



ANNUAL REPORT 2009

PRESENTED TO THE FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF ASAI , 28 MARCH 2009

In taking stock at this first Annual General Meeting it is evident that last year had both highs and lows for ASAI.

2008 began with much promise, After commencing the process of registration in June 2007, we were finally registered as a Section 21 Company in January 2008. We also started the new year by moving into a small office at the University of Cape Town, located within the Department of Historical Studies. The willingness of seven internationally respected individuals – Dr Rasheed Araeen, Prof Chabani Manganyi, Barbara Murray, Prof Nkiru Nzegwu, Prof Sylvester Ogbechie, Prof Uche Okeke, and Steven Sack – to accept our invitation to become honorary patrons represented a significant endorsement of the ASAI project to date.

The first Board meeting in March saw the appointment of ASAI's founder, Mario Pissarra as the Managing Director. It was also in March that ASAI entered into a contract with Gavin Jantjes to manage the [Visual Century](#), a project that had been administered by Mario Pissarra in his personal capacity since August 2007.

The importance of this project management role was not only because it enabled ASAI to play a pivotal role in the development and implementation of what promises to be a seminal series of publications on South African art. It was also important because it provided an excellent opportunity to develop ASAI's profile as being more than a website, although the website remains an important project of ASAI.

Other highlights from the last year included the ASAI website establishing a new record of 671 visitors per day in July 2008, and not long after that we were formally granted recognition as a Public Benefit Organisation.

Another high point was the convening of an informal discussion with Rasheed Araeen, editor of *Third Text* and a patron of ASAI. Attended by a range of artists and cultural practitioners and activists, this six hour conversation covered everything from Ernest Mancoba to food security, and represents the kind of cross section interactions and critical discussion that ASAI seeks to facilitate.



Earnest about Ernest: front- Lionel Davis, Rasheed Araeen, Gavin Jantjes. Back – Abdulkadir Said, Mario Pissarra, Lonwabo Kilani, Athi Mongezeleli, Dathini Mzayiyya, Christine Eyene, Bridget Thompson (Photo: Omar Badsha)

A more formal discursive intervention was a day long seminar on artists in exile convened for the *Visual Century* project at the Centre for African Studies, UCT. Again, participants came from varied backgrounds and professional contexts. This event was recorded and will be published in due course.



Exodus seminar break: George Hallett, Mario Pissarra, Joost Bosland, Michael Godby, Peter Clarke, Gavin Jantjes, Athena Sotomi, Bridget Thompson, Abdulkadir Said, Gordon Metz, Emile Maurice. (Photo: Susan Walker)

While the above all represented cause to celebrate, the lowest point of 2008 was undoubtedly the tragic loss of [Isaac Makeleni](#) on 30 May. Coming just over a year after the senseless killing of [Madi Phala](#), the death of two artists who were part of the 'original' ASAI project has been deeply felt.



Always happiest in the company of fellow artists: Isaac Makeleni (with hat, back) at the opening of the *africa south* exhibition, November 2007. Also pictured: back – Mambakwedza Mutasa, Peter Clarke, Mandla Vanyaza, Velile Soha, Sophie Peters, Ernestine White, Lizette Chirime. Front – Ndikhumbule Ngqinambi, Mario Pissarra, Stacey Stent. (Photo: AVA)

At another level, ASAI's capacity has been seriously tested over the last year. With most attention being given to the *Visual Century* project this has meant that very little new content has been added to the website, particularly over the last six months. Consequently the growth in visitors that has been a feature of the website since it first went online in November 2005 has not been sustained.

In addition the difficulty in finding a suitable administrator, with the modest fees at our disposal, has not helped ease the administrative challenge of dealing with over 40 writers, researchers and editors for the *Visual Century* project.

What has helped has been the commitment of Board members. Eight meetings, including one strategic planning meeting, were held during the last year, ensuring that the process of organisational development remains on course. However Board members are not staff members, and the need to increase the staff component remains a priority in order to deliver on the numerous projects we are currently busy with, both internet based as well as real time.

Notwithstanding these challenges we have ended the first financial year on a reasonable high. As we speak the generation of material for *Visual Century* is at an advanced stage and the four volume series of books will be published next year by Wits University Press and STE publishers. Importantly, from the point of good governance the financial audit resumed early in March.

Another promising sign is that while the website may appear to be stagnant, it has been subjected to internal evaluation and is currently in the process of being redesigned and reorganised.

Funds are currently being actively sought for several of our ongoing projects. These include the commissioning of material for *Word View* (formerly *Forum*), expanding the documentation of artists, and developing the Artists Indexes and bibliographies.



New homepage designed by Donovan Ward

In addition, new projects are underway. These include the documentation of archives of community arts initiatives, which is currently being pursued in partnership with the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape and the Department of Manuscripts & Archives at UCT. Also pending is the publication of *Third Text Africa*, an online project developed in association with *Third Text* journal. This will result in granting free access for African readers to selected material from *Third Text*, and will take the form of eight themed online journals over two years. These new projects all herald the growth that characterises ASAI.

The development of a three year business plan has not only provided a framework for the implementation of our projects, but also identified the need to build our capacity by contracting researchers, writers and editors to work on our numerous projects. In short the time has come to professionalise, to build on our track record of delivery and to raise the necessary funds for our projects.

In preparing to scale up delivery it has also become evident that we need a bigger full time staff comprising at least three strategic positions: the managing director, a projects coordinator, and an administrator.

While it has been a challenging year for ASAI, it is clear that the building blocks of the foundation are now in place and we can look to the future with confidence.



Some of the ASAI members at the AGM: Donovan Ward, Mario Pissarra, David Hlongwane, Garth Erasmus, Tony Mhayi, Gill Cowan, Athena Sotomi. (Photo: Farzanah Badsha)

Acknowledgments

Ralph Freese, who advised on the registration process and paid the fees for ASAI to register as an organisation.

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