The South African Pavilion

Candice Breitz

Mohau Modisakeng

La Biennale di Venezia 2017

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Mohau Modisakeng

La Biennale di Venezia
13 May – 26 November 2017

This book is published on the occasion of the exhibition *Candice Breitz + Mohau Modisakeng* at the 57th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, 13 May – 26 November 2017.

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Foreword

Much as the arts contribute to the economy of a country, its real value is to citizens and their descendants. Art and culture connect us at a fundamental level to our identity, history and heritage as a people. They afford us dignity and insight into our context and enable the expression of our creative voice.

It is indeed the task of our government in South Africa to discover, develop and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life and our society.

We consider this enabling of our artists and their work, together with affording greater access to the arts, as a core mandate of the Department of Arts and Culture. Efforts are being made to ensure that the cultural treasures of humanity are made available to all through deeper engagement, the exchange of books and ideas, and contact with other countries and their cultures. Participation in local and international cultural activities is aimed at teaching our youth to honour their culture, humanity, liberty and peace. Our attendance at the 57th Venice Biennale is informed by this key motivation and understanding.

Today the world faces unprecedented challenges: high and continuously rising levels of youth unemployment and disenfranchisement, a deep economic recession and a wave of human migration into and across Europe not seen since World War II, as people flee terrible conflict in their countries.

We believe, however, that real growth potential lies in the creative industries across the globe. These industries are leading us toward a more optimistic future because, amongst other

attributes, they allow our artists and our young people – who are innovators by their very nature – to prosper and grow.

Now more than ever we must invest in, and support, the creative industries as a way for people to retain a sense of self, as a way to build prosperous and innovative nations and, most of all, as a means to allow people to be themselves and express their views, identities and feelings in constructive ways.

The South African government, through the Department of Arts and Culture's vision, aims to create a dynamic, vibrant and transformed arts, culture and heritage sector, leading nation-building through social cohesion and socio-economic inclusion.

The South African Pavilion at the Venice Biennale is of strategic importance in establishing this goal locally within the sector, and promoting South African arts, culture and heritage on an international level. To stimulate the supply and demand, South Africa has been participating at the Venice Biennale since 2011 after a long absence from the international platform.

The South African artists chosen to exhibit at the South African Pavilion in 2017 are Candice Breitz and Mohau Modisakeng. They represent diverse backgrounds and disciplines, making our platform inclusive and truly representative.

The Pavilion will open our exhibition at the Biennale in Venice on the 10th of May and we are proud to support the work of two leading voices in our visual arts landscape.

Nathi Mthethwa, MP
Minister of Arts and Culture, Republic of South Africa

Introduction

The South African Pavilion presents *Candice Breitz + Mohau Modisakeng*, a two-person exhibition that explores the disruptive power of storytelling in relation to historical and contemporary waves of forced migration. The exhibition foregrounds the challenging narrative structures via which each artist addresses violent experiences of displacement, focusing on the precarious conditions that pertain to subjectivity within contexts of migration, exclusion and transience. What is it to be visible in everyday life, it seeks to ask, yet invisible and disregarded at the level of cultural, political or economic representation?

In staging the particulars of this exhibition, we drew the ideas that informed its inception from a glossary of ambitions that are intertwined with the specifics of the South African art context, and out of an explicit desire to challenge conceptual and visual stereotypes of African representation and cultural consumption. This may seem patent, but given South Africa's complicated history – not without its legacy, conceptual and practical issues – with the Venice Biennale, a key intention in the curation of the 2017 Pavilion was to clearly register individual artistic practices that are conversant with the local and the now whilst simultaneously engaged in more inclusive and expansive dialogue beyond the confines of the country's sometimes insular art context.

The selection of only two artists is an attempt to challenge notions of applied inclusion and representation redolent in our large group shows of legacy, and to create a compelling

experience that is uniquely immersive for the viewer. This is the first time that South Africa will present an exclusively moving image- and sound-based exhibition. Our turn to the moving image acknowledges contemporary video art as a disruptive and critical language for addressing issues of representation and misrepresentation. In her catalogue contribution, ‘No Shore in Sight: Precarious Journeys and Unbearable Passages in the Moving Image Installations of Candice Breitz and Mohau Modisakeng’, M. Neelika Jayawardane states: “Within South Africa, video art helped usher in new, interdisciplinary visual languages through which to communicate the impact of history on the present, creating public spaces that invited personal and national transformation.”

Contextualising the work of Breitz and Modisakeng within the thorny Eurocentric framework of the Biennale is also to critique the achievability of representing one’s own country. Breitz is recognised as one of South Africa’s most expansive and intellectually astute visual artists. Over the last twenty years – moving seamlessly between photography, montage and video installation – she has explored the dynamics of subject formation, the enduring impact of mass media culture and the role that language plays in our coming into being. Living in the US and Germany for a large part of her career, Breitz has navigated manifold pressures: from art market expectations of artists from outside of the West manifesting in one-dimensional, socio-biographical readings of her practice, to challenges at home around the validity of her rights as an artist of the diaspora to address South African history, heritage and current issues of discrimination. While she acknowledges this culture of critique as vital to the rebuilding of a nation’s social imaginary, “Breitz’s rejection of the silent rule that artists from the global South should make art about where they are from – and about what makes them ‘different’ – has resulted in a body of work that pushes boundaries

because it isn’t beholden to exhausted ideas about what artists who happen to be South African should be expected to address in their work. [As such] there is something free and freeing about Breitz’s work,” explains Sisonke Msimang in her catalogue essay, ‘Passages from Home and Love Stories that Bring Us Back’.

Modisakeng’s work, on the other hand, is deeply defined by his South African-ness, yet it is in the reshaping of black identity, by pointing towards universal histories and the spirituality of space, that his practice resists binary readings. His commitment to a radical politics finds expression across his award-winning photography, film, performance and installation. His works are not, however, direct or didactic representations of the violence and poverty he personally experienced during the apartheid era and the early 1990s, but rather powerful, poetic actions that turn the body into a moving instrument for the decolonisation of shared memory. In her essay, ‘The Rock God of the Sea’ Hlonipha Mokoena writes: “What Modisakeng seems to be suggesting is that it is not possible to simply play the colonial encounter backwards and therefore effect a reversal of colonialism’s devastation. By not allowing his characters to land, Modisakeng may be gesturing to the fact that decolonisation is itself a voyage with an unknown destination.”

Candice Breitz + Mohau Modisakeng cannot be simply categorised as an ‘African exhibition’. It is an exhibition by two independent artists of South African heritage whose practices and careers are keenly concerned with the moving image as a nexus via which to explore the critical potential of storytelling. *Love Story* (2016) by Breitz and *Passage* (2017) by Modisakeng, read collectively, present an articulation of our past and current state of ‘refugeeness’ within a global context of exclusion and transience. Their works manifest as personal, local and global stories that correspond with very real political situations in Europe, the United States and South Africa where, in February, riot police used stun grenades, rubber bullets and water cannons to disperse anti-

immigration protesters in our capital city, Pretoria. Resentment against foreign nationals has sometimes turned deadly amid accusations that they take jobs from locals, in a country where unemployment is at more than twenty-five percent. Immigrants are often blamed for drug-dealing and other crimes. In 2015, anti-immigrant riots in and around the city of Durban left at least six people dead. Approximately sixty people were killed in similar violence seven years earlier.

It is with historical reference and contemporary resonance that *Love Story* and *Passage* work to challenge the nationalist populism and global fear that dominate the world today. By inspiring empathy and forcing audiences "in today's too-long-didn't-read, time poor culture …" to question our general inattentiveness, these works re-animate silent voices and subsumed histories and, in so doing, articulate a kind of cinematic justice (see Zoé Whitley's essay, 'Oh! Oh! Love: Candice Breitz's Monologues for Troubled Times'). The characters in *Love Story* and *Passage* are not tangential. They are essential. Once heard, their voices cannot be unheard.

This exhibition has grown out of close cooperation between numerous individuals and supporters. My deepest gratitude goes to Candice Breitz and Mohau Modisakeng for their unwavering commitment to the project. Having had the good fortune to work with Candice on two solo exhibitions, I feel privileged to have gained a more nuanced understanding of her irrepressible curiosity for the human condition. Mohau has worked tirelessly over the past months as *Passage* represents the first commissioning of a new work for the South African Pavilion, which augurs well for future public-sector support. His creative process is both self-reflexive and inclusive, making for a truly collaborative and meaningful exchange. Thanks to the writers of this catalogue, M. Neelika Jayawardane, Hlonipha Mokoena, Sisonke Msimang and Zoé Whitley, for so aptly interrogating the curatorial framework of the exhibition, the artists' practices and the exhibited works. To loyal patron of the visual arts, Emile Stipp, thank you for co-publishing and thus making the best version of this catalogue possible. Thanks to Bronwyn Law-Viljoen and Diane Coetzer for editing and Gabrielle Guy for the design.

I am indebted to my co-curator Musha Neluheni for sharing a true appreciation for and commitment to promoting South African video practice. Thank you to the South African Department of Arts and Culture and to Titi Nxumalo, the Consulate General of South Africa in Milan, for making our participation possible; to the team of Basetsane Kumalo and Ann Roberts from Connect for steering the ship; to production and project managers, Brendan Copestake and Liesl Potgieter from Parts & Labour; and to content strategist Beathur Mgoza Baker and social media strategist, Thami Mbekwa. Lastly, may I extend heartfelt gratitude to The Friends of the South African Pavilion for their generous support: Goodman Gallery, kaufmann repetto, KOW, Galerie Ron Mandos, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Tyburn Gallery, Whatiftheworld, BonelliErede, CN & Co, Strauss & Co, Scheryn Art Collection, KT Wong Foundation, A4 Art Foundation, Wendy Fisher and Business and Arts South Africa.

Lucy MacGarry
Curator

Passages from Home and Love Stories that Bring Us Back

Sisonke Msimang

Over time, South Africa has become a metaphor in the global narrative, a towering example to the world. Home to both the boundlessness of injustice and the possibility of equality, South Africa – in the eyes of the world – represents the triumph of good over evil. It is a place with a good story to tell, a place where hope abounds. Yet the reality is that the collective belief in hope is beginning to fray.

These days, only those with long memories can recall the foot stamping and the threats of war, the singing of struggle songs and the whistles and bursts of canisters of teargas that preceded the birth of the new democratic state in 1994. The South Africa in which black people persevered because they were convinced that every slight and abuse held within it the potential for redemption; because they believed that every crime carried within it the possibility of love. *That* South Africa is dying. The South Africa in which whites expected to be automatically forgiven for their sins of complicity is also dying. Across the colour bar, there are more and more strident voices clamouring for a different, less reconciliatory future.

While nostalgia-related multiracialism is receding, nationalism remains a powerful force for many South Africans. Many of the battles being waged in the political landscape today are nationalist in nature. Xenophobia is on the rise, fuelled by populism and desperation. In this environment, we are seldom afforded the opportunity to question the very idea of the nation state. There is little encouragement for those who ask why people should owe their allegiance and fealty to a country simply because they happen to have been born there.

Questioning the validity of the concept of the nation state is not a job for politicians. Instead, it is the work of artists and philosophers. Fittingly then, questions around belonging and around the dangers of nationalism run through the work of the two South Africans artists whose work is featured in the South African Pavilion this year. Candice Breitz and Mohau Modisakeng's works examine what it means to be a human who happens to have been born and raised in a certain place. In *Love Story*, Breitz creates a platform for the personal narratives of six refugees; people who started out life in one part of the world, only to find themselves later uprooted and displaced. Similarly, Modisakeng's *Passage* examines the landscape of belonging by introducing us to characters who leave (a continent that we presume to be Africa) by boat. Like their contemporary peers – the refugees that Breitz interviews – these long-ago mariners drown, one by one. While Breitz's subjects do not literally drown, there are – in all of their stories – moments in which they are submerged and unable to come up for air.

While both artists are deeply interested in challenging norms and breaking boundaries, there are dissonances. Breitz is concerned with contemporary culture, while Modisakeng is interested in what is ancient. Breitz is a white South African woman born in the 1970s, while Modisakeng is a black South African man born a decade later, in the 1980s.

Breitz is cosmopolitan. She is interested in the formative influence that mass culture exerts in media-penetrated societies. Her practice as an artist views popular culture as one of a series of formative forces that shape us as individuals. Along with other markers of identity – where we are born, the colour of our skin, our acculturated gender, the religious and national contexts in which we are raised – our exposure to media and contemporary culture plays an important role in shaping our subjectivity. Breitz creates work that comments on where we are in time, and on emerging global cultures. Her work can thus float above the specifics of place. Indeed, she has been critical of the tacit pressure that is applied to artists from outside of the so-called 'centre' (Europe, USA), a pressure to play into preconceived notions of what it is to be from 'elsewhere'.

When South Africa was first welcomed into the contemporary art community in the period directly following the first democratic election in 1994, the unspoken rule was that South African artists needed to reflect on apartheid in their work. When Cuba was admitted into the contemporary art community, the expectation was that artists would in some way reference those aspects of Cuban life that were consistent with preconceived ideas about Cuba (boat people, cigars, Castro). The same does not hold true, of course, for German artists or British artists or even for Americans (unless they are Americans of Colour).

In a 2001 interview, Breitz expressed discomfort with the international reception to her early work, explaining that, "people would spend more time discussing where I was from in their reviews than looking at the work […]. I realised that if I wanted to continue exploring the ideas that were important to me, I would have to find a way to do so that avoided inviting overly obvious readings". Her rejection of the silent rule that artists from the global South should make art about where they are from – about what makes them 'different' – has resulted in a body of work that

pushes boundaries because it isn't beholden to exhausted ideas about what artists who happen to be South African should be expected to address in their work. There is something free and freeing about her work. She cleverly upends the fact that, once the work gets thrown into the global machine, any reference to cultural specificity or ethnicity or nationality starts to serve very different purposes. She refuses to buy into the exotic, resisting easy interpretations of the place from which she comes, readings that might too readily pander to stereotype.

Whereas Breitz's practice has been steeped in a politics that resists autobiographical reading, Modisakeng's work is anchored not just in South Africa, but in his South African body, in his blood. This makes it deeply personal, often autobiographical. That said, neither artist is willing to follow narrow and parochial agendas. Like Breitz, Modisakeng has been brazen in articulating his politics. In an August 2016 interview he notes that, "… the history of South Africa appears to stop at 1994. You hit a wall if you try to go back further than that. Perhaps this is consciously where the artist should not take part in fictitious construction of a superficial national identity … I feel that South African artists, black artists in particular should start pointing to other histories, to unconventional knowledge or even to the realm of spirituality or ancient culture … So that we can tell a more dynamic story, a story that disrupts and confronts."

Breitz and Modisakeng are similarly inclined, then, towards defying expectations. One could of course argue that Breitz can afford the luxury of endeavouring to transcend her South African-ness, of defining herself as an artist (as opposed to as 'a South African artist'), in a way that Modisakeng cannot. After all, she is white; and in the context of South Africa, that whiteness is weighted with privilege. It is tempting to assume that the universalising effect of whiteness is at play, both in Breitz's desire to make art whose questions resonate beyond a small place called South Africa, and in her ability to make such art at all.

But Breitz does not fall into such an easy trap. She is not oblivious to her whiteness, nor does she make claims for the universality of her practice. Instead, she is a white artist whose work is deeply critical of whiteness and reflects on precisely the questions of place and identity that she so sharply queries in the aforementioned interview. She demonstrates her trademark wit, critiquing whiteness even as she uses it as the subject of her work. She does this in *Love Story* as she has done elsewhere [see, for example, *Him + Her*, 1968–2008; *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*, 2005; or *Extra*, 2011]. Breitz is able to recognise the limiting forces inherent in the idea of being a South African artist, even as she draws from the lessons that the country of her birth have taught her, lessons about what it means to experience power and empathy, guilt and pain. This works not because she denies South Africa's imprint on her, but because she plays a game of cat-and-mouse with an art establishment that might like to pin her down and put her in her place. To use a hip-hop metaphor, her refusal to namecheck South Africa isn't about being a hater; it's about being a true fan. Perhaps then, the artist loves South Africa too much to sacrifice herself at the altar of global conversations that too often devolve into simple-minded and extractive exchanges. To be South African without referencing South Africa is like being a refugee who no longer needs to name the country from which you have escaped. It is, at a certain point, unnecessary. You are different and people are not interested in that difference. They want only to know what seems most interesting. They are seldom interested in the mundane details that make up a life.

Breitz's *Love Story* archives the stories of six people who have escaped. Sarah Ezzat Mardini, who escaped war-torn Syria; José Maria João, a former child soldier from Angola; Mamy Maloba Langa, a survivor from the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Shabeena Francis Saveri, a transgender activist from India; Luis Ernesto Nava Molero, a political dissident from Venezuela; and

Farah Abdi Mohamed, an idealistic young atheist from Somalia. And yet of course it does not tell their stories at all. How is it possible to condense decades into hours? And does it matter if no one listens, if the audience is only interested in a dramatised version of your life? The subjects whose personal narratives are at the heart of *Love Story* have, inevitably, been partially reconstituted by their journeys, by the flavour of the places where they now live. Who these individuals have become is both a testament to – and more important than – where they come from. They are both defined by and bigger than their refugee stories.

In choosing to refract these stories of displacement through the performances of Alec Baldwin and Julianne Moore – two recognisable celebrities – Breitz sets out to reveal something not just about her subjects, but equally about her audience. She turns the camera on the viewer, zooming out so that her frame includes those who consume the refugees' stories. She insists that we consider how we choose to spend our time and where we are willing to invest our attention. Do we watch the condensed Baldwin-and-Moore version of the six stories, or do we slog through the hours-long, real-life accounts shared by the interviewees? Will we follow our instincts and zone out when the refugees speak, allowing the Hollywood actors to draw the majority of our energy and attention (no matter that their tellings of the stories are riven with errors, no matter that their renditions are often woefully inadequate in the face of what the refugees themselves have experienced)?

Either way, the first-person accounts shared by the interviewees persist as archival material within *Love Story* – hours and hours of grief and pain and arduous physical and emotional travail, which would numb the viewer if they weren't accompanied by moments of humour and lightness and joy, memories of family and loved ones, descriptions of tastes and smells, anecdotes about friends and life. Breitz is at pains to accommodate a broad range of human emotion, to avoid foisting only pain and grief and misery on those who might

persist in watching the interviews in full. It is easy to be put off by the duration of the original interviews. It all seems too much. Consumers who decide whether or not to listen to a story based on how much time they have (those who want a story that is 'under seven minutes') will find themselves uncomfortably confronted by *Love Story*. They will perhaps be most drawn to the pap fed to us by the celebrities. The question, of course, is whether those who view the work will treat the Baldwin-Moore montage as the centrepiece, or whether they will understand that something deeper is at play. Regardless, Breitz makes her point. The very structure of the work forces us to acknowledge that we are all guilty – to some extent – of being drawn to the summary. Beyond this, by offering us a choice, Breitz offers us redemption. We can choose not to be callous. We can choose to spend time, to ask questions. Or we can choose to focus only on Baldwin and Moore. We can choose to ignore the hours and hours of interview footage, and in so doing, to perform the kind of complicity that marks conversations about refugees in increasingly hostile political climates.

By presenting us with long interviews that are arduous to watch, then condensing them and offering extracts from them to Hollywood actors, by daring us to listen and then daring us not to, by putting excruciatingly difficult stories into the world, and then having them regurgitated by two impossibly white actors, Breitz suggests that the business of trying to know the world is difficult. The degree of understanding which she calls for is virtually impossible if you are caught up in the tempo of modernity. *Love Story* is about the impossibility of keeping up with and understanding what is 'real' (and what is not) in a world in which everyone is a curator of their own content, each of us liking this – and clicking on that – in order to develop a virtual feed that, as a result of its narrowness and specificity, inevitably leads to insularity and myopia. *Love Story* is about the impossibility of knowing anyone or anything with any certainty. It is about the

indistinguishability of fact and fiction. In Breitz's hands, we realise that all refugee stories are love stories, for what is a love story if not a tale of yearning – to feel more deeply, to know more richly, to be saturated in the consummation of desire. Breitz's work is at once wide-eyed and astute. She manages a delicate and difficult balance. She is a believer, albeit one whose mission is to unearth what cannot be known.

Where Breitz digs into the now, Modisakeng – who sees his role as that of a disruptor and a confronter – digs into and resists history. He refuses to sing the praises of Mandela or Sisulu or of any of the other men who are said to have liberated South Africa. He rejects the story of the 'Rainbow Nation', looking instead into the past preceding apartheid, moving backwards and sideways and always avoiding easy references. In a country where the stories of ordinary people are often absent from public narratives, and from galleries and museums, this is both provocative and counterintuitive.

For Modisakeng, history has left too much business unfinished for a black man like him – a man born in Soweto, the survivor of violence and structural oppression – to ignore. The processes by which the South African nation came into being loom large in his work. I imagine there are few black South Africans who are not preoccupied with the nation and their place within it, as well as with its attendant machinations.

While Modisakeng's work is about black pain and vulnerability – a staple of black art everywhere (especially in this extended Black Lives Matter period) – his references are wide-ranging and often surprising: the migrant labour system, inyangas and the divine, violence, quests for peace. His own body – often photographed in shadow – evokes a history in which the bodies of men like him were tougher than they ought to have been. Looking at these images, it is hard not to think about the uncles and brothers and cousins whose bodies carry scars where Modisakeng's is smooth. Despite the strength, starkness and masculinity of his images, they are a

meditation on the vulnerability and expendability of black male life.

Amongst his more recent works, there is no piece more evocative than a sculpture presented in his *Ditaola* exhibition: Two feet are suspended on a wooden bench as though they were hacked off their owner in the moments after his lynching. In a single image he evokes the history of colonial exploitation in the Belgian Congo (where a common method of punishment involved amputation), but also moves us across space to the United States (where photos of merry crowds celebrating lynchings often depicted black feet dangling in the background), and then fast forwards us to Sierra Leone in the 1990s (where severed limbs were so commonplace in the civil war, that there was an epidemic of double-amputees – children whose arms and legs had been cut off by Foday Sankoh's rebels).

Modisakeng brings a certain steeliness to his work. Like many men who have been raised in South Africa's townships, he is a survivor of violence and so he can look at it with vulnerability. Yet he is also capable of seeing violence in clinical terms. Gunpowder, manacles – he examines the tools of oppression in his sculptures and his photographs. He brings an historian's rigour to his art. He is interested in the details, in what history teaches us about the human capacity for (mis)understanding. In *Passage*, as the boat moves deeper into its watery grave, he demonstrates that he is at once rooted in the grammar of contemporary South African race politics, and capable of floating above it.

To some extent, all of Modisakeng's work is about passages of some kind; *Passage* is simply an explicit acknowledgement of this seminal theme. It is anchored by references to the Middle Passage, the journey across the Atlantic in which up to six million Africans drowned or died on slave ships, ferrying their human cargo from Africa to Europe and the Caribbean. By choosing to work with water imagery, Modisakeng seeks to move beyond the obvious. The last two years have witnessed South African university campuses

alight with protest and flames. This unrest follows decades of fumes and smoke representing dissatisfaction with the status quo. Modisakeng's departure from the metaphor that is most associated with rage, offers opportunities, signalling his connection to a world beyond South Africa, and to experiences that are owned more generally by Africans across the diaspora.

Yet, it is not black South Africans who have of late been drowning at sea. For the most part it has been migrants from the Horn of Africa who have suffered. Indeed, South Africans largely remain in their townships and cities, captive to and beneficiaries of global capital flows that keep them in the country. Modisakeng's work invokes solidarity with Africans who continue to make treacherous crossings – travelling to places most black South Africans will never see. This display of kinship is rarely expected of South Africans. In the face of the xenophobia that has stalked the post-apartheid era, and the generally hostile environment many visitors from other African countries have found upon their arrival in South Africa, Modisakeng's work signals other possibilities. Through his art, he speaks to and with the African diaspora, evoking an African experience that engendered an oppressive and awful legacy but that also created a sense of community amongst Africans in the New World. The experiences of racism, slavery, colonialism and apartheid have remained fairly consistent across space and time and, by marking the Middle Passage, Modisakeng creates a sense of timelessness. *Passage* speaks to an abiding and brutal truth: across time and space, Africans have drowned. Yet his depiction also reminds us of something even larger than the African experience: the human condition. He shows us that the laws of drowning are immutable: to drown is to drown is to drown.

In Modisakeng's hands this reality is not bleak, it is hopeful. It levels the ground and investigates a large question. Like Breitz then, Modisakeng deliberately chooses curiosity over suspicion. Both artists are perceptive and sceptical in the best sense. They

are distrustful of political projects that mobilise national or ethnic identities to mask difference and dissent. At the same time, their work manages to engage local concerns and fears. Both find a language to transcend pessimism by reaching outward – beyond South Africa, beyond history, beyond the personal and the political – towards modes of storytelling that are not afraid of what politics cannot understand or explain.

The works of Breitz and Modisakeng represent a leap of faith. Their practice as artists opens onto unknown spaces, even when it addresses stories that we think we know. Both seem to jump for the same reason, not necessarily because they are believers, but because they want to know. And they land up in remarkably similar terrain. Their installations in the South African Pavilion affirm that that there is something profoundly important about belonging to a particular place. For the refugees and migrants and slaves who are the subjects of their stories, belonging to a place where they can experience love and acceptance is a crucial aspect of being human. Still, both artists imply that being displaced is as much a marker of the human experience as being at home. This is as true for those who have been forced to flee, as it is for those who have never left. The human condition is defined not as much by where you find yourself, as it is defined by having a story. South Africans know this well.

No Shore in Sight: Precarious Journeys and Unbearable Passages in the Moving Image Installations of Candice Breitz and Mohau Modisakeng

M. Neelika Jayawardane

As I began writing on Candice Breitz and Mohau Modisakeng's moving image installations for the South African Pavilion, the newly inaugurated President of the United States, Donald Trump, signed an executive order designed to give the Department of Homeland Security's immigration officers broad powers to prevent those born in seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States. On 27 January 2017, the order went into effect, creating havoc in the lives of Iranian, Iraqi, Libyan, Somali, Sudanese, Syrian and Yemeni visitors with valid visas, refugees who had in fact already undergone stringent vetting processes, or who had already established legal residency in the US. Hamdiyah Al Saeedi, sixty-five, travelling from Qatar to see her son – a newly minted US citizen and a member of the US military – was held for more than thirty-three hours. Homeland Security officers handcuffed her for a portion of that time and denied her the use of a wheelchair, according to a lawyer for her son.[1] At Washington DC's Dulles Airport, a five-year-old schoolboy was allegedly separated from his mother and handcuffed after he was deemed a possible threat. (He was later identified as a US citizen who

lives in Maryland.)[2] Theirs are just two stories of the hundreds of lives that were disrupted by the Executive Order, the overtly stated purpose of which was to "protect its citizens from foreign nationals who intend to commit terrorist attacks in the United States … [from those who] bear hostile attitudes toward it and its founding principles. Much less publicised in the international news is the fact that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) also began raiding homes of undocumented immigrants – most of whom work the backroom jobs on which the U.S. economy depends, and who are raising American-born children – in order to deport them.

It is difficult to appreciate the prescience of the multi-channel, moving image installations that Breitz and Modisakeng are presenting in the South Africa Pavilion in Venice just a couple of months later, without taking into account the ways in which they are intimately connected to these unfolding tragedies. The conceptual frameworks that undergird Breitz's *Love Story* (2016) and Modisakeng's *Passage* (2017) are deeply informed by long views on both international and localised history, socio-economic and political pressures that shape individuals, global flows of desirable commodities and the attendant disposability of the persons used to extract and refashion the raw materials for those commodities.

When Trump's Executive Order was announced, I, along with millions of immigrants who live in the US – both privileged and far less privileged – knew we were entering a new era of fear and insecurity. In Europe too, after an initial outpouring of empathy for Syrian refugees, the tide of welcome soon turned, as neo-Nazis amalgamated behind far-right parties touting anti-immigration platforms. In South Africa, immigrants from other parts of the continent – those who travel vast distances on the strength of the country's twin mythologies of liberation and economic prosperity – continue to be brutally hounded

and killed. But I also knew, through learning about South Africa, that the perpetration of organised state violence against 'others' (often accompanied by the enforced instrumentalisation of the labour of those same 'others'), was hardly a novel occurrence. Breitz and Modisakeng's works help us reflect on the ways in which laws, policies and attitudes within South Africa, the US and Western Europe have relegated the lives of inconvenient 'others' to the margins of consciousness. We realise that in order for the veneers of 'freedom', 'democracy' and the material present to remain, longstanding histories of abduction, forced migration and enslaved labour must remain unacknowledged by official history. We understand, through spending time with their work, that when we see new waves of forced migration, we have only a ghostly memory of a subsumed history to inform us.

During the years leading up to the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, and over subsequent years lived under the apartheid regime, most white South Africans did not believe their country was "really in Africa at all". Rather, it was regarded as "a 'Western' society that just happened – accidentally and inconsequentially, if irritatingly – to be situated at the foot of the dark continent."[3] This belief in the special status of the country influenced subsequent popular, scholarly and political views. During the latter part of the twentieth century, the "insularity, the provincialism, the inward directedness, the self-obsession" resulting from South Africa's many years of existence as a "pariah nation" meant that activists, political players and the greater public were invested in imagining the history of struggle in the country as one with a "particular and particularly irreducible history."[4] Even contemporary South African scholars have argued that the country has had an exceptional experience when it comes to its encounters with European imperialism. However, much like the United States, which bases its founding mythology on the contested concept of manifest destiny, South Africa's settlers

also believed that they were divinely ordained to expand and defend territory. And in both countries, a strong belief in the moral superiority of the white ruling class justified the enslavement of shiploads of people to be used for forced labour on plantations. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the prevailing ideologies of exceptionalism in both countries led to protectionism and immigration policies that reflected each nation's white-supremacist histories.

Acknowledging this status quo – that South Africa was never cut off from global flows of power, the desire for commodities, and attendant exploitative labour practices, and that it has always been entwined within the global flows that created modernity – Breitz and Modisakeng seek out narratives in the interstices, in the spaces between the spectacular and the mundane. To highlight the impact of global politics at the level of personal experience, both artists situate individuals – their bodies, voices and experiences – within larger historical narratives.

Framing perceptions: the role of moving images in constructing 'Africa'

Video art and digital moving image installation art[5] in South Africa are undeniably informed by the micro-politics of film and the role that film played in demarcating racial difference in settler-colonial systems of governance. Historically, the role that film has played – for audiences in the geopolitical west – in perpetuating 'Africa' as the location of the "performing primitive"[6] is considerable. Films depicting indigenous people engaging in dances or rituals have played a significant role in the ways in which we still envision what it means to be 'African'. The proliferation of these films has ensured that even contemporary visitors and voyeurs continue to seek those same ritualised, rhythmic movements of "performative natives".[7] Robert Gordon argues that the camera (first that of the

anthropologist, and later that of the tourist) became "a prophylactic, preventing the indigene from returning the 'gaze'."[8] It allowed visitors from the 'west' to document the 'authenticity' of Africans and their cultural practices without having to interact with these exoticised subjects.[9]

Moving images and the machinery employed in recording, distributing and displaying these images, thus helped construct our views of those deemed 'other'. Recordings made by imperial officers, anthropologists, missionaries and travellers alike – to be subsequently viewed in the metropolises of the colonising country, where they informed the colonised subject's own self-perception – became significant tools for subjecting the bodies, psyches and cultural being of colonised subjects to the rigorous gaze of colonial powers. Although cinema (and sound recordings) were frequently used to illustrate that the indigenous were alarmed and captivated by the 'white man's magic', Gordon reminds us (as Taussig has already theorised), that it was not in fact the 'natives' who were "overawed by cinematography". Rather, it was (and still is) the European settlers themselves who were/are obsessed with the "magic of mechanical reproduction," by means of which the much-exaggerated awe displayed by 'natives' can be read as "morality plays that served the settlers' needs".[10]

Impact of apartheid censorship on film

In South Africa, colonial-era anxieties about the power of moving images were early iterations of the apartheid government's fears about the threats of television and film to governance. Should the public have access to film and television as viewers or, worse, should they access the same technology for making and distributing film and video, thus becoming authors of alternative narratives, the apartheid government knew it would lose control of the white supremacist master narrative. Thus, for

most of the twentieth century, the racist regime had one of the most extensive and repressive film and media censorship systems, known for marrying the strict Calvinist morality of the ruling National Party's founders with the Party's explicit white supremacist agenda.[11]

Even as the nation emerged into a celebrated freedom in the 1990s, its intrusive past – grounded in repressive legal, political, and moral frameworks that were intended to control women's bodies and sexualities, vilify 'other' sexualities, and exclude black South Africans from visualising themselves as powerful subjects essential to the construction of the nation – cast long shadows over the present. Although there has been considerable reform to the regulation of film and video distribution subsequent to the first democratic elections in 1994, remainders of the structures of censorship have meant that apartheid's repressive template continues to infiltrate discourses around how South Africans visualise and process their history and their present.

Contemporary South African video art: infiltrating the (censored) archive

It is in the context of this paradoxical environment that some of South Africa's earliest video practice began to proliferate. The advent of video and digital technology, especially after the 1990s, finally offered South African artists new tools with which to infiltrate the seemingly impenetrable archive that had been so fastidiously regulated, first by colonial authorities and later by the apartheid state. By the first and second decades of the 2000s, artists were exploring a variety of media, including performance art and video "as a new interdisciplinary public political visual language".[12]

When used self-reflexively and critically in relation to the colonial and apartheid archive, performance art has been a tool

of resistance and a means of transgressing dominant social structures. Even within performance practices among black South Africans that predate colonial times, performers acted as vessels for channelling the voices of powerful guardian-figures; these authoritative voices aided those communities to question and reposition the ideologies that were shaping and directing their societies at the time. In South Africa, performance has been used to reveal the ways in which unjust power structures and systems of governance have eroded communities' private and personal spaces. Despite the fact that performance has been traditionally associated, as Nomusa Makhubu argues, "through the anthropological gaze", with the "'primitiveness' of the 'inarticulate' bod[ies]" of colonised others, it has been accepted into articulations of 'modernity' through new media in installations and video art.[13] As such, video art, in particular, has helped usher in new, interdisciplinary visual languages through which to communicate the impact of history on the present and create public spaces that invite personal and national transformation.

The horrific violence that apartheid worked so hard to conceal was uncovered and made public by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). These hearings influenced much South African video art in the 1990s so that by the early 2000s, artists had come to regard the medium of video as one of the most innovative tools of self-examination, a tool for revealing what was behind the slick veneer of the much-touted 'South African miracle' of a peaceful transition of power. The impulse of these artists – in using video to investigate, uncover and trouble conventional truths – worked directly against the state's impulse to offer placating narratives. Whilst the state would rather subsume the unruly remainders of four centuries of colonial genocide, the violent remainders of apartheid, and the neo-colonial present, artists unrelentingly deployed video

to reveal these unpalatable realities. For instance, in an analysis of Jo Ractliffe's video work, *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (drive-by shooting),* Yvette Greslé notes that, given the determined level of obfuscation by the apartheid state, and the absence of an official archive documenting who was brought in for torture and "information extraction", who was employed to extract information and what happened to the bodies of those who did not survive this process, Ractliffe's "affective and performative intervention into historical and political spaces constituted by secrecy and erasure, might be imagined as an alternative archive."[14] *Vlakplaas* was first shown at a conference titled 'The TRC: Commissioning the Past' at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1999, where it was presented in relation to *Prime Evil*, a documentary film about Vlakplaas commander Eugene de Kock.

The first decade of the 2000s also brought forth artistic and scholarly explorations of identity, connecting South Africa's racialised and over-taxonomised identities to global flows of bodies. Moving image works became the go-to technology for artists seeking to question apartheid's racialised taxonomies. Makhubu notes that live performance and video art, particularly those practices in which the body of the artist or other actors are the primary mode of communication, have been "significant in addressing issues of identity … because they create situations that remove boundaries of comfort" between performer and audience.[15] Berni Searle's works are of particular interest in this regard. Writing about Searle's work *Looking Back*, Este De Beer contends that the artist uses her own (naked) body and her unrelenting and directed gaze towards the camera to "invite[s] the gaze, rather than being a passive victim of it". Searle "makes the viewer aware of the act of looking," thematising the role that the observer's gaze plays in the production of the "other" as exotic and available for scrutiny.[16]

In 2017, South Africa enters its twenty-third year of democratic

rule. In the past decade, moving image artists have begun to depart from stories whose subject matter and style Njabulo Ndebele called "the spectacular" in his influential book, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*.[17] Rather than focus on spectacular and monumental subjects, artists are exploring what it means to be marginalised in quieter ways. It is this impetus, and a renewed interest in focusing attention on transnational networks – those intellectual and political contributions and imaginative and ideological influences outside the borders of South Africa – that inform Breitz and Modisakeng's works.

Mohau Modisakeng's *Passage*

Passage refers to a forced migration from centuries past – perhaps the seminal forced migration to which industrial modernity, the European Enlightenment and even our contemporary conceptualisations of individuality and freedom owe their existence. Modisakeng's work also makes reference to a second rupture in the continuity of African history: the Berlin Conference of 1884, which parcelled out sections of Africa to European powers, allowing them to unilaterally control and determine the territorial fragmentation of the African continent. According to Modisakeng's conceptual framework, this historical juncture transformed "the continent into a series of plantations owned by European powers", which led to subsequent decisions to seek out forced labour to develop and work those plantations.[18] *Passage* is thus a provocative meditation on the subsumed and near-erased narratives of those whose lives were forcibly employed in the construction of modernity. It shows us that despite our attempts to drown their memory in incoming tides powered by expansion, development and advancement, their presence continues to haunt us.

His film also reflects on the leaps of faith that women, men

and children have taken – and continue to take – because they have hopes of enhancing their livelihoods by trade, because they were driven into the ocean by fire and destruction in the places they once called home, or because they imagine that other shores across the ocean will offer them a new place to rebuild. Oceanic waters, as theorised by Modisakeng's work, offer the possibility of regeneration and life, but are also able to take life. Modisakeng reminds us that, in Setswana, the journey of life is "referred to as a passage", that the "Setswana word for life, *botshelo*, actually means to cross over", and that "human beings are referred to as *bafeti* (voyagers)."[19] This layer of reference in his work reminds us that life-passages are always fraught. Whether the ocean's surface is calm or disturbed, its power to transport us is always palpable, present in the resistance that waves offer us.

Passage shows a woman with a hawk perched on her arm, a young man in a Trilby hat and a woman wrapped in a Basotho blanket. Their small possessions and their individual ways of gesticulating individuate them. Each of their small signals allows the artist to show observers that these journeymen have their own motivations for this undertaking. We see them as they press their fortunes onto a small, rickety boat, launching it along a waterway. They are dressed in clothes typical of slave labourers from that time period – straw hat, white scarf and bare feet. Historical records of the Cape show that slaves were not permitted shoes, and were mandated to carry a lantern after 10 pm. This requirement for those who are marginal to be visible reflects the limitations imposed on them. At the same time, although marginal persons are highly visible, they are also made invisible: their labour is used without recognition of their contributions, and they are often moved, removed or erased in the face of empire and modernity's needs.

We wonder whether their impulse for freedom alone might be powerful enough to counter towering waves in the open ocean,

whether history will allow their passage. We know this to be a precarious journey, propelled by a desire to return to a place they remember through a sea route, perhaps because freedom, love and belonging lie across an ocean. No matter that the vessel seems ill-suited for such a task; no matter that the freedom they seek is a fantasy; no matter that the 'home' they remember has, most likely, been broken and remade by an imperial army.

But the artist does not permit us to pin our hopes on a fantastical victory. The boat quickly gathers water and sinks, literally, to the bottom of this Passage of Tears. As the lives of the three are claimed by the water, they join millions of other enslaved and forcibly transported people from previous centuries, and those from more recent attempts to reach freedom. Like a chorus of memory lining the River Lethe, they tell us the story of their striving.

As we absorb their memory, striving and their eventual transcendence, we realise that although modernity may seem to be propelled by unsullied winds of progress, the psyches and bodies that were forcibly employed to create this industrial and post-industrial modernity remain with us, haunting the shoreline of our own collective psyche.

Candice Breitz's *Love Story*

If Modisakeng's work connects global colonial currents to South Africa's formative years, invoking subsumed memories of violent subjugation, trans-oceanic transportation and forced labour, Candice Breitz's seven-channel installation *Love Story* situates contemporary South Africa within a broader network of currents that swirl across the globe, depositing people displaced by violence, war and environmental chaos into select geographical locations.

South Africa, the United States and Germany – the three

epicentres of power in which Breitz herself has resided – are the contexts in which the artist chose to film *Love Story*. If cities such as Cape Town, New York and Berlin have provided Breitz with the opportunity to refashion and enhance her subjectivity, it is easy to imagine that there are many others who also dream of the haven offered by these destinations. Breitz met with two interviewees in each of these cities, six people who have been forced to flee their home countries as a result of a wide-ranging set of inhospitable conditions. Despite the divergent origins of the six individuals whose stories are at the core of *Love Story* – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Syria, Somalia, India and Venezuela – the subjects of Breitz's interviews all sought to start new lives in locations that are defined, in the popular imaginary, by their economic and social privilege. Each of the three countries in which Breitz contacted and interviewed her subjects nurtures a similar self-mythology. All three frame themselves as locations of opportunity and freedom. It is no doubt to a large extent these mythical prospects, projected as the marvellous-real, that magnetise those fleeing inhospitable conditions.

Breitz's interviews for *Love Story* draw on a methodology that at first glance alludes to formats that are commonly employed by documentaries, memorials or news shows seeking to generate empathy for the suffering 'other.' However, she realised that her work would be "inadequate" if it only recorded and replayed testimonies, as do other famous sites of commemoration. Thus, *Love Story* initialises audience engagement using testimony, then veers sharply away from these familiar formats, and opens onto a structure that stresses individual stories in their fullness and complexity, persuading us to contemplate our own responses to these stories and to interrogate the media representations that we have come to accept as the norm.

Upon entering *Love Story*, a bench located in a spacious front

room invites us to view footage that is projected cinematically onto a large wall that bisects the exhibition space. There is nothing remarkable about this thus far. But what appears on the screen is startling: we encounter alternating, over-sized performances by Julianne Moore and Alec Baldwin. Our focus is heightened both by the fact that the actors wear simple black attire against a stark green screen backdrop, but also because they have no set, no props or costumes, to enhance their performances, which are as such reduced to their facial expressions and voices. We are mesmerised by the actors, perhaps because they are celebrities, perhaps because they reproduce conventional images of power and beauty.

The construction of the space gradually leads us to reflection on the mechanics that create affect and empathy in film. As one's eyes adjust to the darkness of the room in which the Hollywood stars preside, one slowly becomes aware that there is light emanating from behind the large screen, from a space that can only be accessed via the 'cinema' that is our first experience of *Love Story*.[20] Venturing behind the projected footage into the second space of the installation, we realise – after spending a little time with the six interviews that this second space hosts – that Moore and Baldwin are in fact 'channelling' the narratives archived in these behind-the-screen interviews, whose persons and voices they literally overshadow and dominate within the geography of the work. Small clues connect the Hollywood actors to the interviewees: Shabeena Saveri wears a pair of rhinestone bracelets that seem bizarrely out of place on the elegant Moore. At another moment, Moore draws attention to a silver ring on her index finger, one that we also notice adorning Sarah Mardini's hand. Baldwin wears a pair of sunglasses that appear identical to those worn by Farah Mohamed. In fact, each of the interlocutors in the 'back space' wore an item of personal value during their interview, an item that is borrowed by their celebrity 'channeller'

as s/he re-performs the relevant first-person narrative. The actors wear these symbols of resilience as talismans. They are visual signs that connect the larger-than-life celebrities to six lesser known people, figures that the audience might otherwise not bother to individuate.

Love Story began then, with these interviews of Shabeena Francis Saveri, Mamy Maloba Langa, Sarah Ezzat Mardini, Farah Abdi Mohamed, José Maria João and Luis Ernesto Nava Molero. Each was interviewed for a full day, and the entirety of each spoken narrative – minus Breitz's own interjections – has been maintained in the resulting work of art. The audience is as such invited, should they wish to take the time, to comprehend the six individuals in a relatively unmediated way. As we listen, we realise how important it is that Breitz did not erase sections of the interviews that might at first seem out of place, such as the jokes and light anecdotes that her interlocutors choose to share, thus punctuating the most brutal of stories with moments of everydayness and memory. The personal accounts of the six interviewees as such offer us something other than what we can access via newsreel or blockbuster representations of displaced individuals: None of these interviewees is reduced to a series of tragedies; none is portrayed solely as the "victim of a political crisis".

Having completed the six interviews, Breitz asked the two celebrity actors to 'channel' excerpts from the experiences of Saveri, Langa and Mardini (Moore); and Mohamed, Maria João and Nava Molero (Baldwin). Each actor moves erratically between his/her three narratives, never fully embodying or owning any single character. As one starts to be drawn into a particular story or to find a particular character credible, the actor moves abruptly to the next narrative. One moment we are in a hijra community in Mumbai with Shabeena, the next we are in the dark waters of the Aegean with Sarah, swimming for our lives, pushing

a sinking rubber dinghy filled with sixteen people from the coast of Izmir to the safety of the Greek shore.

As we listen to the interviews with Saveri, Langa, Mardini, Mohamed, Maria João and Nava Molero (each lasts anywhere from three-and-a-half to five hours), we start to recognise sentences and fragments that we have already heard Moore and Baldwin recite. In the mouths of the interviewees, the stories sound less elegant, at times more repetitive, often broken by asides and meanderings away from the central narrative. They are spoken in accents that might require close attention, accents for which we may not have the patience. And none of them subscribe visually to the conventional attractiveness of Moore and Baldwin, professionals who know how to use performative conventions to command our empathy, performers whose narrations of horror and loss are made accessible and smooth by their American English.

The filmed interviews have a collective duration of approximately twenty hours. The Hollywood montage featuring Moore and Baldwin, on the other hand, is an edited and sanitised version of these 'back room' stories, with a duration of a little over an hour. We soon realise, however, that even if we were to spend several hours listening to the personal narrative of Mamy Maloba Langa – who escaped Joseph Kabila's henchmen after they spent a night sexually assaulting her and violating her with a knife – we could never fully comprehend the compounded effects of the thirty years of horror that she has endured. As Sven Beckstette notes, those observers who take the time to contemplate the relationship between the 'back' and 'front' spaces will apprehend – perhaps only subconsciously – "how the dramatic conventions of blockbuster cinema translate a real event or 'true story', since a movie needs to address as many viewers as possible in order to comply with the economic constraints of the film industry – and aims to entertain as well."[21]

In keeping with this observation, Moore and Baldwin can remain 'Wizard of Oz' figures who are all-powerful only for as long as the mechanisms that project them as the sole (and idealised) narrators of experience (the mechanisms that make them appear larger than life), remain concealed.

Although Breitz and Modisakeng both explore narrative threads that chart movement, displacement, dislocation and the attendant physical and psychic violence that accompanies all migrations, they do so from different angles. Breitz focuses on connecting South Africa to global displacements in the contemporary era – revealing the rich, complex and complicated 'inner' lives that are lived behind the two-dimensional narratives that are spat out on television news. Modisakeng narrates a parable of our insatiable need for liberation, but also of our ultimate journey towards transcendence. Seen in this light, rather than a painful finality, we can be hopeful and accepting of our immersion into the great and universal waters of creation; this here, is liberation from suffering and samsara.

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2 "White House Claims Five-year-old boy Detained in US Airport for Hours 'could have posed a security threat.'" *Independent*. 31 January 2017.
3 Neil Lazarus. "The South African Ideology: The Myth of Exceptionalism, the Idea of Renaissance". *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103:4. 2004. 607–628. 610.
4 Ibid, 610–611.
5 I use the terms 'video art' and 'digital moving image installations' since the technology used in creating moving images has changed from the 1990s (video) and the 2000s (digital). Breitz, Modisakeng and other artists mostly use digital recording technology.
6 Robert J. Gordon. "'Captured on Film': Bushmen and the Claptrap of Performative Primitives." *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa.* Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin (eds). San Francisco: University of California Press. 2002, 212–232.
7 Ibid, 212.
8 Ibid, 226.
9 Ibid, 226.
10 Ibid 220.
11 For more on the history of film and video distribution in South Africa, see Patrick Lynn Rivers. "Governing Images: The Politics of Film and Video Distribution in Late-Apartheid and Postapartheid South Africa". *Journal of Film and Video* 59.1. 2007. 19–31. See also Scott Kraft "South Africa Loosens the Reins of Movie Censorship: Free speech: The country's more relaxed approach to language and nudity reflects a fundamental break from its strict, Calvinist past." *Los Angeles Times.* 4 June 1990.
12 Nomusa Makhubu. "Race and the Anxieties of Cultural Obscurity: Meditations on Blackness in South African Performance and Video Art". *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16:1. 2012, 43.
13 Ibid, 42–43.
14 Yvette Greslé. "'Empathic Unsettlement' in the Field of Vision: Jo Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* in Photographs and Video." *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 29 (S1). 2015, 73.
15 Makhubu, 51.
16 Este De Beer. "Spicing South Africa: Exploring the Role of Food and Spices in Berni Searle's Conceptual Art", *Journal of Literary Studies.* 2012, 46.
17 Njabulo Ndebele. *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. 2006.
18 Mohau Modisakeng. "Artwork Proposal: Venice Biennale South African Pavilion 'After Phenomena'". 2017.
19 Ibid.
20 For further discussion of this architecture see Sven Beckstette. "We Are the Others: On Candice Breitz's *Love Story.*" *Candice Breitz: Love Story*. 60.
21 Ibid, 60.

Candice Breitz

Love Story

Candice Breitz
Love Story, 2016
Featuring Alec Baldwin and Julianne Moore
Based on and including interviews with Mamy Maloba Langa (04:15:35), Sarah Ezzat Mardini (02:47:52), José Maria João (03:27:57), Farah Abdi Mohamed (03:32:19), Luis Ernesto Nava Molero (03:49:58) and Shabeena Francis Saveri (03:38:49)
7-Channel Installation: 7 Hard Drives
Duration: 73 minutes, 42 seconds, loop
Commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), Outset Germany (Berlin), Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg
Courtesy Goodman Gallery (Johannesburg), Kaufmann Repetto (Milan), KOW (Berlin), Anna Schwartz Gallery (Melbourne)

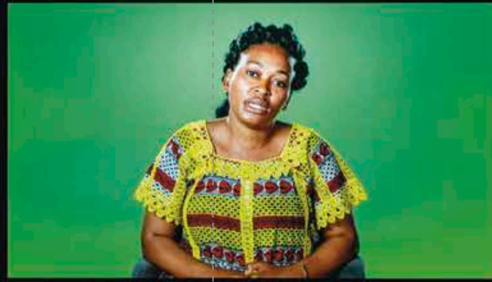
What kind of stories are we willing to hear? What kind of stories move us? Why is it that the same audiences that are driven to tears by fictional blockbusters, remain affectless in the face of actual human suffering?

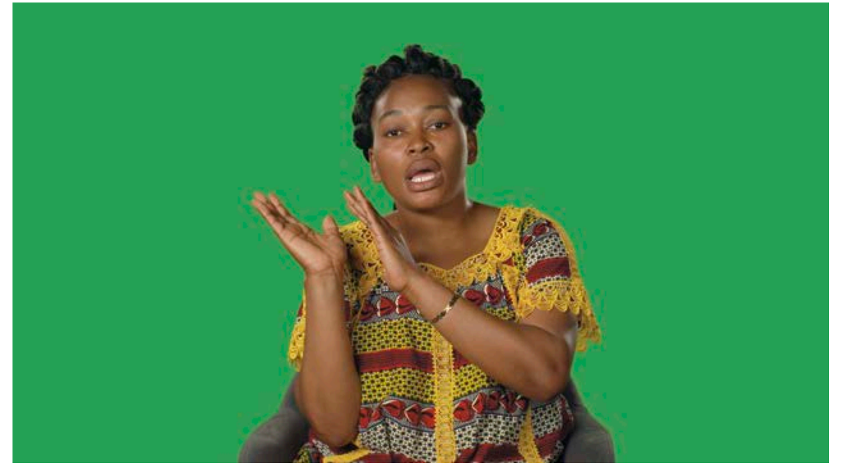
Love Story (2016), a seven-channel installation by Candice Breitz, interrogates the mechanics of identification and the conditions under which empathy is produced. The work is based on the personal narratives of six individuals who have fled their countries in response to a range of oppressive conditions: Sarah Ezzat Mardini, who escaped war-torn Syria; José Maria João, a former child soldier from Angola; Mamy Maloba Langa, a survivor from the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Shabeena Francis Saveri, a transgender activist from India; Luis Ernesto Nava Molero, a political dissident from Venezuela; and Farah Abdi Mohamed, an idealistic young atheist from Somalia. It evokes the global scale of the so-called 'refugee crisis,' evolving out of lengthy interviews conducted with the six participants in the countries where they are seeking or have been granted asylum (two interviews took place in Berlin, two in New York and two in Cape Town).

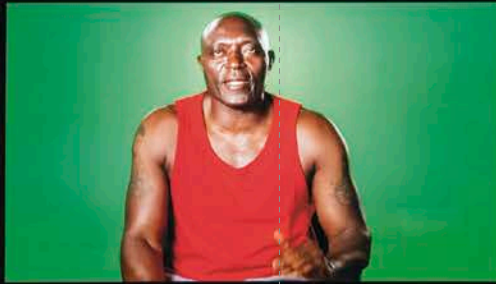
The personal accounts shared by the interviewees are articulated twice by *Love Story*. In the first space of the installation, re-performed fragments from the six interviews are woven into a fast-paced montage featuring Hollywood actors Alec Baldwin and Julianne Moore (who are cast in the work as themselves: 'an actor' and 'an actress'). Each was asked to channel excerpts from

three of the first-person narratives on a green-screen set, without the support of fictional backdrops, costumes, props, accents or interlocutors. Breitz's edit intertwines the six renditions, plotting the diverse socio-political circumstances and personal experiences that prompted the interviewees to leave their countries. Her polished restaging of the six stories strips the source interviews of their depth and nuance, of their imperfect grammar and accented English, provocatively mimicking and exposing the logic by means of which 'true life stories' migrate into popular entertainment. In a second space that is accessible only via the first, the original interviews unfold across six suspended screens in their full duration and complexity, now intimately voiced by the individuals whose lived experience they archive.

Suspending viewers between the gritty firsthand accounts of people who would typically remain nameless and faceless in the media, and an accessible drama featuring two actors who are the very embodiment of visibility, *Love Story* raises questions around how and where our attention is focused. The work deploys the hypervisibility of Moore and Baldwin to amplify stories that might otherwise fail to elicit mainstream attention or empathy. At the same time, it reflects on the callousness of a media-saturated culture in which strong identification with fictional characters and celebrity figures runs parallel to a widespread lack of interest in people facing real world adversity.







Oh! Oh! Love: Candice Breitz's Monologues for Troubled Times

Zoé Whitley

Alfredo:	Love is a heartbeat throughout the universe, mysterious, altering, the torment and delight of my heart.
Violetta:	Oh! Oh! Love!

– "Sempre Libera", Giuseppe Verdi, *La Traviata*

The crepe of the upper lip is what draws you in, before a single uttered word does. Not as a sign of imperfection, but as one of shared humanness, of vulnerability to time, to age, to circumstance – laughter, frowns, screams, puckered tastes and kisses – the travails that make a life. I stare at the larger-than-life face of Julianne Moore. She's more human on screen than ever before: unvarnished, freckled and creased where Hollywood actors typically appear to have been burnished – around the eyes, on the cheeks and especially around the mouth. This makes her words utterly convincing. I believe her story implicitly. Even though the words are not her own. Moore is a medium. The personal narratives of three people are channelled through her: Shabeena Francis Saveri, from Mumbai, India; Mamy Maloba Langa who was born

in Ntala, Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Sarah Ezzat Mardini from Damascus, Syria. They are seeking asylum in New York City, Cape Town and Berlin respectively. Moore alternates on screen with fellow actor Alec Baldwin who ventriloquises excerpts from the harrowing life experiences of Luis Ernesto Nava Molero (Venezuela), Farah Abdi Mohamed (Somalia) and José Maria João (Angola) – all with self-aware Baldwin swagger. Over a feature-length duration of seventy-three minutes, Moore and Baldwin deliver matter-of-fact, deeply emotive monologues, performing the lives and hardships of others in the first person. Armed with the talismanic presence of personal effects borrowed from the original storytellers, the actors are a visual manifestation of cognitive dissonance, audio-visual bait-and-switch.

Candice Breitz's *Love Story* (2016), a seven-channel video installation, initially presents itself along traditional Hollywood cinematic proportions. The artist is invested in "making visible the mechanics of exceptionalism, whiteness perhaps being the most obvious visual marker of privilege."[1] In an interview in Johannesburg, Breitz pre-empts me with characteristic candour, asking, "Who am I, a white South African woman, to speak on behalf of anyone else?"[2] It's disarming. But it's also honest. She's posing the question not so as to avoid it, but in order to confront it. What price does white privilege exact? What price does silence exact in the face of fear, oppression and injustice experienced by others? Why are the lives of some valued more than those of others, eliciting more pathos in the face of suffering? To whose cries do we collectively respond? We can and should still ask these questions, but the artist has already asked them of herself, and her answers move beyond mere rhetoric. They are emphatically present in the work. While Breitz hasn't *more* right to lay claim to certain narratives, she can marshal her own position and point of view to focus our attention on stories that we might otherwise choose not to hear.

There are many well-worn Hollywood film genres: Period costume drama. Teen slasher. Rom-com. Buddy action. Breitz zooms in on a sub-genre that is ubiquitous but infrequently acknowledged: African love story. You may never have heard it described as such, but you know it when you see it. It's the audio-visual accompaniment to Binyavanga Wainaina's script, "How to Write about Africa".[3] An unsuspecting white tourist/intrepid journalist/selfless NGO volunteer/rakish arms trader gets caught up in the socio-political drama of a named (or nameless, no matter) African country.[4] Cue the outbreak of storm-, famine- or drought-induced desperation/violence/disease (delete as appropriate). And yet, against all odds, the white protagonist almost certainly finds, as Rihanna sings, love in a hopeless place. South African actor Charlize Theron and Spanish actor Javier Bardem find romance in Liberia (*The Last Face*); Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Connelly share on-screen chemistry in Sierra Leone (*Blood Diamond*); Kim Basinger and Vincent Perez start a new life in Kenya (*I Dreamed*

of Africa). Each of these blockbuster titles – and many others besides – populates a dramatic African backdrop with recognisable Hollywood personalities, calling to mind a strategy that cultural critic bell hooks has astutely critiqued, one that invariably guarantees "that the [audience] will not become more enthralled by the images of Otherness than those of whiteness."[5] hooks refers to the logic that drives this genre as one of 'defamiliarisation', whereby the foreignness of the setting "distances us from whiteness so that we will return to it more intently."[6]

In addition to race, one can also riff on the privileges that attend to recognisability. The interviewees who appear in *Love Story* each recorded a personal message that Breitz promised to relay to the relevant Hollywood actor (who would be channelling edited versions of their stories). Admitting that she doesn't know exactly why Moore is renowned, Mamy Maloba Langa nevertheless imparts something of herself to the actor. She acknowledges that given Moore's celebrity status and visibility it is both *what* and *who*

Moore is that might allow her own story to have a wider reach: "My message to Julie … I really don't know much about her, but what I know, because they're famous people, because she's a famous one (all over the news, TV), my message is that I know that when she will listen to this story and share it with the world, it won't be the same as if it were just me – Mamy – coming to stand here to share my story … I don't think all those nice people would come just to listen to my story, I don't think so … But I think, because of what she is, because of who she is, I know that sharing my story will be something, you know, something nice that people will come and hear, because she's a famous one …"

That *something* – the social and emotional value, the attention that we "nice people" pay – is a rich area of study, because how and to whom we pay attention, show compassion and demonstrate empathy, has serious socio-economic implications. In her thinking around *Love Story*, Breitz builds on philosopher Georg Franck's hypothesis that material wealth is rapidly being replaced by "mental capitalism": "Dedicated attentiveness imparts dignity to the person receiving the attention. This alone makes receiving somebody's benevolent attention a most highly valued good."[7] Though Franck tends to assume a universal subject (leaving unsettled the matter of how different individuals have fluctuating access to attention), he poses useful questions regarding how we invest our time in a neoliberal economy. What kind of individual does attention stick to? In Moore and Baldwin, Breitz offers us two specimens of the kind of individuality that successfully attracts our attention. The exceptional individual occupies centre stage within our economy of images: those in possession of a particular beauty and magnetism, of athletic prowess, of political or financial power. And the more you are regarded as exceptional in our media culture, the more people are willing to invest in you materially and emotionally.

"Nobody is inherently exceptional," of course, as Breitz herself has pointed out. "We typically have access to exceptional status via

being born into privileged social and economic circumstances, via entering the world on favourable terms. The exceptional individual is more often than not the beneficiary of whiteness and, as such, has access to particular tools of self-narration." The exceptional individual, for one thing, is able to perpetuate the myth of being self-made, rather than registering his or her belonging to an interconnected community. Franck concludes that, "Receiving alert attentiveness means becoming part of another world."[8] His analysis tallies with hooks's observation that, "Movies not only provide a narrative for specific discourses of race, sex and class, they provide a shared experience, a common starting point from which diverse audiences can dialogue about these charged issues."[9] Indeed, psychologist James Cutting has developed a mathematically sound analysis for studying a sample of 150 high-grossing Hollywood cinematic releases, demonstrating a clear pattern according to which film editing and management of scene length can "resonate with the rhythm of human attention spans."[10]

Beneath the Hollywood veneer that is our first experience of *Love Story*, the layered work unfolds further on six more modestly scaled screens. Here we meet the genuine people behind the dramatisation that has been offered by Moore and Baldwin. Having previously been dwarfed by the magnified presence of A-list celebrities, we are now face-to-face with a series of intimate interviews, invited to engage at eye-level with approximately twenty hours of documentary footage. While the words delivered by Moore and Baldwin in the first space of the installation are cinematically amplified, the anecdotes of the interviewees can only be heard over headphones, by a maximum of three people at a time. This human reality – tucked away behind the great Hollywood machine – offers us an entirely different version of the six narratives that are compressed within the Baldwin-Moore montage. The mechanics of packaged identification and empathy give way to a more nuanced human vulnerability, to testimonies that yield their richness only

to those who are willing to invest considerable time and energy in them. I'm reminded here of literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, who describes "the word in language" as being "half someone else's"[11]. Bakhtin reminds us that the negotiation of power is always inherent to communication. Our words are not only our own, but also come to belong symbolically to those who receive them: "[The word] exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own."[12]

Mindful of this, Breitz introduces us to a range of subjects for whom the presentation of immaculate, manicured selves – preened and camera-ready, armed with rehearsed and easily memorable soundbites – is not the end goal: "I wanted *Love Story* to preserve and dignify the stories that are so generously shared by the interviewees, no matter how hard these can be to hear. Mamy, for example – having described in intimate and gruelling detail the sexual and psychological violence to which she was subjected

before fleeing Kinshasa – explicitly insisted, during the course of her interview, on how important it was to her to share the minute details of her ordeal with an audience: 'Candice, it's really important that people know exactly what these men did to me. I want everybody to know that they ripped up every family photograph I had in my home, that they made me drink litres and litres of water to torture me and to weaken me. If I leave out these terrible details, people will not understand the horror that we experience as women'."[13]
Is it possible to ghost-write oneself into subjectivity? Can the deployment of white privilege as a platform for those who might otherwise remain unheard overcome the reification that comes with whiteness? bell hooks has this to say: "As cultural critics proclaim this post-modern era the age of nomadism, the time when fixed identities and boundaries lose their meaning and everything is in flux, when border crossing is the order of the day, the real truth is that most people find it very difficult to journey away from familiar and fixed boundaries, particularly class locations. In this age of

mixing and hybridity, popular culture, particularly the world of movies, constitutes a new frontier providing a sense of movement, of pulling away from the familiar and journeying into and beyond the world of the other."[14]

Love Story stages and exaggerates our general inattentiveness. In today's too-long-didn't-read, time-poor culture, screen time relentlessly captures then splinters our attention. Offering an apt metaphor for the empathy gap that results, Breitz chooses to preserve the irreducibility of the original interviews, presenting us with stories that are impossible to absorb and process in a single sitting, if ever. How can one ever grasp the entirety of what Mamy or José have lived through? One cannot. How many people can personally relate to being a middle-class teenager like Sarah, once preoccupied with shopping for accessories and antiques back home in Damascus, now tentatively building a new life in Berlin, having been forced to flee her country? In truth, this is the experience of far too many young people worldwide, though it is an experience that is likely unknown to those reading (or writing) this text. "Even with the best of intentions," Breitz reflects, "those of us who live comfortable lives will never truly be able to comprehend what it might be like to watch dozens of people die before you, or to watch the expressions on the faces of your children as they observe you being relentlessly brutalised. The unwieldy duration of the footage that is archived in *Love Story* is intended to point to the magnitude of the lived experience that is encapsulated in the six narratives, to infer the impossibility of ever being able to truly grasp and digest these stories in the full range of their nuance and complexity. The sheer duration of the footage denies those experiencing *Love Story* the gratification and sense of fullness that mainstream storytelling has trained us to expect. These are not stories that can be easily owned by their audience."

And this is by design: we may invest some of our precious time in accessing the work, seduced first by Moore and Baldwin, and then

perhaps drawn into hearing the individual stories directly from the mouths of the affected. But ultimately ownership of the stories is resolutely retained by those who have lived them. The interviewees remain the only authentic possessors of their lived experience.

Breitz's amplification of the irreconcilable distance separating dramatised narration from lived experience, is both artistic and editorial: "Often when we encounter interviews with survivors of socio-political crises or trauma of some kind, editorial decisions regarding what information is relevant (or not) have already been made for us. The editor brings a structure to narratives that might otherwise resist easy comprehension, imposing a grammar that packages the unimaginable in comfortable form. I wanted to resist offering that easy comfort to viewers as they engage the interviews that are at the heart of *Love Story."*

Breitz instead provides us with a hagiography of those who have had their lives stripped of material comfort through persecution, suffering, forced imprisonment and forbidden loving. The tender trepidation of Farah Abdi Mohamed in professing his atheism transforms non-belief into the ultimate form of unrequited love; the threat of rejection from the family circle. Will we be seduced by the Hollywood formula that favours celebrations of the triumph of the human spirit over strife, to the exclusion of documentary reality? Do we want to be seen as – and to perceive ourselves as – good people? Does our "niceness" extend no further than Moore and Baldwin? I can provide no better conclusion than the artist's own voice in my ear: "As I got to know the six interviewees and to familiarise myself with their stories, I noticed that above and beyond the specificity of their narratives (and the particular challenges of the personal journey that each has navigated), there is an intensity that they all share … An insistence on the possibility of transcending dire circumstances, a refusal to be bowed by oppression, a striving – at times against all odds – towards more liveable lives, the utter conviction that things could be better elsewhere. I can only describe

this force – which manifests over and over again in the stories shared by the interviewees – as something like love; a love for life, a love for family, a love for god, a love for expression, a love for being on this fucked-up planet despite everything. The desire to live and love without encumbrance is profoundly and emotionally insistent throughout the *Love Story* interviews. It is a refusal to succumb to darkness, an insistence on remaining human at all costs."

Candice Breitz's *Love Story* trusts us to be a receptive audience rather than an indifferent one. Ultimately, we are all performing versions of ourselves, seeking approval and looking for something very much like love.

1 Zoé Whitley interview with Candice Breitz, Cape Town, South Africa: 20 February 2017.
2 Zoé Whitley interview with Candice Breitz, Johannesburg, South Africa: 12 September 2015.
3 Binyavanga Wainaina. "How to Write about Africa". *Granta 92: The View from Africa*. 2006.
4 Needless to say, other continents comprising the global South can easily be interchanged …
5 bell hooks. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Toronto: Between the Lines. 1992: 28–29.
6 Ibid.
7 Georg Franck. *The Economy of Attention*. 1999.
8 Ibid.
9 bell hooks. *Reel to Real: Race, Class and Sex at the Movies.* London: Routledge. 1996, 2.
10 James E. Cutting, Jordan E. DeLong and Christine E. Nothelfer. "Attention and the Evolution of Hollywood Film". *Psychological Science*. 5 February 2010.
11 Mikhail Bakhtin. *Dialogic Imagination* (Michael Holquist, ed.). Austin: University of Texas Press. 1981: 293.
12 Ibid, 294.
13 Zoé Whitley interview with Candice Breitz, Cape Town, South Africa. 20 February 2017.
14 bell hooks. *Reel to Real: Race, Class and Sex at the Movies.* London: Routledge. 1996, 2.

Farah Abdi Mohamed

Interviewed in Berlin
on 18 October 2015
Fled Somalia
Seeking asylum in Berlin, Germany

Farah Abdi Mohamed was born in Somalia in 1988. His father was killed in tribal conflict while his mother was pregnant with him. Raised by a hardworking single parent in a conservative religious community, he was expected to grow up to be a devout Muslim. As a young child, Farah made immense efforts to "find signs" that might confirm the existence of God. Unable to find such signs, and looking around himself – at the mess of tribal war, poverty and failed nationhood that characterised the Somalia of his childhood – Farah concluded that there could not be a God. His inability to find faith was accompanied by anxiety and fear. It became clear to him at an early age, that it was dangerous to express doubt. A confession of non-belief would, at best, have condemned him to a life of stigma and isolation. At worst, there was a high likelihood that members of his extended family would feel obliged to end his life to prevent him from poisoning the minds of others, in a community in which the death penalty is viewed as appropriate punishment for those who renounce their faith.

Searching online as a teenager, Farah came across words such as 'atheist' and 'atheism', and was comforted by the discovery that there were others that had lost their faith or failed to find faith. As his English improved – largely via use of the internet – a larger world grew visible to him. His voracious online reading was accompanied by exposure to television series such as *Lost*, *Survivor* and *Grey's Anatomy*, which piqued his curiosity about life beyond Somalia. When Farah could no longer stand having to feign religiosity and attend prayers five times a day, he ran away to Egypt to study. Finding that conditions were not much better for atheists in Egypt, he gradually came to the decision to risk the journey across the Mediterranean to Europe. On his first attempt to leave Cairo, he was captured and thrown into jail for seventeen days. Upon his release (thanks to the intervention of the UNHCR), he paid smugglers to board him onto a rickety fishing boat in Port Said, alongside 322 other refugees, braving a week-long journey across the ocean (for much of which there was insufficient water and food on board) in a desperate bid to get to Germany.

Farah arrived in Berlin in September 2015 and is currently seeking asylum in Germany. He is finally able to speak his mind freely within a new circle of friends. He nevertheless continues to fear for his life, given the conservative religious views prevalent within the Somali community in Berlin. As such, he chose to wear a disguise to conceal his identity for this interview, in which he speaks out publicly for the first time about having left the Islamic faith. Farah Abdi Mohamed is an assumed name.

Duration of interview – 03:32:19

Sarah Ezzat Mardini

Interviewed in Berlin
on 18 October 2015
Fled Damascus, Syria
Granted asylum in Berlin, Germany

Sarah Ezzat Mardini was born in Damascus in 1995. From the age of five, she and her sister Yusra were trained by their father – a professional swimming coach – to be competitive swimmers. Both started swimming for the Syrian national swimming team at an early age. The highlight of Sarah's athletic career came when she won a silver medal at a championship in Egypt at the age of twelve, after which she and other members of the national team were invited for a personal audience with Bashar al-Assad, the president of Syria.

When war broke out in Syria, Sarah's family lost their home, and her father was forced to take a job in Jordan, leaving his wife and three daughters behind in Damascus. Life grew increasingly difficult. As friends started to leave the country to seek safety and a better future, Sarah and Yusra gradually convinced their parents to allow them to risk the journey to Europe.

Flying from Syria to Turkey via Lebanon in August 2015, the sisters made contact with smugglers in Istanbul. The smugglers transported them from Istanbul to Izmir. After a wait of four days and a first failed attempt to make the crossing over the Aegean from Turkey to Greece, Sarah and Yusra were among a group of twenty people that the smugglers loaded onto a flimsy rubber dinghy (which was designed for eight passengers). Few within the group –which consisted of sixteen men, three young women and a baby – could swim. Within fifteen minutes, the motor had failed and the boat started to fill with water. As those on board started to pray feverishly, Sarah courageously jumped into the night sea and started to push the boat in the direction of Greece. Yusra and a handful of others joined her in the dark water. After three and a half hours of strenuous swimming, they had managed to guide the boat safely to the shore of Lesbos, saving twenty lives. In her interview, Sarah vividly describes the Aegean crossing, as well as the subsequent journey that the sisters made across Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary and Austria en route to Germany.

Sarah and Yusra arrived in Berlin in September 2015. Their parents and younger sister were able to join them in December 2015. The family has applied for asylum in Germany. Sarah is currently studying German and is a passionate member of the Refugee Club Impulse, a vibrant theatre group that was established by refugees and advocates for refugee rights. She spends much of her time on the island of Lesbos volunteering with ERCI (Emergency Response Centre International), a non-profit organisation that provides humanitarian aid to refugees arriving in Greece. Sarah is a proud Arab who resents the rich Arab countries for their poor treatment of Syrian refugees. She is an observant Muslim. She is opinionated and outspoken. She plans to study journalism (with a focus on human rights), and to return to Syria when it becomes safe to do so.

Duration of interview – 02:47:52

Luis Ernesto Nava Molero

Interviewed in New York City
on 13 November 2015
Fled Caracas, Venezuela
Granted asylum in New York, USA

Born in 1960 in Maracaibo, Venezuela, Luis Ernesto Nava Molero was an effeminate child who was relentlessly bullied and taunted by other children, but also sexually abused by his stepfather, who stayed home with the kids while his young mother worked long shifts at the local Chinese restaurant to support the family. His fear of disappointing his deeply homophobic mother, as well as his own internalisation of the homophobia that was perpetuated by the Catholic Church, ensured that he kept silent about the abuse. He was convinced that he deserved it. His stepfather did not accompany the family when Luis's mother decided to relocate herself to Caracas with the children to seek a better life, but Luis continued to be a victim of harassment in the capital city, where he was persistently at risk in an oppressively macho culture. A failed attempt to "become a straight person" by enrolling himself in a military academy eventually led him to the sanctuary of university life.

A promising, politically minded student (who looked to figures like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro as role models in the utopian early years following the Cuban Revolution), Luis soon won a scholarship to study in the Soviet Union. He arrived in Kyiv to study international economic relations as Mikhail Gorbachev was ascending to power, witnessing first-hand the growing disparities between the ideals of the Communist Party and the realities of Soviet life. He returned to Caracas in 1989, a few days prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, still a keen supporter of the theoretical potential of socialism.

Hugo Chávez's rise to power soon led to disillusionment, as Chávez's paramilitary regime rapidly became dictatorial and aggressive, often violently oppressing political opposition. Luis was offered a prestigious professorship at the Universidad Simón Bolívar. He continued to live his public and academic life very much in the closet, fearing the repercussions of coming out. Refusing to be silenced in his critique of Chávez, Luis was brutally assaulted by three men late one night as he left campus. The attack was intended to teach him a lesson for "being a mouthpiece of antipatriotic capitalist propaganda". "Fuck your mother, Professor Nava, you little faggot, nobody needs you here."

Fearing for his safety, Luis fled to the United States, where he was granted asylum as a political dissident. Today Luis lives in New York City, where he advocates for others seeking refuge and freedom in the United States, and works as an activist in the LGBT immigrant community.

Duration of interview – 03:49:58

Shabeena Francis Saveri

Interviewed in New York City
on 14 November 2015
Fled Mumbai, India
Seeking asylum in New York, USA

Shabeena Francis Saveri was born in Mumbai, a son to her Hindu mother and Catholic father. She realised early in her childhood that there was "a girl trapped inside her". Intensely unhappy with her boyhood, she dreamed of growing up to live a "regular, mainstream life" as a woman.

As a child, Shabeena was intrigued by the local hijra community. By the time she was a teenager, she had joined the community and begun her own life as a hijra. Hijras define themselves as a third gender, neither men nor women. They have held a place within Indian culture for centuries (as recorded in epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) and are believed to have powers to bless or curse others. Under British colonial rule, hijras were severely stigmatised and ostracised from mainstream Indian society. Since then, they have had little access to social support (education, employment, healthcare) and virtually no legal protection. Furthermore, under a British colonial law that is still enforced, non-heterosexual sex remains illegal in India. Any sexual act that is considered 'against the order of nature' is punishable by imprisonment. Internally, hijra communities are organised according to a strict hierarchy. Each hijra has a guru who expects full obedience, and who collects a large portion of the income generated by the hijras who are her disciples. Hijras typically earn their income by dancing at weddings and births, begging (which includes extorting money from people on the streets) and through sex work.

Frustrated with the many limitations imposed on hijras, and determined to live a more dignified life, Shabeena and a friend founded the non-profit Dai Welfare Society in 1999, intent on fostering awareness and prevention of HIV (and other sexually transmitted diseases) within hijra communities. Soon after founding Dai, however, Shabeena was subjected to blackmail and physical abuse within her own community, perpetrated by a hijra superior who attempted to gain access to the government funds that had been designated for the organisation. Aware of other possible ways of living her life (she had by now learned, via the internet, about the existence of transgender identity in Western countries), Shabeena found it increasingly difficult to tolerate the hierarchical nature of hijra life. Looking to lead a more independent life, and to escape stigma, Shabeena broke her ties with the hijra community and fled to Chennai. Against all odds, she decided to pursue an academic career. In 2013, she was awarded a PhD for a dissertation that focused on the transgender movement in Tamil Nadu, India. She has since shared her ground-breaking research at conferences and symposia around the world.

The lack of legal protection and basic human rights for transgender people in India – and related threats of violence – prompted Shabeena's decision to leave India. She arrived in New York City in June 2015, and is currently applying for political asylum in the United States. Today, Shabeena lives her life as a "regular, mainstream woman" and feels that she has completed her personal journey. She shares her full story openly for the first time in this interview.

Duration of interview – 03:38:49

José Maria João

Interviewed in Cape Town
on 13 December 2015
Fled Angola
Granted refugee status first in Namibia,
and then in South Africa

José Maria João was born in an impoverished village in northern Angola in 1970, a few years before Angola achieved independence from Portugal. His childhood was embedded in the Angolan Civil War, during which MPLA and UNITA – two of the revolutionary movements that fought to topple the Portuguese colonial regime – jostled for political power over a period of twenty-seven years. José's family could not afford to educate him. From the age of ten he was sent barefoot to the closest market every day (ten kilometres away from home), where he sold fruit to help support his family.

At the age of twelve or thirteen, he – along with many other young boys – was violently abducted from the market (those who resisted were killed), thrown in the back of a truck and taken to a camp in the bush to join UNITA's rebel militia (a militia that sought to unseat the MPLA government via guerrilla warfare). On their second day in the camp, the children were each given an AK47, and by day two were participating in frequent and bloody night assaults, the aim being to take MPLA villages for UNITA.

For more than a decade, José served as a soldier in captivity. Child soldiers were indoctrinated and stripped of their humanity. They were frequently made to witness and participate in savage killings of children who had rebelled or attempted escape. There was no possibility for contact with family or any reality beyond the bush camp. Following orders was the only way to survive. José's physical strength soon singled him out for special night training sessions, during which he was trained to embody fierce animal spirits so as to be able to lead troops ferociously into battle – "They change your mind, you start to forget that somebody gave birth to you. You feel like you were just born in the air and fell to earth. Your mind is not there anymore." José was both a witness to – and the perpetrator of – countless killings during his time with UNITA. Around 1994, he started to hear his mother's voice in dreams, dreams that would haunt him over several years ("Don't kill people, it's not good, killing people is not good, you will lose your life, you must leave ..."), until he finally found the courage to flee the camp around 1997, late at night. He ran through the bush for five days to reach Namibia, burying his AK47 before he crossed the border.

Today, José is a much-loved bouncer at The Power & The Glory, a trendy bar in Cape Town. He spends his downtime volunteering at a soup kitchen for homeless children. He sports a gold tooth (inspired by a Cuban soldier whom he met during the war), as well as a sizeable tattoo of Nelson Mandela on his right bicep. Every morning at the crack of dawn, José climbs Table Mountain, an activity he regards both as his breakfast ritual and his source of inner peace.

Duration of interview – 03:27:57

Mamy Maloba Langa

Interviewed in Cape Town
on 12 December 2015
Fled Kinshasa, Democratic Republic
of the Congo
Seeking asylum in Cape Town, South Africa

Born in the village of Ntala in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mamy grew up in a family that spoke Lingala and French. Soon after her birth, the family relocated to Kinshasa, where Mamy was raised. When her father took a second wife during her teen years, Mamy's heartbroken mother left the family, abandoning her children to a stepmother who treated Mamy and her siblings with cruelty. At eighteen, Mamy could no longer tolerate the mistreatment and moved in with her husband-to-be, Foster.

Foster was making a comfortable living working as a trusted bodyguard to Jean-Pierre Bemba, the wealthy and charismatic leader of the political party that represented the strongest opposition to then President Joseph Kabila. During the heated run-up to the presidential election of 2006 – an election in which Bemba and Kabila were the two frontrunners – Mamy's husband fled Kinshasa, leaving her alone with her twin babies. It was common knowledge within political circles that Kabila would exact bloody revenge on the private militia of Bemba if he were to win the election, which he did. With her husband in hiding and out of contact, that revenge was instead brutally visited on Mamy. Seeking her husband, Kabila's thugs raided her house in the middle of the night. In the presence of her children and her young sister, Mamy was brutally tortured and abused by four men, to "send a message to her husband".

In dire condition and fearing for the lives of her children, Mamy fled to Lubumbashi, where she made contact with a smuggler who offered to get her out of the country illegally, though the destination of the journey was never made clear. After braving a suffocating five-day journey in the back of a truck, during which she was forced to physically silence her children, she found herself in Johannesburg. She managed to reunite with her husband in South Africa, thanks to the efforts of a friendly pastor, only to soon after be badly injured by a rampaging crowd during the xenophobic attacks that took place in Johannesburg in 2008. That experience prompted the family to move to Cape Town in 2009, where a few years of stability finally followed. In 2013, her husband Foster was shot in the face and killed during a nightshift at the Cape Town club where he was employed as a manager. No witnesses came forward to support Mamy's case, although the identity of the killer was well-known within the community.

Today Mamy lives with her twins Fortune and Fortuna and her son Miracle in Cape Town. She must make the long journey across the country to Pretoria every three to six months to renew the documents that define her as an asylum seeker. Nine years after her arrival in South Africa, the country has yet to grant her refugee status or to offer her asylum, although women who have been subject to sexual violence as an instrument of political vengeance or war are clearly eligible for asylum and support.

Duration of interview – 04:15:35

Mohau Modisakeng

Passage

Mohau Modisakeng
Passage, 2017
Featuring Mohau Modisakeng, Aphiwe Mpahleni and Lesoko Seabe
3-Channel Installation
Duration: 20 minutes
Commissioned by the South African Department of Arts and Culture on the occasion of the Biennale Arte 2017
Courtesy Whatiftheworld Gallery (Cape Town), Galerie Ron Mandos (Amsterdam), Tyburn Gallery (London)

Passage (2017) by Mohau Modisakeng, is a three-channel projection that meditates on slavery's dismemberment of African identity and its enduring erasure of personal histories.

In each of the artwork's three projections, we are confronted with a character – a woman with a hawk perched on her arm, a young man in a trilby hat and a woman wrapped in a Basotho blanket. The arched shape of the boat frames each passenger, with their heads pointed towards the prow of the boat; they are each traveling with a single possession. As the passengers lie motionless on their backs, looking up at the sky, they begin to perform a series of actions that move between gestures of struggle and resignation. A pool of water gradually forms beneath their bodies. The rising water gradually floods the well of the boat, eventually leaving the passengers submerged while the boat slowly sinks and eventually disappears.

In *Passage*, the ebb and flow of water, as both life-giving and deadly, symbolises the many who have arrived or departed from South Africa in trade, as cargo or as transient bodies belonging to no particular state. In South Africa, systems of indentured labour and slavery were instituted by the Cape Colony in 1652 to meet the growing demand for labour. Dutch settlers imported people from the Indian subcontinent, Indonesia, Madagascar, East Africa and Angola, putting them to work on plantations and at ports.

South Africa became a jostling ground between the Dutch and British, its native people rendered as mere commodities moving through the establishment of an industrialised mining economy, as labourers and as soldiers in the Anglo-Boer and World Wars.

In Setswana the experience of life is referred to as a 'passage'. The Setswana word for life, *botshelo*, means 'to cross over'. As such, all human beings are referred to as *bafeti* (voyagers), a word that points to the fact that the experience of life is transient; it has a beginning and an end, as with any voyage.

Passage (2017) was commissioned by the South African Department of Arts and Culture on the occasion of the 57th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia.

The Rock God of the Sea

Hlonipha Mokoena

Even the poetry of Cape Town begins with an apparition:

I spoke, when rising through the darkened air,
Appalled, we saw a hideous phantom glare;
High and enormous over the flood he towered,
And thwart our way with sullen aspect lowered.
An earthy paleness over his cheeks was spread,
Erect uprose his hairs of withered red;
Writhing to speak, his sable lips disclose,
Sharp and disjoined, his gnashing teeth's blue rows;
His haggard beard flowed quivering on the wind,
Revenge and horror in his mien combined;
His clouded front, by withering lightnings scared,
The inward anguish of his soul declared.

– Translation by William Julius Mickle of Luís de Camões's epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (*The Lusiads*), Canto V.[1]

Horrors. Monstrosities. Vindictiveness. Fear. It's all there in the Cape of Good Hope's beginnings as the forbidding barrier to voyagers who wanted to reach the East. Later Adamastor – the giant created

in Camões's imagination – would become a myth. In the poem itself, it is the telling of his story of love lost and exile that releases him from his banishment and anger. The rock god of the sea relinquishes his secrets as soon as he tells the Portuguese sailors his sorrows. Thus, even at the origins of our country, storytelling was restorative, it was cathartic, a way to release the demons. Yet, in the original poem once the rock giant tells his story he evaporates and thus opens the way for sailors and adventurers to dock at the Cape. He is therefore also our betrayer. How could he have given up his powers, his menace, his strength and given way to colonisers and slavers? South African stories are never simple. He is our Janus god – two faces, each looking in a different direction. Salvation and damnation all wrapped in one. That is our sea; that is the Cape of Good Hope; that is Cape Town. And this is just the poetry. In their pursuit of a route to the East, the Portuguese and the Dutch looked to the Cape as an *entrepôt*. But as with other colonising desires, this search for a route to eastern riches implied also the traffic in human beings. Once the Dutch had won the voyage race and established their refueling station, it didn't take long for them to start importing slaves. 1658. Another passage that forged the Cape of Good Hope.

This time there was no rock god of the sea to prevent this misadventure. Then came Islam too. Henceforth, the sea at the Cape would also acquire the flavours of nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon. 'Letjon of Bali', 'Simon of Ceylon', 'Roosje of Samarang', and 'Slammat of Mozambique': these are the new names that came in with the tide of spices and slavery. New names that would be etched onto the landscape of the Cape and the gravesite, Tana Baru (meaning 'new place' or 'new ground' in Bahasa Melayu) from which so much of the Cape landscape, fauna and flora has been painted and described. To stand at any point on the southernmost tip of the continent was to stand on 'new ground', because it was a place in which a new language, a new people, a new identity were being formed even while it was being imprisoned by slavery. Mohau

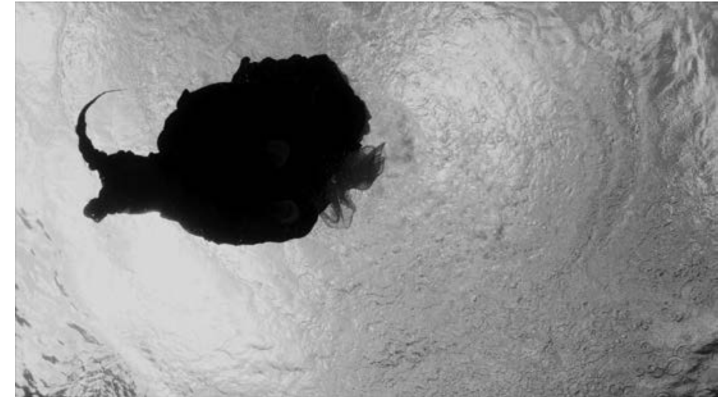
Modisakeng also starts here – with the evocation of the tidal power of slaves, spices and ships. His *Passage* is a summation of these never-ending journeys that began with the dying of the rock god of the sea and his cessation of power to the forces of exploration and imperialism. The journeys taken by Modisakeng's characters chart the many ways in which the sea, its routes and re-routes have shaped our country. Yet, it is not just the water but the gut reaction to it, that tug in the bottom of one's belly that signals the fear of being pulled in, drenched, drowned by the overwhelming current. That too is part of the instinctive reaction to the sea that Modisakeng taps into. One could even venture further and say that his film is about the sea and its obverse: from the shore the distant ship looks steady and even threatening and yet onboard the waves crash into the vessel and the motion caused in this way sometimes causes sickness. Sea-sickness is therefore the obverse of a sea voyage. It is a discordance of the senses in which the brain knows it is moving but the eyes cannot detect motion. That too is the

narrative of Modisakeng's boats. His characters represent both the embrace of the sea and its side effects.

In contemplating the history of entries and exits via the port city of Cape Town, it may be apposite to play Abdullah Ibrahim's 'Tuang Guru' (or 'Tuan Guru'), which refers to the founder of Islam in South Africa. His full name was Abdullah ibn Kadi [Qadri] Abdus Salaam and he was banished to the Cape by the Dutch in 1780 and imprisoned on Robben Island until 1793. His story is one of many that Ibrahim's music evokes, of fathers, brothers, mothers, sisters, princes, commoners, who were brought to the Cape against their will and forced into slavery or incarceration. These exiles and renegades seem to be the obvious representatives of the Cape's history as a domain of Dutch imperialism. However, what is less known are the stories of the exiles to the Cape who came from inland (or the hinterland, depending on your ideological vantage point). One of the most arresting photographs taken by Gustav Fritsch is labelled "Sandilli's Councillors" and it depicts four men who are variously seated and crouched. They are all looking into the camera's lens. What is remarkable is their composure. Undaunted by the camera, they quizzically contemplate its presence while at the same time they seem to have agreed on a symmetrical imaging – the two seated men are on the right and left of the photograph while the crouching men are in the middle. Although this framing could have been chosen by the photographer, what he could not have chosen is that the men do not seem to embody the social status granted to them by their British rulers. They seem not to represent the 'imprisonment' to which they were being subjected. Their dignified demeanour (and that of many photographic subjects in the same position) has led scholars to write about the 'honorific' functions of photography. What is important here is that these were exiles who had been transported to the Cape – a theme that would repeat itself several times in the history of southern Africa. The Cape thus becomes a 'final' home or even middle passage for exiles who either didn't return to their places of origin or ended up elsewhere after their brief sojourn in the Cape. For example, in 1879 the Zulu king Cetshwayo was transported to the Cape as an exile after his defeat in the Anglo-Zulu War. From the Cape, he travelled in 1882 to England to have an audience with Queen Victoria and to plead for a return of and to his kingdom. It is these journeys that are illegibly inscribed in the choppy seas of the Cape of Good Hope, the tos and fros that both made empire possible and thwarted its designs. These 'exiled kings' (Sandile and then later Langalibalele and Cetshwayo) are also as much a part of the Cape landscape and history as the exiles who were transported here from the East Indies. These dual or multiple histories converge in *Passage* as Mohau Modisakeng's visual narratives speak of the many lives that lie at the bottom of the two oceans – the Atlantic and the Indian – that meet at the Cape. Thus, what may be seen to constitute the exceptionalism of the

Cape – the East Indies and African slaves – is also a marker of the unfinished stories of passage, exile and trafficking.

Whereas in his previous work, specifically *Ditaola,* Modisakeng has troubled notions of masculinity and the masculine by directly referring to the tools of colonial masculinity such as whips and muskets or subverting them by wearing pleated leather skirts, in *Passage* masculinity is positioned obliquely in relation to the oceanic history of navigation. Here it may be useful to recall an 1850 painting by Charles Bell that represents the colonial encounter between Jan van Riebeeck and the Khoisan. It should be remarked that this painting – like many other in its genre – was completed many decades after the 'contact' and so is as much fiction as it is fact. It is titled *The Landing of Jan van Riebeeck* and is housed in the South African Library in Cape Town. On the left of the painting are Van Riebeeck and his men who have obviously just landed since in the shadows they cast one can also see a group of men offloading cargo from a boat. The main male characters are fully dressed and they bear a flag whose flagpole is simultaneously pointing skywards and backwards towards the sea. In 'conversation' with this motley crew is a stereotypically represented Khoisan interlocutor who is gesturing with his hands as he speaks. It is already an unequal relationship: the arrivants have guns, swords and lances while the indigenous people are huddled in a group, weaponless and almost indistinct. The masculinity that is being celebrated here is the aggressive chauvinistic kind where might is right and the muzzle and musket rule. Importantly, the indigenous group are depicted as 'genderless' since there is nothing that marks the speaker as 'male' whereas on the other side, macho masculinity is fully depicted. The boat on the left reminds us that colonialism was also a clash of masculinities and gender identities since so much of its ravages depended on the 'man on the spot' (the colonial governor, magistrate or commissioner who was charged with dealing with



the 'natives'). In this painting, the main command being effected is that of taking possession, of planting the flag and of renaming this 'virgin land'. Thus, the image of the boat here represents the masculine assumptions that were embedded in the sea voyages that brought sailors and adventurers to the Cape. As if to reverse such logic, however, Modisakeng's characters are adrift in a sea and in a boat that has no definite landing place, or that is not even guaranteed a landing. Modisakeng seems to be suggesting that it is not possible simply to play the colonial encounter backwards and therefore effect a reversal of colonialism's devastation. By not allowing his characters to land, Modisakeng may be gesturing to the fact that decolonisation is itself a voyage with an unknown destination. He therefore leaves open the question, "where will we land?"

In the year in which South Africa commemorates the centenary of the sinking of the SS Mendi – a passenger ship that sank on 21 February 1917 off the Isle of Wight while transporting men

who were part of the South African Native Labour Corps – it is apt that Mohau Modisakeng has created a film that, although not directly about the SS Mendi, nonetheless reminds us of the countless voyages that have become marginal in the South African imagination. The men who died in 1917 were serving as soldiers in World War I and the reports of the survivors tell us that they exhibited valour even while they faced their deaths. This naval disaster (and shame, since the ship that rammed the Mendi, in violation of the laws of the seas, didn't lower its life boats) has lived on in the memories of poets, writers and storytellers. Modisakeng's *Passage* adds to this list of memorialisations since he too contemplates the lives of those whose graves are at sea. Thus, a hundred years later, the men who died when the Mendi sank are receiving a farewell and a commemoration that marks their voyage as yet another South African story that needs to be told.

1 https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Lu%C3%ADs_de_Camões

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Candice Breitz

Biography

Candice Breitz (born Johannesburg, 1972) is a Berlin-based artist whose moving image installations have been shown internationally. Throughout her career, she has explored the dynamics by means of which an individual becomes him or herself in relation to a larger community, be that the immediate community that one encounters in family, or the real and imagined communities that are shaped not only by questions of national belonging, race, gender and religion, but also by the increasingly undeniable influence of mainstream media such as television, cinema and popular culture. Most recently, Breitz's work has focused on the conditions under which empathy is produced, reflecting on a media-saturated global culture in which strong identification with fictional characters and celebrity figures runs parallel to widespread indifference to the plight of those facing real-world adversity.

Breitz holds degrees from the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg), the University of Chicago and Columbia University (NYC). She has participated in the Whitney Museum's Independent Studio Program and led the Palais de Tokyo's Le Pavillon residency as a visiting artist during 2005–2006. She has been a tenured professor at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Braunschweig since 2007.

Solo exhibitions of Breitz's work have been hosted by the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Palais de Tokyo (Paris), The Power Plant (Toronto), Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Humlebæk), Modern Art Oxford, De Appel Foundation (Amsterdam), Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art (Gateshead), MUDAM / Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean (Luxembourg), Moderna Museet (Stockholm), Castello di Rivoli (Turin), Pinchuk Art Centre (Kiev), Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Bawag Foundation (Vienna), Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin, White Cube (London), MUSAC / Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (Spain), Wexner Center for the Arts (Ohio), O.K. Center for Contemporary Art Upper Austria (Linz), ACMI / The Australian Centre for the Moving Image (Melbourne), Collection Lambert en Avignon, FACT / Foundation for Art & Creative Technology (Liverpool), Blaffer Art Museum (Houston) and the South African National Gallery (Cape Town).

Selected group exhibitions include *South Africa: The Art of a Nation* (British Museum, London, 2016), *Laughing in a Foreign Language* (The Hayward, London, 2008), *The Cinema Effect* (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, 2008), *Made in Germany* (Kunstverein Hannover, 2007), *Superstars* (Kunsthalle Wien, 2005), *CUT: Film as Found Object* (Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, 2004), *Continuity and Transgression* (National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 2002), *Thank You for the Music* (Kiasma Museum of Modern Art, Helsinki, 2012), *Rollenbilder–Rollenspiele* (Museum der Moderne Salzburg, 2011), *Performa* (New York, 2009), *Contemporary Outlook: Seeing Songs* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2009), *Remix: Contemporary Art and Pop* (Tate Liverpool, 2002) and *Looking at You* (Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 2001).

Breitz has participated in biennales in Johannesburg (1997), São Paulo (1998), Istanbul (1999), Taipei (2000), Kwangju (2000), Tirana (2001), Venice (2005 and 2017), New Orleans (2008), Göteborg (2003 and 2009), Singapore (2011) and Dakar (2014). Her work has been featured at the Sundance Film Festival (*New Frontier*, 2009) and the Toronto International Film Festival (*David Cronenberg: Transformation*, 2013).

Her work can be found in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (both in New York), Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Humlebæk), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus (Munich), Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), FNAC / Fonds national d'art contemporain (France), Castello di Rivoli (Turin), Hamburger Kunsthalle (Hamburg), M+ / Museum of Visual Culture (Hong Kong), National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), Milwaukee Art Museum, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, MUDAM / Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean (Luxembourg), MUSAC / Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (León, Spain), Kunstmuseum Lichtenstein (Vaduz), MONA / Museum of Old and New Art (Tasmania), QAGGOMA / Queensland Art Gallery (Brisbane), Museum of Fine Arts (Boston) and MAXXI / Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo (Rome).

Mohau Modisakeng

Biography

Mohau Modisakeng was born in 1986 and grew up in Soweto, Johannesburg. He currently lives and works between Johannesburg and Cape Town. He completed his undergraduate degree at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, in 2009.

The personal is political in Modisakeng's work. Informed by his experience as a young boy in Soweto, at the crossroads of a violent political transition, Modisakeng uses memory as a portal between past and present to explore themes of history, body and place within the post-apartheid context. His photography, films, performances and installations grapple with the conflicting politics of leadership and nationhood, whilst also attempting to unpack the legacy of inequality, capital, labour and the extraction of mineral wealth in contemporary South Africa. Modisakeng's oeuvre represents a poignant moment of grieving, catharsis and a critical response to the historical legacy of exploitation and the current lived experience of many black South Africans. Through his work, he critically engages with the complex mechanisms of violence, power and subjugation as propagated, and to some extent internalised, through the course of the successive colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid regimes. He uses a personal lexicon of ritual and symbolism in which his physical form becomes both a vessel and a signifier. His use of his own body is a significant shift away from the problematic depiction of the other and is a gesture of self-actualisation and acknowledgment of subjective experience.

Modisakeng's work has been exhibited at the Laumier Sculpture Park (Saint Louis, Missouri), Framer Framed (Amsterdam), International Kurtzfilmtage (Oberhausen), the 56th Venice Biennale, MOCADA (Brooklyn, NY), Kunstraum Innsbruck, the Museum of Fine Art (Boston), 21C Museum (Louisville, Kentucky), Iziko South African National Gallery (Cape Town), Saatchi Gallery (London); and the Dak'Art Biennale (Dakar). It has also been placed in numerous private collections, both locally and internationally, as well as in public collections including the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Iziko South African National Gallery, Saatchi Gallery and Zeitz MOCAA.

Selected solo exhibitions include *Lefa le Ntate* (Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery, University of the Free State; Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg; Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, 2017); *ENDABENI* (Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam, 2016), *Bophirima* (Tyburn Gallery, London, 2016), *Mohau Modisakeng* (Laumeier Sculpture Park, Saint Louis, Missouri, 2016), *Lefa le Ntate* (Monument Gallery, Grahamstown, South Africa, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum Port Elizabeth South Africa and Iziko South African National Gallery, 2016); *Ke Kgomo Ya Moshate* (Kunstrum Innsbruck, Austria, 2015), *Mohau Modisakeng* (Big Pond Artworks, Munich, 2015), *Ditaola* (BRUNDYN+, Cape Town, 2015), *Mohau Modisakeng* (Chavonnes Battery Museum, Cape Town in partnership with Zeitz MOCAA, 2015), *Sera* (Master of Fine Art Exhibition, Michaelis School of Fine Art, Cape Town, 2015) and *Untitled* (Pretoria Art Museum, 2015).

Selected group exhibitions include *After The Thrill has Gone* (Richmond Center for Visual Arts, Virginia, 2016), *Re (as)ssisting Narratives* (Framer Framed, Amsterdam, 2016), *International Short Film Festival* (Oberhausen, 2016), *When Tomorrow Comes* (Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg; Michaelis Galleries, Cape Town, 2015), *DIS/PLACE* (MoCADA, Brooklyn, 2015), *AFIRIperFOMA* (Lagos, 2015); *What Remains is Tomorrow* (South African Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2015), *La Fabrique* (De L'Homme Moderne, in association with the Lyon Biennale, La Fabric, 2015), Solomon Foundation for Contemporary Art (2015), *Foreign Bodies* (Whatiftheworld, Cape Town, 2015), *Broken English* (Tyburn Gallery, London, 2015), *Brave New World ... 20 Years of Democracy* (Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, 2014), *!Kauru 2014: Rerouting Dialogue 1994–2014* (Unisa Gallery, Pretoria, 2014), *Art Against the Wall: An Artist Response to Civil Wars* (Gallery 72, Atlanta, 2014), *GIPCA Live Art Festival* (City Hall, Cape Town, 2014), *Fearless Renewal* (MC Theatre, Amsterdam, 2014), *Performing Portraiture* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2014), *Am I not a Man and a Brother? Am I not a Woman and a Sister* (James Harris Gallery, Seattle, 2013), *Personal and Political* (21c Museum, Louisville, Kentucky, 2013), *Biennale Internationale d'Art Contemporain* (BIAC), Fort de France, Martinique, 2013), *Out of Focus* (Saatchi Gallery, London, 2012), *Unevenness* (National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, 2012), *NEWSFEED: Anonymity & Social Media in African Revolutions and Beyond* (MoCADA, New York, 2012), Dak'Art Biennale, Dakar (2012).

Production Credits

Love Story by Candice Breitz

Director: Candice Breitz
Editor: Candice Breitz
Co-Commissioners: National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), Outset Germany (Berlin) + Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg
Project Management: Alex Fahl
Sound: Alex Fahl
Post Production: Alex Fahl
Digital Colourist: Johannes Hilser
Post Production Assistant: Marko Schiefelbein

Berlin Interview Unit
Interviewees: Sarah Ezzat Mardini (Syria) + Farah Abdi Mohamed (Somalia) / Location: Allmost Studio, Berlin, Germany: October 2015 / Line Producer: Alex Fahl / Director of Photography: Sebastian Krügler / Sound Recordist: Max Schneider / DIT: Alex Fahl / Still Photography: Eden Breitz / Makeup: Adrielle Santos Peukert / Production Assistants: Francisco Montoya Cázarez, Aron Lesnik / Special Thanks: Louis Breitz, Alexander Koch, Hamid Moradi, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Stefan Roloff, Raja Shamam, Sven Spannekrebs, Samee Ullah (Refugee Club Impulse), Nine Yamamoto.

New York Interview Unit
Interviewees: Luis Ernesto Nava Molero (Venezuela) + Shabeena Francis Saveri (India) / Location: Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, New York, USA: November 2015 / Producer: Scott Macaulay / Line Producer: Taylor Shung / Director of Photography: Chris Dapkins / Sound Recordist: Dagny Looper / DIT: Steve Russell / Still Photography: Hadi Fallahpisheh / Production Assistants: Anabelle Declement, Rebecca Uliasz / Special Thanks: Ellie Alter + Maria Blacque-Belair (RIF Asylum Support), Kamrooz Aram, James M. Bittel, Nadia Bokhari, Greyson C. Brooks (LGBT-FAN / LGBT Freedom and Asylum Network), Anthony Aziz + Sammy Cucher, Nina Katchadourian, Eve Meltzer, Melanie Nathan (African Human Rights Coalition), Kristine Roome.

Cape Town Interview Unit
Interviewees: Mamy Maloba Langa (Democratic Republic of the Congo) + José Maria João (Angola) / Location: University of Cape Town Television Studio, Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, South Africa: December 2015 / Production: Muti Films / Line Producer: Shanna Freedman / Production Consultant: Roger Young / Director of Photography: Nic van der Westhuizen / Sound Recordist: Anton van der Merwe / Sound Assistant: Brandon Shore / DIT: Alex Fahl / Translation: Guto Bussab, Teresa Castilho Raposo / Still Photography: Gerald Machona / Location Manager: Alan Johannes / Production Assistants: Keren Setton, Evan Wigdorowitz / Special Thanks: Jonathan Garnham, Angus Gibson, Goodman Gallery (Liza Essers, Tony East, Lara Koseff, Zach Viljoen), Laurence Hamburger, Fritha Langerman, Liani Maasdorp (Centre for Film and Media Studies, University of Cape Town), Kaelynn MacDonald (Scalabrini Centre, Cape Town), Virginia MacKenny, Jo Menell, Sean O'Toole, Ana Maria Tavares, Bernard Dipo Toyambi (PASSOP – People against Suffering, Oppression and Poverty).

Baldwin / Moore Unit
Cast: Alec Baldwin + Julianne Moore / Locations: Pelorus Studio (NYC) + Digital Arts Studio (NYC): January 2016 / Producer: Scott Macaulay / Line Producer: Taylor Shung / Director of Photography: Trish Govoni / Camera Assistants: Jon Nelson, Kelsey Johnson / Grip: Gage Zanghi / Sound Recordists: Allistair Johnson, Corey Poindexter / Teleprompter Operator: Taj Francois / VTR: Brian Sanchez / DIT: Josh Brede, Danny Flanagan / Still Photography: Helga Traxler / Makeup: Susan Reilly Lehane (Julianne Moore) + Julie Teel (Alec Baldwin) / Hair: Marcus Francis (Julianne Moore) + Julie Teel (Alec Baldwin) / Production Assistants: Trevor Freeman, Emily Lesser / Special Thanks: Erika Balsom, Renate Becker, Sven Beckstette, Ana Bedayo, Bettina Böhm, Eden + Louis Breitz, Craig Burnett, Jessica Chermayeff, Maro Chermayeff, Sam Chermayeff, Noah Cowan, Tony Ellwood, Omer Fast, Wendy Fisher + Dennis Goodman, Sarah Flack, Ulrike Groos, Teresa Hoefert de Turégano, Andrea Kerzner, Stefan King, George + Liz Krupp, Simone Leigh, Astrid Mania, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Evelyn O'Neill, Joseph Rodriguez, Mallory Schwartz, Bill Sobel, Isa Spalding, Sandy Tabatznik, Carolin Wurzbacher.

Passage by Mohau Modisakeng

Director: Mohau Modisakeng
Director of Photography: Mohau Modisakeng, Paul Painting
Editor: Melissa Parry
Cast: Mohau Modisakeng, Aphiwe Mpahleni, Lesoko Seabe
Co-Commissioners: The South African Department of Arts and Culture, Whatiftheworld Gallery (Cape Town), Galerie Ron Mandos (Amsterdam), Tyburn Gallery (London)
Producers: Clare van Zyl, Phillip Killingbeck, Blair Smith (Monkey Films), Ashleigh McLean (Whatiftheworld Gallery)
Project Management: Connect Channel
Musical Score: Neo Muyanga
Production Assistants: Mia Borman, Matthew Bradley (Whatiftheworld Gallery)
Post Production Co-ordinator: Marc Baleiza

Special thanks to Monkey Films, Clearwater Productions and Lady Linda Davis

Presented by
The South African Department of Arts and Culture

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Titi Nxumalo, Consulate General of South Africa in Milan

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la Biennale di Venezia
57. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte

The South African Pavilion presents *Candice Breitz + Mohau Modisakeng*, a two-person exhibition that explores the disruptive power of storytelling in relation to historical and contemporary waves of forced migration.

The exhibition foregrounds the challenging narrative structures via which each artist addresses experiences of displacement, focusing on the conditions that pertain to subjectivity within contexts of exclusion and transience. What is it to be visible in everyday life, it seeks to ask, yet invisible at the level of cultural, political or economic representation?

Curated by
Lucy MacGarry
Musha Neluheni

Essays by
M. Neelika Jayawardane, Hlonipha Mokoena, Sisonke Msimang and Zoé Whitley

La Biennale di Venezia
13 May – 26 November 2017

The South African Pavilion
Biennale Arte 2017

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