

# Editorial

## Collectivities

Welcome to the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of *Third Text Africa*, an online peer-reviewed journal published by ASAI. *Third Text Africa* began life in 2008 as an extension of the journal *Third Text*, making African content from the print journal more accessible through open access publishing. Subsequently *Third Text Africa* began publishing original material, with themed editions.

The theme *Collectivities* was chosen because of the need to rethink relations in what is customarily viewed as singular, the art world: between artists; as well as between artists and all those who play critical roles in the production, circulation and reception of art. Such perspectives persist as marginal concerns in a market-led art world where artists continue to be regularly presented as manifestations of their own individual significance, with little consideration to the various conditions and networks that enable their practice, and influence the extent to which careers are judged to be successful.

Appropriately, most of the texts in this edition are co-authored. We begin with a broad overview of emerging collectives and centres in southern Africa. In this study Molemo Moiloa and the Visual Arts Network of South Africa make the point that many young artists are looking to collectives, often informally constituted, to provide alternatives to the institutionalised structures in the artworld. This argument is complemented by a comparative account of Harare-based collectives and centres, where Fadzai Muchemwa raises questions regarding the sustainability of independent initiatives and the frequently ambivalent relationship such initiatives tend to have with mainstream institutions and discourses. This city-based view is followed by a case study of the Community Arts Project, one of South Africa's most celebrated arts centres. Mario Pissarra provides a revisionist perspective on this once dynamic but now defunct centre, and concludes by suggesting the need for more informal structures to be established. Akande Abiodun and Akinwale Onipede provide another case study, with an analysis of the collaboratively produced artworks of Nigerian artists Nike Okundaye and Tola Wewe. The authors consider the factors underpinning the formation and success of this artistic collaboration, but also use this example to highlight the parallel pedagogies in Nigerian art education – those of academic

training and informal workshops. In so doing, Abiodun and Onipede propose that by bridging these divides the artists present new opportunities for pedagogy and practice, which, they posit, heralds new horizons for contemporary Nigerian art. The work of another collaboration, the International Inventories Programme, is foregrounded through a conversation between its members Marian Nur Goni, Sam Hopkins and Simon Rittmeier. This conversation, concerning the relations between museum objects (particularly African objects in western museums), their producers and interlocutors, points to the often-fraught histories of acquisition and challenges of translation and interpretation. The pervasive legacies of western imperialism and colonialism, and their impact on collective identities brings us to Alanna Lockward's advocacy of Afropean identity as a decolonial response. This theme leads into the role of art in addressing colonial violence, with Kolodi Senong's proposition that *seriti* (dignity) is intrinsic to much black South African aesthetics. Senong also foregrounds the tensions, even contradictions, between *seriti* as an aesthetic quality and *seriti* as an ethical principle. Together, these essays provide a range of responses to the theme *Collectivities*, but also foreground the need for more case studies, particularly concerning the ways in which art worlds (plural) function as sites of inclusion and exclusion, of legitimation and erasure, of change and conformity.

In keeping with ASAI's focus on creating a platform for scholarship not only on but principally *from* Africa, the majority of contributors are based on the continent, more specifically in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe. And in keeping with our commitment to bridging divides, we are also pleased to feature contributors from the Caribbean and Europe. That we provide an intellectual platform that includes but is not limited to academics, with curators' voices well represented, presents another line of continuity with the work of ASAI.

We extend our gratitude to the writers, reviewers and all those who assisted in producing this edition. In particular, we thank the National Arts Council of South Africa for their support of ASAI, without which publication of this edition would not have been possible.

## Dedication

*Collectivities* is dedicated to the late Olabisi Silva (1962–2019). Bisi was a member of *Third Text Africa's* advisory council, as well as a reviewer and writer for our journal. Few curators, if any, have matched her contribution in remapping the relationship between the local and international, and in reshaping the international. As was said at the time of her passing, the field of contemporary African art lost a warrior, but we also gained an angel. May we continue to uphold and follow her example.