

Editorial East Africa

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This issue of *Third Text Africa* builds on our previous edition's theme, Localities. That edition itself marked a break from the first few issues of *Third Text Africa*, which, as an open source, aimed to make Africa-related material previously published in the print journal *Third Text* more accessible to African and non-African readers. With Localities, we began the process of producing and publishing new content, with the deliberate intent to address what we identified as critical issues and relative silences in public discourse. Notably, these included the need to focus more attention on particular African localities and their associated practices, specifically those receiving insufficient or no attention in prominent international journals and institutions. Critical too, was the need to create an intellectual platform that brought academic voices into play with those of practitioners, notably artists and curators. For with the growth of the academic publishing industry comes the threat of rarefied discourses, of academics producing for academics. In the South African environment, one of the more developed art writing and publishing nations on the African continent, academics are pressured by their institutions to publish principally in officially accredited publications, a practice that earns lucrative government subsidies for higher education institutions. The fact that many of these journals are elitist platforms, inaccessible to non-academic practitioners, is of little concern in this environment. Therefore, it is heartening to see the advances being made in open-source publishing, a practice championed by ASAI since our inception in 2005.

Third Text Africa does adopt some of the dominant practices of journals, notably that of blind peer-review, but we disregard some of the orthodoxies that are driven by anti-intellectual interests, such as the market economy driven 'logic' that requires profit to be made from publishing, and for regular production schedules to satisfy commercial interests. Of course, our freedom to determine our own identity reflects our position as an independent project. We are neither underwritten by international agencies pursuing foreign policy objectives, nor do we receive support from most national (South African) agencies who fail to see the relevance of our project, and who cannot see the link between their restrictive notions of nation building and the scourge of xenophobia (or Afrophobia as it has been more accurately named). Nor are we the property of any institution. That this position represents both a strength and vulnerability, offering opportunities as well as threats for our survival is self-evident. Accordingly, Africa South Art Initiative has to adopt a flexible approach to publishing, and will continue to do so within available resource constraints.

With this edition we are proud to contribute to the growing awareness of prevailing conditions, practices in specific parts of the African continent. When we began charting a thematic path for *Third Text Africa*, we were in part responding to ongoing calls to bring East African art into the frame, and certainly one can observe substantial development in the region over the last few years, particularly through the work of non-profit initiatives, but also through the support of

governments for biennales, at home and abroad. This recognition does not imply that there is sufficient infrastructure in place to sustain creative and critical arts practices, and indeed some of our writers highlight specific challenges in this regard. Our contribution is in enabling more space for independent and imaginative voices.

As noted in the previous editorial, we are mindful of the sage advice of Rasheed Araeen, our Founding Editor, who cautioned: 'I do understand and appreciate the fact that the priority of *Third Text Africa* should be first to deal with what concerns Africa, but it is also important that *Third Text Africa* does not forget its trans-continental or international task and vision.' We reiterate our position that an internationalism needs to be informed and shaped from below, that a multiplicity of centres needs to dislodge the model of the centre and the periphery. With African themes and African voices underrepresented in the discourses of contemporary art, and with scientific publishing from Africa said to contribute less than 0.5% of global output (Zezeza 2003); facilitating the emergence of divergent African voices remains our strategic priority.

We have assembled an edition that, while by no means representative of all key players and issues, evidences the growth and dynamism of art in and from East Africa. We have sidestepped problematising East Africa as an idea, choosing rather to work within the limits of an enduring but shifting notion of regional identity, beginning in the colonial era and persisting to the present, with the envisaged East African Federation. Kenyan and Ugandan themes dominate, with some Tanzanian content.

Despite shortcomings, notably the absence of content and voices from Rwanda and Burundi, we are pleased to note the contributions of artists, curators and academics, mostly based in East Africa, with many of them 'emerging' rather than 'established' voices. We are also pleased to have attracted inter-disciplinary contributions, without losing sight of the need to encourage more writing on the visual arts. Utilising a variety of forms, from interviews, opinion, visual essays, to historical and textual analysis, a varied range of contributors brings the past and future into dialogue with the present. Themes span from new contemporary practices that have emerged in often conservative and repressive environments (Kakande, Mugubi & Mwititi, Malinda, Muwanguzi) to recent research and interventions that revisit archives and canonical figures that urge us to consider the validity and relevance of established narratives (Hopkins, Peters-Klaphake & Kúma, Pissarra, Rodrigues).

Acknowledgments

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For the record

Following the publication of *Localities*, it was brought to our attention by Stephen Wright that he had previously co-authored an article titled, 'Inadvertent Monuments.' This term appeared in the title of a visual essay by Brenton Maart in *Localities*. Following consultations with Maart, and with senior academics closely associated with his doctoral research, which centres on the concept of 'inadvertent monuments,' we are satisfied that Maart's use of this term was arrived at independently. For the precedent to Maart's use of the term, see Ilana Salama Ortar and Stephen Wright, 'Inadvertent Monuments,' *Third Text*, 20:3-4, 2006.