the outward perception is that of the tragic, the sad. As such it succeeds in one major aspect, alienation. Is this the intended response? Surely not, but reeling back, taking stock, and communicating, is definitely not as much fun.

1



## ALLEYS, ELLIPSES & THE EVE OF CONTEXT

On Fielding Some Early Misconceptions About Athi-Patra Ruga

by Anthea Buys

The first sustained conversation I had about Athi-Patra Ruga was with a glittering, besetled Orthodox Jewish Mama. We were seated next to each other at a long Shabbat table somewhere in Sandton, Johannesburg. The floors, walls and curtains were a matching shade of light mushroom. She was delicately leveling a pile of sticky ribs and I, being a vegetarian, had been served the greater part of a chicken, deboned.

It was a cold Friday night a week after the first Joburg Art Fair in April 2008 and having felt insufficiently Jewish for the event without some sort of costume or amour, I had put on a pair of near-opaque beige stockings for the first time since a fleeting encounter with another faith many years before. I pondered my stockings and behaved faithfully whilst *The Mama's* Frenchly manicured nails, now grey from the marinade under their long tips, waved near my face as she told be about her visit to the Art Fair the previous weekend. We had found a common interest in art and we were going to talk about it until we no longer had to sit next to one another.

2





“You know which artwork I really liked at the fair?” she asked.

“Which one?” I asked back.

“Maybe you can tell me the name of the artist.”

“I’ll try.”

“It was at a new gallery – quite nice – and it was a picture of a flock of white sheep in a meadow with a girl dressed as a little black sheep.”

“That was a boy. His name is Athi-Patra Ruga,” I offered.

The black sheep, as those familiar with Ruga’s 2007 series, *...Even I Exist In Embo: Jaundiced Tales of Counterpenetration* will know, is not particularly little, and the proportions of the arms and legs poking out of the bouffant mass is a clue that the wearer might not be female.

*The Mama* persisted: “I just thought, isn’t that cute! What did you say her name was again?”

“His name – it is by an artist named Athi-Patra Ruga.”

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Previous Page: 1–2 *Even I Exist in Embo: Jaundiced Tales of Counterpenetration* #6 – #7, 2007

Lightjet Prints ~ 70 x 90 cm ~ Edition of 5 + 2AP

Photographer: Oliver Neubert

Opposite: *Even I Exist in Embo: Jaundiced Tales of Counterpenetration* #8, 2007

Lightjet Prints ~ 70 x 90 cm ~ Edition of 5 + 2AP

Photographer: Oliver Neubert





*The Mama* had attended the fair with the purpose of prospecting. She was in the market for a new picture to be hung either in the lounge or the kitchen, and one of Jaundiced Tales numbers six through eight had been earmarked for the latter. Initially I was quietly horrified that her chief interest in Ruga's work was its cuteness, and even more so that she had admitted it. But in retrospect, she wasn't entirely off the mark. *Inj'ibhabha*, the hirsute "afro-womble" that sometimes plays the black sheep and sometimes the dainty flaneur in *Even I Exist in Embo* is as seductive as it is disruptive. In fact, it is precisely its seductiveness that enables it to shake up the calm. The *Inj'ibhabha* charms us, it incites our curiosity and desire, and our attraction to this unknown entity opens up the possibility that it might undo us.

I am not sure whether *The Mama* ever visited the gallery and bought the work, but I hope she did. Not because I feel that people in the market for pictures should have their way with well-intentioned artists, but because there is something perversely apt about Ruga's work being displayed in such a maladjusted context. In the steaming kitchen one day months later, over a platter of herring and liver, the cute black puff will burst leaving in its place an oddly menacing creature certainly foreign, perhaps threatening – with which the room and its *hors d'oeuvres* will have lived unawares for all that time.

This anecdote touches on a matter at the heart of Athi-Patra Ruga's artistic practice, that being the politics of context. Mainstream art production and criticism in South Africa is simultaneously almost obsessed with the semantic inverse of this, the context of politics. Artists and their works are often ruthlessly yet thoughtlessly checked and balanced against a schema of political concerns important (and rightfully so) in other realms of South African society, but suffocating in art. This literal conception of politics may be at the root of our veneration of the notion of context, a fixation so entrenched in our critical culture that it is taken up practically with a sort of sacred awe, treating the conditions of influence and the thematic agendas of a work of art as incontrovertible truths. But what happens to this system when the integrity of context can't withstand the grind of the alter-contextual, when improper contexts come to weigh on the work so heavily that it becomes something entirely other than itself?

Athi-Patra Ruga is one of very few artists working in South Africa today who dares to entertain this question. His work glosses over politics in the quotidian sense, only in order to show that there is something more profoundly political at stake: our sense of historical, physical, sexual and psychological place. On one hand, we can quite easily locate Ruga's practice in relation to a number of backgrounds or frames of reference. For instance, the scenarios constructed in his work are typically urban, and his early work in fashion and performance took its cue from the grime and pace of Johannesburg city life. During a sojourn in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2007, he produced *Miss Congo*, a three channel video shot in the backwoods of Kinshasa. Next, during a residency at the Zenter für Kulturproduktion in Bern, Switzerland, the *Inj'ibhabha* roamed the high streets of Bern and then was banished to the glacial countryside in *Even I Exist in Embo: Jaundiced Tales of Counterpenetration* (2007).

In 2008, Ruga returned to Johannesburg, straightened out the *Inj'ibhabha's* curls and *Beiruth* the bugchaser was born. She is well-documented in Ruga's first solo show (in Johannesburg), *...of Bugchasers and Watussi Faghags*, *Beiruth* had prowled the nowhere places of the Johannesburg inner city and paid a visit to the Johannesburg Central Police Station, previously known as John Vorster Square a notorious site of police brutality during South Africa's apartheid years.

3–4 *Even I Exist in Embo: Jaundiced Tales of Counterpenetration* #9 – #10, 2007  
Lightjet Prints ~ 70 x 90 cm ~ Edition of 5 + 2AP  
Photographer: Oliver Neubert



Ruga's work since the invention of *Beiruth* has adopted a bold stance in relation to prevailing moralizing discussions of HIV/AIDS, sexuality and sexual conduct. *Beiruth* is a bugchaser someone who deliberately pursues infection with the HI virus for altruistic motives. *Beiruth* is principled, empathic and courageous in her sexuality, but her morality is at odds with that of the society she inhabits, which assumes that HIV/AIDS will always be feared and avoided by good, informed and sane subjects.

The extravagant costumes, which give both the and *Beiruth* such convincing presence, can be attributed to Ruga's background in fashion design. In 2004 he completed a diploma in fashion design through the Gordon Flack Davison Academy in Johannesburg and launched his own fashion label, Just Nje. As part of his first solo exhibition titled *She is Dancing in the Rain with her Hand in the Toaster* (2007) Ruga installed an assembly of bespoke garments hung from butchers hooks and dripping with rapeseed otherwise known as canola oil, a substance often used as a sexual lubricant in poorer communities in South Africa.

Costumery in art has a kinship with camp, and often when the two occur in one artists practice, they are direct conduits of one another. Camp calls for some facility for transcending the body while remaining rooted in it and costumery is typically the vehicle for reaching for this sublime aesthetic.

Ruga's 'camping', tips its hat to a tradition of drag in South Africa, which, thanks to a persistently conservative artistic milieu, has been all but erased, from our cultural history. Steven Cohen, for instance, an extreme drag and performance artist of international acclaim, has been deleted from the secondary school art history syllabus in spite of his important critiques of South Africa's social inequality and prejudice throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Ruga is South Africa's first overtly camp black artist to make a name in the art world and in some sense he is already marginalised: many cultures of black masculinity in South Africa will not openly abide transgressions of traditionally construed maleness and femaleness. One hopes that Ruga will one day manage to puncture this unyielding barrier, and that when he does other artists follow in his slipstream. That said, Cohen and Ruga share more in common than

just their marginality. Beginning with Cohen, both explore the aggressive and grotesque possibilities of camp. This brings to the camp act the possibility of a startling potency and even a paradoxical seriousness and suggests that the limits of frivolity, indulgence and violence may be one and the same.

While seeing Ruga's work in light of these contexts is valuable and assists us in reading them collectively and with a fairly literal eye, no context is sacred. His ability to undermine the very frames of reference he establishes for his works turns on the 'campness' of his performance.

Susan Sontag, in her famous 1966 essay *Notes on Camp*, defines camp as "a paradoxical sensibility or affinity for tastefully bad taste, for extravagance, for the banal, for provocation and for moral digression" Sontag (1966). Although many of Sontag's ideas about camp – such as her assertion of its frivolity, its relative impotence – are dated and less relevant in contemporary South Africa where the political, aesthetic and moral values that camp would seek to overturn are contingent on different factors (again, the return to context in order to upend the very idea), her *Notes* are pertinent in so far they represent camp as an operation of displacement and de-familiarisation. She writes: "Camp sees everything in "quotation marks". It is not a lamp, but a lamp; not a woman, but a woman. To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater"... "or What is Displaced." (Sontag 1966:280)

Whatever issue, person or feeling a camp gesture takes up – even when it is aggressive – it casts into the sphere of the burlesque. This is because such grand ideas as essence, pathos and beauty camp can it treat with earnestness; they are the territory of yesteryear, and what we have now instead, to paraphrase Frederick Jameson very expediently, is the replacement of everything with its echo. Camp is therefore a genre fundamentally concerned with the displacement of states of being.

In an artist's statement released at the time of *...of Bugchasers and Watussi Faghags*, Ruga mentions his interest in the history of image making, and of displacement both of people and images. The character of *Beiruth* in particular is the figure through which we



Above: *She is Dancing in the Rain with her Hand in the Toaster*, 2007  
Installation image







are shown a meditation on the idea of displacement and its possible expressions. In the photographic series *The Naivety of Beirut* and the 2008 video *after he left Beirut* is most often found in marginal, non-specific or transitional spaces.

In *after he left* she embarks on an elaborate journey to the township of Atlantis in Cape Town, in which she waits at the train station against a background with barely any distinguishing qualities and sits in a crowded taxi where she is vulnerable to the prejudices of her fellow passengers. She is terminally en route, arriving at certain familiar places, the unmissable bright Universal Church of the Kingdom of God building on Buitenkant Street in Cape Town, for instance, only to move elsewhere. On *Beirut's* journey through Johannesburg, in the naivety of *Beirut* she is photographed at the historical site of John Vorster Square, but also in non-descript nooks of the city that are unmistakably urban but would not necessarily belong to any city in particular. She crouches over a storm water drain on the street, creeps out of a dark shelter closed by rusted corrugated iron and squats on a bland tar pavement against an equally generic face-brick wall. In these scenarios *Beirut* is displaced because there is no place for her to be. Her marginality and flux in the city space is echoed grammatically in the titles Ruga gives to his works. The recurring ellipses give the impression that the title has sprung from a larger thought, and is omitting something or is leading us elsewhere.

When it comes to the topic of displacement and marginality, it appears that Ruga may be as wrapped up in the politics of post-colonial identity as the garden variety artists from whom I have differentiated him earlier. It would not be altogether wrong to suggest that Ruga is concerned with displacement in a fairly literal sense, but there is also a far broader, more abstract motion of displacement at work in Ruga's art that takes us back to Sontag's idea of camp as an insertion of quotation marks around the being that the artist plays at. Camp displaces the original with its copy, and in the process creates images, but also displaces them (since once the original is displaced, there is nothing more to displace but images). Here Ruga's two arms of interest in displacement coalesce: In the camp act, the displacement of people and the displacement of images are continuous processes.

What becomes apparent here is an overlapping of the two types of politicality that I identified earlier: one being the hegemonic, everyday notion of politics and a broader type of politics that challenges systems of power and hegemony. In what sense should we call Ruga's works political?

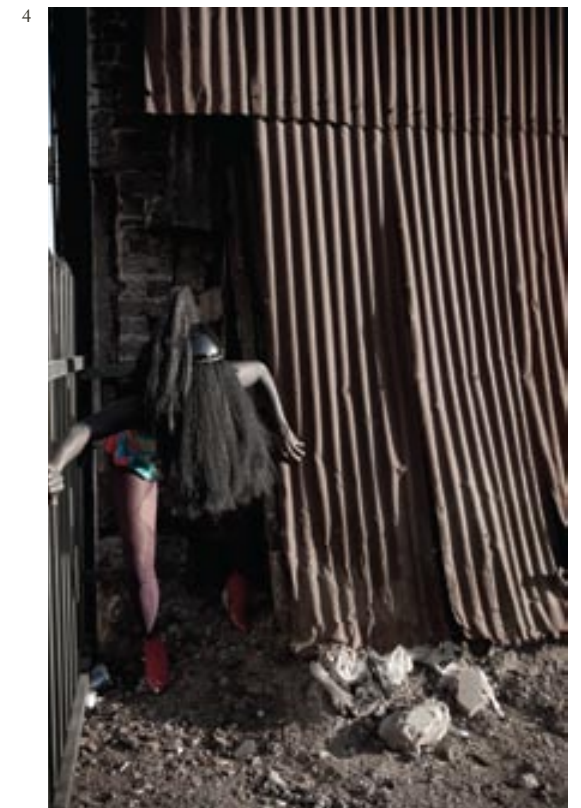
The French philosopher Jacques Rancière defines "politics" as "dissensus" (the opposite of consensus), while the common political banter we endure in all spheres of culture, he calls "the police". The essence of an act or a thought that is truly political, translator Gabriel Rockhill writes in his notes to Rancière's *Politics of Aesthetics*, resides in "acts of subjectivisation that separate society from itself by challenging the 'natural order of bodies' in the name of equality..." (Rancière: Rockhill 2006:90). In an utterance of almost uncanny relevance, Ruga describes the character of *Beirut* "the illusive figure that qualifies the autonomous body against that of the sovereign state."

"As a matter of fact, political art cannot work in the simple form of a meaningful spectacle that would lead to an awareness of the state of the world. Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of a double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification. This ideal state comes about through a negotiation between the readability of the message that threatens to destroy sensible form of art and the radical uncanniness that threatens to destroy all political meaning." (Rancière: Rockhill 2006:63)

This, I think, is precisely how Ruga's art operates; it points to the issues of the day but at the same time deflects our understanding of them by introducing to the scene something altogether unfamiliar, unnerving or unheimlich, to use Freud's excellent German phrase for what has been inadequately translated into English as the uncanny.

Previous Page: *The Naivety of Beirut #1*, 2007  
Lightjet Prints ~ 70 x 90 cm ~ Edition of 5 + 2AP  
Photographer: Chris Saunders

1-4 *The Naivety of Beirut #2-#5*, 2007  
Lightjet Prints ~ 70 x 90 cm ~ Edition of 5 + 2AP  
Photographer: Chris Saunders





The uncanny is necessarily unpredictable because it inaugurates a cognitive dissonance, and thus far Ruga's contribution to the South African art world is an echo of just this. What he produces in the future will, in one way, be familiar; it will follow from what he is doing now, extending his filmic investigations to areas only alluded to before: the pornographic image and particularly the extreme quotation of character, but in another way, Ruga's future works in virtue of his use of, or response to, a camp sensibility and his recasting of the political will always partially disown their context and go somewhere new, always in masquerade, always shape-shifting, always taking us by surprise.

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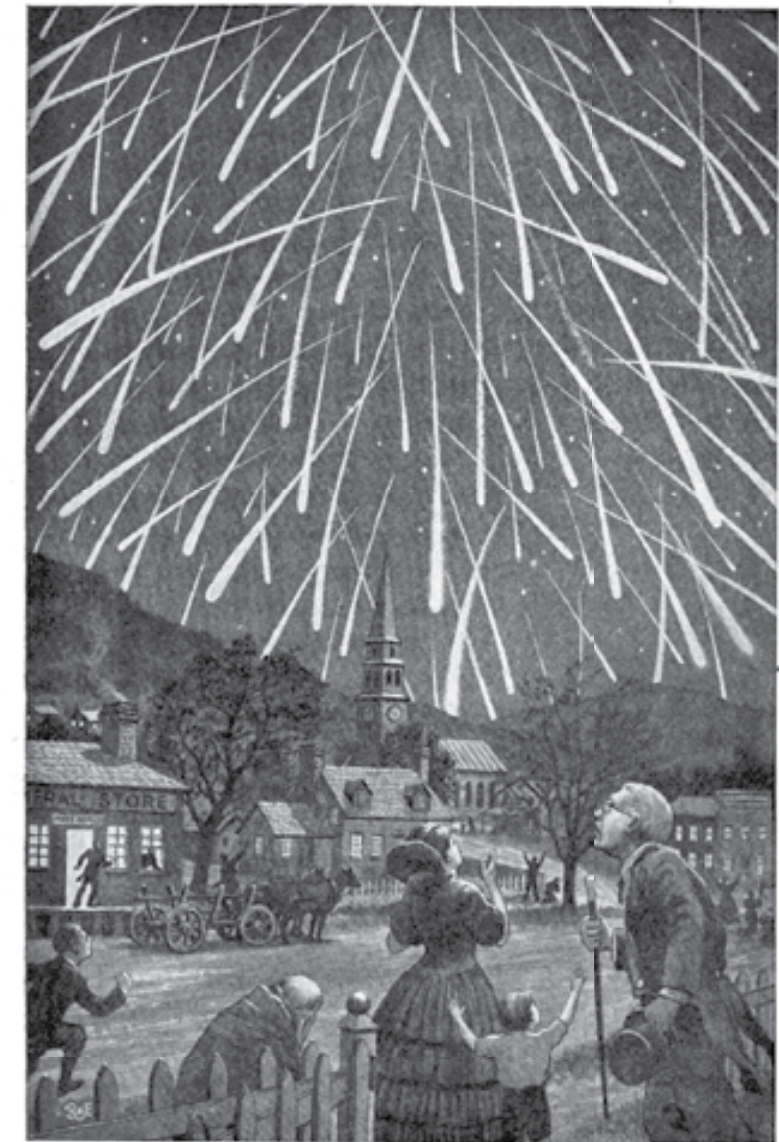
Anthea Buys is an independent art journalist and curator and a Research Fellow at the Research Centre for Visual Identities in Art and Design at the University of Johannesburg.

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Illustration reference on opposite page: W.E. Straw, *God's Answers to Man's Questions*. The Sentinel Publishing Company, 1950. pp89.



R. M. Eldridge, Artist

**THIS  
AUTISTIC  
IMPERIUM  
ISNIHILREICH**

by David Tibet

...In Trojan seas  
I called God on the phone  
Just yesterday and spoke to Breathface  
He told me death arises for Bloodface  
Doctor without possibilities of crime  
(Let's call that "pixie time")  
To make light of the shouting in my head  
I want to have lunch with the Umbrella Ladies  
I want to make love with the Umbrella Ladies  
Who inhabit the stealing time  
I got this from the night-owl singing  
"Policeman, policeman, is there anyone there?"  
If the Great Turk eats Empire  
Well is that countdown?  
Or just Twinkletoes eating his face?  
Whilst the wicked incense batters the church  
Outside the church  
Outside the church walls  
Bloodface waits  
He is twisting time  
And selling sweets to sweethearts  
Who have painted mountains for money  
They sell their bodies to the Ice Cream Queens  
Autistic Imperium  
You have arisen as a way of cutting the Centre  
Out of this world...



## “LA TÊTE DU PROPHÈTE”

Dakar, Senegal

by Koyo Kouoh

(translated from the original French text by Sandrine Micossé)

The period of the celebration of Abraham’s sacrifice, also called the holiday of the sheep, Eid el Kebir or Tabaski (in Senegal) is a time that attracts and captivates non-Muslim visitors in Dakar. The City transforms itself into a giant sheep market. The public spaces become vending areas. Athi-Patra Ruga is the second artist with whom I am working who immediately got inspired by this ambiance and environment to create a performance piece in-situ. Here Patra Ruga’s performance revolves entirely around self affirmation – towards others as well as towards oneself. Ruga is a black man, a black South African man, a black overtly homosexual man. He draws from this state, to create the matrix of his multiform *oeuvre*.

Athi-Patra Ruga’s work includes performance, video, photography, installation and fashion. He is feeding on his personal experience and is motivated by breaking the rules and norms established in society as well as artistic practice. His work *la tête du prophète* presented in the streets of Dakar works within these realms and he offers himself to the Senegalese society. In this work a living human head, his own, is rising from a hole cut into the centre of a table, offering a mix of fruits and vegetables. This table is being placed along side the sheep vending spaces that have been installed for the festival in different corners of the city.

Athi-Patra Ruga is offering himself to the sheep and to the looks of baffled by passers. The audience is impressed by the serenity and natural ease with which the artist delivers himself to the appetite of the sheep who are happy to be fed such delicious food . In a discussion, Athi-Patra Ruga told me that he always inquires about the situation of homosexuality Wherever he goes. Knowing of strong homophobic tendencies in Senegal the artist wishes to offer himself just like a sheep to remove the sins of Senegalese society. The sin in this case becomes homophobia and not homosexuality.

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Koyo Kouoh is a curator and cultural manager. She is the founder and artistic director of RAW MATERIAL COMPANY, a mobile site for art practice and critical exchange. She was the Coordinator of Cultural Programs at the Gorée Institute from 1998 – 2002. She has collaborated with the Dakar Biennale of Art from 2000 – 2004 and co-curated the Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine in Bamako in 2001 and 2003. Specialising in photography and public interventions, she has curated exhibitions in Brazil, Switzerland, Austria, Germany and the United States and written on contemporary African art. She also served as advisor to the artistic director for documenta 12 and curated Philip Aguirre’s project “Gaal Gui” for the Beaufort Triennale 03. Her latest exhibition “Hypocrisy: the site specificity of morality” co-curated with Stina Hoegkvist was on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Oslo. She is based in Dakar.

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1-4 "La Tête du Prophète", 2009  
Performance Stills - Dakar, Senegal  
Photographer: Simone Gilges



**ATHI-PATRA RUGA**

Full Circle

by Sandrine Micossé and Joshua Kwesi Aikins



Top Left: *First Moment of Rejection I*, 2008  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 42 x 45 cm

Top Right: *First Moment of Rejection II*, 2008  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 42 x 60 cm

Bottom Left: *Watussi Queen (after Irma Stern 1946)*, 2008  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 102 x 60 cm

Bottom Right: *Watussi Rooi Kombers (after Irma Stern 1943)*, 2008  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 103.5 x 60.5 cm

Notions of displacement – of the body, the image and the haunting spectres of otherness that are woven into the normality of dominant fantasies of ‘race’ and ‘gender’– are not simply themes in Athi-Patra Ruga’s work, but also echoes of Berlin in Africa, and specifically South Africa. Berlin is not only a place from which euro-centric ideas were projected onto the African continent or the stage on which so many borders, walls, divisions and segregations across the African continent both between and within nations, peoples, families, couples, old and young, men and women were created. Berlin’s history is also irredeemably interwoven with the history and legacy of South Africa’s notorious Apartheid system, which was (in no small part) inspired by and designed with German competence ‘in race matters’.

The idea of the passport laws has actually travelled between Berlin and Southern Africa several times: first introduced by way of passport coins in Namibia formally German South West Africa, the passport system was part of the subjugation of the Herero and Nama peoples, who were the indigenous population of the region. The passport laws provoked a resistance movement, which in turn led to genocide and the erection of the first German concentration camps in South West Africa. This German aggression, bred expertise which was to be utilised in Hitler’s Third Reich and which in turn inspired the South African architects of Apartheid to invite German law makers to help them craft the “legal” foundation of Apartheid – complete with passport laws.

These as well as later uncanny and generally unacknowledged connections are now redrawn, but this time it is through South African agency, it is the art of Athi-Patra Ruga that comes to Berlin. It is these connections that make his work far less ‘exotic’, ‘different’ and ‘pristinely African’ than most German spectators would have themselves believed. In this context, the perceived displacement of his South African art in the Berlin space reveals the misplaced projections of the onlooker: displacement emerges as a strategy, an act of denial, a vain attempt to ward of the all-too-present imprint of a shared past.



In offering his work *Whyde Boyz* at the Hebbel um Ufer Theatres Berlin in 2008 as a response to the desire to see him *Performing South Africa*, Athi-Patra Ruga rekindles the voyeuristic, European desire to behold art and body of the other. He transforms the floating signifier associated with the performance of “Africa” into a blurred mirror that reflects the European lustful, possessive, oppressive, consuming gaze at the proverbial Baartman.

But now the subject is returning the gaze and is devising a spectacle in which European Arias, intercontinental pornography and the post-fight performance stains on the gallery walls create a dazzling crescendo of images. This ultimately forces the spectators to re-evaluate their own expectations with regard to the idea of ‘authentic Africa’ versus the ‘high culture of Europe’ as well as the public nature of Art as a contrast to the nagging desire and guilt associated with voyeuristic intrusion. The ‘racialised’ and ‘gendered’ fallout of the Berlin-South Africa conduit manifests not only in front of the viewer, but even more so in the tension between contrasting expectations and desires, the canvas of Athi-Patra Ruga’s art is the mind of the spectator.

Specific works such as *...of Bugchasers and Watussi Faghags* explore the ways in which the current and historical links between Europe and Africa, and more specially Germany and South Africa inform the reception and perception of contemporary African art. In his “craft meditations” these subjects are tackled through a blend of performative intervention and intricate craftsmanship. As *Miss Congo* the protagonist in a series of performances staged in Kinshasa, Democratic republic of Congo the artist explores the craft of stitching. Traditionally seen as an exclusively female and often solitary exercise, Ruga performs this craft in public spaces.

Athi-Patra Ruga not only uses the art of tapestry in the performative sense but also as a means of re-appropriating and questioning art history. In his works *Watussi Queen* and *Rooi Kombers* Ruga intervenes into found-object tapestries and reinvents the expressionist imagery created by the German African Artist Irma Stern. Stern, an acclaimed female artist working within a colonial context used black African bodies as subject matter in her portraiture. These images are inextricably linked to the context in which they

were produced and as such are indicators of prevailing attitudes and prejudice toward the exoticised African identity. Thus, a reference to the depiction of Africans by a German born artist residing in South Africa becomes at once a means of re-appropriating the history of art and recreating personal artistic agency that rises above the projections imposed onto the forcefully displaced body.

The reference to bugchasers – people who voluntarily elect to contract AIDS in solidarity with infected people – further charges this association with a demonstrative, theatrical benevolence that is at the surface of European and German engagements with Africans. This sentiment is mirrored in Irma Stern’s use of African bodies as canvas for European associations of the noble savage.

The enormity of the bugchaser concept finds its match in an oft-forgotten German contribution to Rwandan history: German missionaries were instrumental in applying concepts of German eugenics to classify and essentialise Rwandan people: The categories of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa described social positions within one culture – positions of relative wealth and associated influence that people could attain and loose over their life-span. German Colonial administration in need of collaborators to assist in implementing divide and rule strategies invented the fictional account of the Nilotic origin of Tutsi’s. Along with this ethnographic fantasy came theories that differentiated the physiognomy of the Hutu from that of the Tutsi whose long, slender faces and noses were said to be a mark of their nobility.

These projections and their essentialising results constitute the historical background of the Watussi – German linkage. They transform Irma Stern’s imagery into haunting representations of European interventions into African societal and gender orders.

“I strongly believe by and large that the body of work I am responsible for is informed by how the collective body responds to imagery, and in response to this, I re-own the history of the images. One has to be a mirage to tackle the history and put it in another context to get to the point.” Athi-Patra Ruga in Conversation with David Brodie 2008.



Top Left: *Bitch Please*, 2009  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 49 x 62 cm

Top Right: *...stillborn [birth of a nation]*, 2008  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 49.5 x 39.5 cm

Bottom: *...nobby helps out*, 2008  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 40 x 52 cm



The invention of performance characters such as *Beiruth* or the *Inj'ibhabba* allow the Artist to explore and criticise dominant racialised and gendered images of identity. Through the use of invented personas these images are made into new and powerful statements of belonging beyond the one-dimensional viewpoint of conventional western society.

Created using twenty-five fake Afro wigs, the *Inj'ibhabba* costume is used as a vessel to penetrate different levels and realms of reflection about physical appearance and the body. It is mediation on the body and particularly the black body as an object of exclusion and 'othering' but is simultaneously used as a means of self-empowerment. In his performance and costumery Athi-Patra Ruga uses African hair as one of the markers of difference, it is a reference to both the Violence and oppression legitimised by the dominant European Hegemony. Ironically the Afro has simultaneously evolved into a symbol of resistance and redemption of the black body whilst still being used in some contexts as a demeaning caricature of blackness.

The *Inj'ibhabba* featured in a performance staged in Switzerland at the time of the Swiss elections. During this campaign right wing election advertisements depicted two white sheep kicking the proverbial black sheep off the Swiss map. The *Inj'ibhabba*, is shown as having been "shot" during a performance as a result of having penetrated the Swiss space and suggests that the onlooker may have been the Wilhelm Tell marksman who has pierced the *Inj'ibhabba* with his lethal arrow. The *counterpenetrations* performed by the *Inj'ibhabba* address the issues of racially motivated political exclusion and, reflect them back onto their manifold contexts.

*Beiruth*, another of Ruga's protagonists is a faceless yet feminine character whose name refers both to the book of Ruth as well as the war torn Lebanese capital, is covered in black powder and leaves stains of blackness on everything she touches. *Beiruth* creates her own sense of belonging rather than let the here sense of place be defined by socially constructed conventions and ideas.

In 2008 the artist brings *Beiruth* into the Berlin Hebbel am Ufer, against the backdrop of his installation the *Whyde Boyz*. The artist confronts the audience with a collage of pornographic images, parts of *Beiruth's*

public performance and a young man singing an operatic aria famously sung by Maria Callas. In this performance versions of *Beiruth* are performing a dance of violence and love. The installation, and in particular the depiction of gay pornography forces the audience to re-evaluate their own patterns of thinking and behaviour.

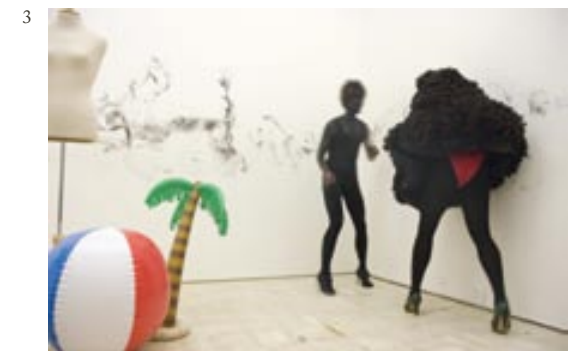
Ruga's dense representations evoke a web of associations into which spectators are lured with images charged with aesthetic ambiguity – ironic, violent, contemporary but historically charged. There is satire in the metaphors, but its depth chokes the spectators' laughter.

The imagery is seductive in its nature, but shame might mar the spectator's desire. The audiences lustful gaze is drawn to the artists work, but deflected to the historical and contemporary context of the work – and reflected back toward them. The spectator is therefore made to situate their history and present vis-à-vis Athi-Patra Ruga's art. The connection and involvement of the spectator with the subject matter and their entanglement in the power relations, desires and projections are intricately woven together. This involvement creates an ever accelerating spiral of inflections leaving the viewer with a number of links that make the inescapably tangible connection between their historical position, biography, identity the art of Athi-Patra Ruga.

In exposing these connections, which, like a collective subconscious, contain the denied, yet constitutive foundational imaginaries for Western, subjectivity we are able to examine their imprint and consequences on our thought and perception. Like the indelible stains left on the walls by *Beiruth's* fight with a masked stranger, engaging with Athi-Patra Ruga's art leaves the spectator stained – and enriched.

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Sandrine Micossé, the painter and conceptual artist that lives and works in Berlin, is concerned with questions of identity and belonging, exclusion and (self-) empowerment in both her painting and her curatorial work. As a Togolese-German artist, who has also studied and worked in Mauritius, she combines various art forms to create a polyphonic exploration of facets of identity, attribution, and unequal power relations.



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Joshua Kwesi Aikins, PhD candidate at the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology is a political scientist. He studied at Freie Universität Berlin and University of Ghana. His research interests include the interaction between western-style and indigenous political institutions in Ghana, development in postcoloniality perspective, cultural and political representation of the African Diaspora, postcolonial and the politics of memory in Germany as well as Critical Whiteness Studies.

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1-3 ...but don't worry you can suntan (for Katrina), 2008  
Performance installation



20 P 09

20 P 09

Athi-Patra Ruga  
*...mr floating signifier and the deadboyz*



**DEADBOYZ:  
AUTO EXOTICA SERIES #1-#5**

*Deadboyz Auto Exotica Series #1-#5, 2009*

Lightjet Prints ~ 74 x 107 cm ~ Edition of 5 + 2AP

Photographer: Oliver Kruger













## **THE DEATH OF BEIRUTH**

*The Death of Beirut #1 and #2, 2009*

Lightjet Prints ~ 74 x 107 cm ~ Edition of 5 + 2AP

Photographer: Oliver Kruger






## **PIXELATED ARCADIA**

2009 ~ Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ Sizes Various

Photographer: Hayden Phipps



COLLECTION  D'ART

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110X60cm Canvas  
100X50cm Design

MADE IN E.U.  
100% COTTON

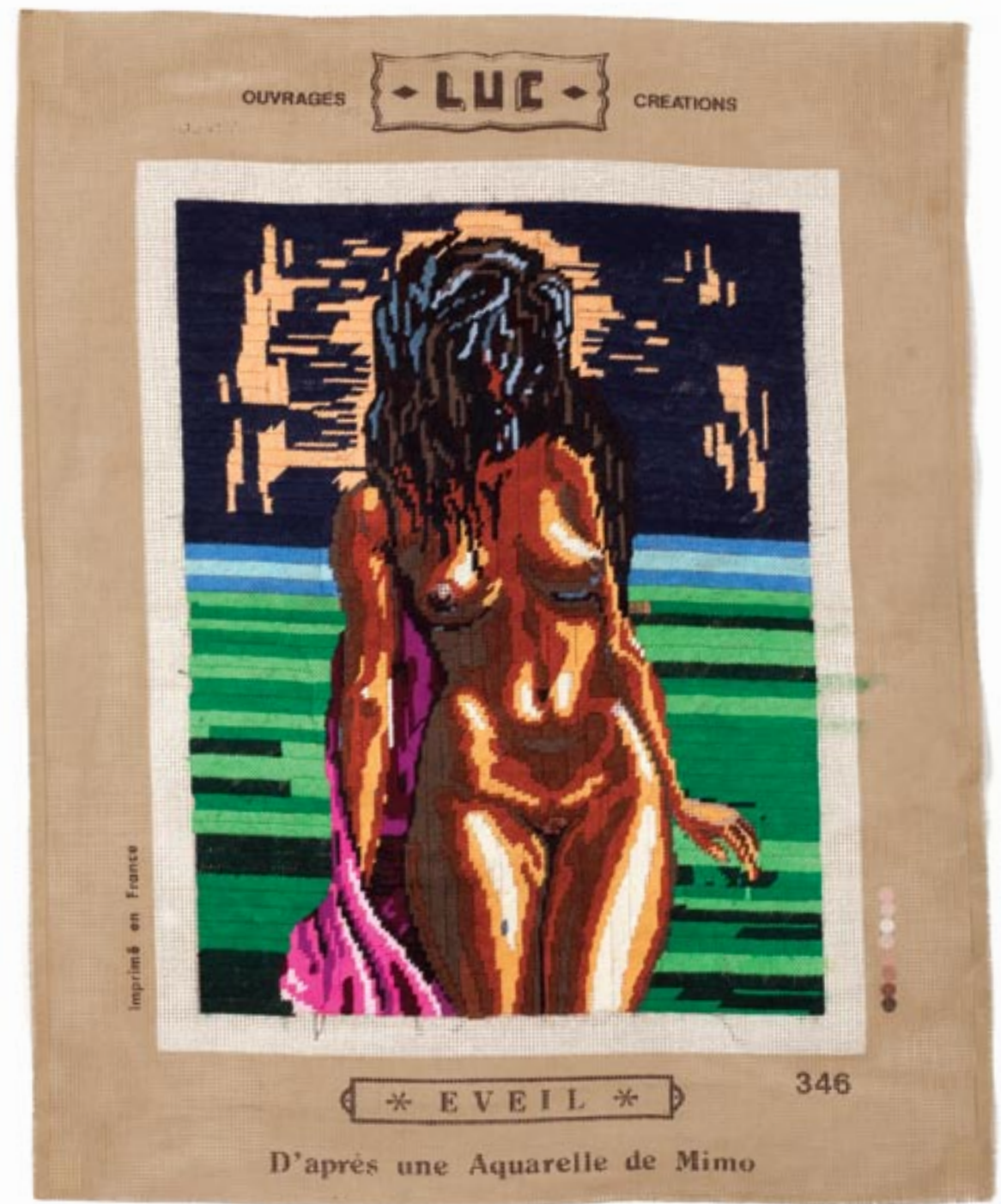
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*..oh pale Galillean! You Have Conquered, 2009*  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 109,5 x 60 cm





...votive portrait [umthondo wesizwe], 2009  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 75 x 94 cm



...votive portrait of the Beirut, 2009  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 73 x 58 cm





...Megiddo Marrow, 2009  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 51 x 59cm



... POST AIDS, 2009  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 50 x 39 cm





*...Jacob wrestling the Angel, 2009*  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 51 x 59 cm



*...the first moment of rejection #3, 2009*  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas ~ 72 x 46 cm  
(work in progress)





...Goldface Sphinx, 2009  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas and Gunshot Residue ~ 62 x 91 cm



...Melitta Sphinx, 2009  
Thread on Tapestry Canvas Gunshot Residue ~ 51 x 59 cm

**THE BODY IN QUESTION PART IV:  
... LA MAMMA MORTA**

*The Body In Question Part IV, 2008*

Video Performance ~ Approximately 4:20 minutes loop  
Originally commissioned by the Hebbel am Ufer Theatres





## **IDOL DEATH MASKS #1-#3**

*Idol Death Mask #1, 2009*  
Modeled paper ~ 26 x 19 cm

*Idol Death Mask #2, 2009*  
Modeled paper ~ 27 x 23 cm

*Idol Death Mask #3, 2009*  
Modeled paper ~ 27 x 24 cm

Photographer: Hayden Phipps





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## **ATHI-PATRA RUGA'S**

### Curriculum Vitae

2004 – 2009

Athi-Patra Ruga is a hastily-ascending young artist whose work straddles the divides of fashion, performance and photography. He was born in Umtata, South Africa in 1984 and lives and works in both Johannesburg and Cape Town.

#### Education

2004:  
*Honours Diploma in Fashion  
History and Design*  
Gordon Flack Davison Design Academy  
Johannesburg, South Africa

2001:  
*Matric Certificate*  
Belgravia Art College  
East London, South Africa

#### Solo Exhibitions

2009:  
*...mr floating signifier and the deadboyz*  
Whatiftheworld / Gallery  
Cape Town, South Africa

2008:  
*...of Bugchasers and Watussi Faghags*  
Art Extra  
Johannesburg, South Africa

2007:  
*She is dancing in the rain with her  
hand in the toaster*  
Michael Stevenson Contemporary  
Cape Town, South Africa

*Inj'ibhabha Series: Jaundiced Arcadia –  
Tales of Counterpenetration*  
Progr-Zentrum fur Kulturproduktion  
Bern, Switzerland

## Selected Group Exhibitions

2009:

*Beauty and Pleasure in Contemporary*,  
Stenersen Museet, Oslo, Norway

*Spot On Dakart 2008 – retrospective*,  
IFA Gallery, Berlin, Germany

*Pret-a-Partager – more than the sum of its parts*,  
IFA Gallery, Stuttgart, Germany

2008:

*Big Wednesday*, Whatiftheworld / Gallery,  
Cape Town, South Africa

*Peripheral Vision and Collective Body*, Museion  
Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art,  
Bolzano, Italy

*Disguise: The art of attracting and deflecting attention*,  
Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

*Upstairs/Downstairs*, AVA, Cape Town  
Curated by Bettina Malcomess

*The Trickster*, Art Extra, Johannesburg

2007:

*Impossible Monsters*, Art Extra,  
Johannesburg, South Africa

*Miss Congo/TinTin's aHo'*, Performance  
in collaboration with Christopher Martin,  
Confluence 4.2, Design Indaba 10  
Cape Town South Africa

2006:

*Doc. no3, Die Naai Masjien – Miss Congo*,  
Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

2005:

*Doc. no2, Die Naai Masjien – The Revenge of the 9ft  
Ma-Benz and her Toothless Taxi Kings*,  
Elle New Talent Awards / SA Fashion Week

2004:

*Doc. no1, Die Naai Masjien – Familie Fortuin*,  
Elle New Talent Awards / SA Fashion Week

## Residencies

2009:

*Infecting the City Festival*, Cape Town, South Africa  
Curated by Brett Bailey

2008:

*100 Year War* in collaboration with Jean-Christophe  
Lanquetin, August House, Johannesburg, R.S.A.

2007:

Progr-Zentrum fur Kulturproduktion  
Bern, Switzerland

*Kin Be Jozi*, August House,  
Johannesburg, South Africa

2006:

*Scenographies Urbaines*, Lingwala, Kinshasa, DRC

## Lectures and workshops

2009:

*Spot On Dakart*, University of Art, Berlin, Germany

2008:

*Pret-a-Partager – more than the sum of its parts*,  
Dakar, Senegal

2007:

*...in memory of craft (sic)*, Confluence 3 Bag Factory  
Artist Studios, Johannesburg  
In collaboration with Nontsikelelo Veleko,  
Kudzanai Chiurai and George Mahashe

*...in memory of craft [redux]*, Bern, Switzerland

*when all architecture fails, your bling is your best friend*,  
Centre for African Studies, Basel, Switzerland

2006:

*Meditations Artesanal (Craft Meditations)*, Academie  
des Beaux Art, Lingwala, Kinshasa, Democratic  
Republic of Congo

## Festivals and Biennales

2009:

*Infecting The City Festival*,  
Cape Town, South Africa

2008:

*Dakarts 09*, Dakar, Senegal

*3rd Guangzhou Triennale*, Guangzhou, China

*Performing South Africa*,  
Hebbel am Ufer [HAU 2] Berlin, Germany

2007:

Design Indaba 10, Cape Town, South Africa

FIMA [International Festival for Fashion  
Africaine] Niamey, Niger

2006:

*Scenographies Urbaine*, Lingwala, Kinshasa, DRC

## Publications

2008:

*Whydeboyz*  
Berliner Zeitung, 29/08/08

*Athi-Patra Ruga*  
Artthrob, October 2008  
Michael Smith

Design Indaba Cover,  
Tough Love Issue Q3/08

*Subverted Bodies*  
Mail and Guardian, 31 August 08  
Lynley Donnelly

*Pavement Specialist*  
One Small Seed, Summer 07/08

*A fashionable cause*  
Art South Africa, Volume 7 Issue 2  
December 2008, Mary Corrigan

*Ways of being seen*  
Mail and Guardian, 13 March 2008  
Kwanele Sosibo

2007:

*Tailored to Subvert*  
Mail and Guardian, 15 June 2007  
Carl Collison

*Two sides to every fashion story*  
Mail and guardian, August 17 2007  
Lynley Donnelly

2006:

*Boum Bada Boum*  
Art South Africa, Volume 4 Issue 4  
June 2006, Carl Collison

*African Inventive*  
Verve Magazine (India), Volume 14 Issue 5  
September / October 2006, Bandana Tewari

*Athi-Patra Ruga: The Cosmopolitan Voice of South  
African Townships*  
Collezioni Sport and Street, Autumn 2006  
Andrea Malavolti



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