Off the wall

Two years ago, Johannesburg artists Landi Rabeuheimner and Paul Cooper visited Neville, a tatty, Johannesburg suburb neighbouring on Johannesburg’s inner city. Their attention was momentarily diverted by a large, discount notice board that had asserted its rightful to sit on a bare stretch of wall facing onto Rocky Street. “Walking alongside it one could shrug off snippets from people’s daily existence,” says Landi, who is also a researcher at the University of Johannesburg. The vacant, abandoned, interminable and quoted offer and inscribed unto the wall included: requests for accommodation and employment, numbers for money lenders, offers for the sale of physical objects and bodily pleasures, details on religious counseling, and more singular statements of human existence: “What we found interesting is the informality of such spaces, and the viability of voices, each unique and each looking for something,” says Landi.

Wishing Wall. Photo: Felicia Pattison-Bacon

Wishing Wall is a hybrid of a variety of existing and familiar forms: community noticeboards, online blogs and impromptu sites of meaning. It is also a site-specific artwork. More self-reflexively, it could also be viewed as a manifestation of Johannesburg’s unfolding urban logic in Cape Town, a city arguably faced with a complementary, but ultimately different set of urban dynamics.

“As artists, we will be mediating public interaction with the actual wall,” she adds. “We see ourselves as facilitators, guiding the development of the installation through specific activities. On any given day we may decide to limit our interaction with the public to asking them one specific question or inviting individuals or groups to engage in a singular, focused activity, and recording their responses as drawings and prophecies... In some we are allowing the public contributions to the wall to become the raw material that we use to shape and alter the installation as it develops.”

While the project remains many attributions that are relevant to the Noelle wall, like all artworks Wishing Wall is the product of multiple conversations and events. Paul, who heads up the critical studies programme at Grootel Design Centre in Johannesburg, explains. In 2009 the pair submitted a proposal for participation in the 2009 Arum Art Fair. “Landi had in mind a project called Wall that derived from the wall we encountered in Noelle,” says Paul. “We decided to develop a project in response to the cross-commercialisation of the art fair, which would focus involved the collection and translation of stuff generated during the actual fair.” The pair’s somewhat critical proposal was rejected.

At the same time as this was happening, Paul was also researching worship and other more singular practices. When one is involved in creating any artwork one begins by gathering material and information, which is essentially mixed into an eventual artwork. The Wishing Wall is simply a public representation of this process. It is not a new idea, just an informed and open-ended approach to the concept.”

To post your wish, or chat to Landi and Paul, go down to the corner of Adderley and Hout streets, Friday 11am – 4pm, and Saturday 10am – 1pm. — Sean O’Toole is editor of Art South Africa magazine

Infecting the City reviews Meet Market

How serious history museums have to present the past is vividly (and poetically) visualized in the famous opening sequence of Lawrence of Arabia. For the triennial’s 1994 TV soap series Zapphire (The Kingdom), something of that charged ambience, mystifications and engaging, woodshed and cynical, is invoked by the wooded town that temporarily carpets Church Square (recently repaved and petitioned, again) and the happenings on that ground during this flagship event.

Infecting the City performance. Undoubtedly, there is much to be unravelled at this historic site, where once the rituals of slave trade and colonial imperialism were performed. Surrounded by the edifices of, and about, the past (an important church, grand buildings of bureaucracy, a slave memorial and museum), its a civic space that has a tight grip on what anyone attempts there as public spectacles.

The end question then about this collaborative production, involving artists from various backgrounds and a large group of performers, is how far it succeeds in unlocking that hold of history. And, remember, this has to be done on a bustling street corner, which requires high performance values to pull it in and hold the attention of the passer-by. A number of strategies are employed in Meet Market, many, following this year’s theme, trace ritual: the sharpening of knives, coordinated group movements (gumboot dancing), buckets of water passed on, and the cleaning of the memorial stone (interpreting of the gripping moments), and singing interpretations of the stories of another stranger: a man shot from the roof of a neighboring building, a woman scans the church steps (another ‘cleaning’) a blind troop of musicians march, a couple of silly dogs walk among the performers. These훈스 of Fellini-like absurdity is meant to tease and disorientate, and it does. Then there are the performers. Skilled Andrew Buckland takes centre stage, as it were. His presence (dramatic, brooding, centre polemon), all body language, is highly physical. It drives the hour along, starting with the killing-sharpening over a slaughter table, ending with knife pulling the mortal slab along in bastard utensil. A large, widely ‘representative cast’ perform various actions along the way, including ‘hiding’ objects in the grass and, finally, breaking away into the crowded, telling individual stories. The latter is quite effective, suggesting that many ghosts are given voice, then they disappear into the street crowd.

Melvyn Minnaar reviews Meet Market

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Melvyn Minnaar is an art critic

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**Letter**

Dear ICT,

I confess, I am an avid reader about. As you have developed over the past three years you are one of the few things that has ever happened to Cape Town and to the milieu of the performance arts in Southern Africa.

You provide the very necessary alternative spaces for artists to test and challenge work, work that often is immediate, fresh, and thought provoking.

You expose and interpret the complexities of urban life in Cape Town, unpack the tropes and use professional financial tools to end through passively, performer; spectator; you communicate each and every as an artist; often through literal, effective yet temporal displays of rhythm, time, love, desire, interiors and uncertainties. But, as much as you have developed, I fear you may paradoxically have repressed. As a spectrum watching two collaborative worlds and two commissioned worlds, I came away feeling strangely distant and removed from the experience. I suspect that this mostly has to do with a lack of visualising spaces. What occurred was an enforced, fetishized, vertical, visual narrative. Works that were collaborative and commissioned, were ‘translated’ to an audience. These presentations happened within a specific frame; very rarely did the frame break to express the diverse spaces into which the city goes behind the scenes.

I think that the morning’s tours were the infatuations of the city itself—those who stopped, watched and interacted, and were consumed by the production, and for many, everyone was there from the start.

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**Your thoughts**

At Windows

“It was thoughtful and touching. I’ve seen Quiet Emergency and the one on Church Square (Hearts Market). It’s inspiring; I hope it will happen next year again, and longer pieces. For the love of art.”

— Alvin, trainee pilot

“More than beautiful. We’ve been hearing about AIDS day in and day out, so its encouraging to have a third-voice.”

— Tanali, poet

“What’s this play? It’s interesting, not boring. I will see it tomorrow again.”

— Gloria, chef

At the Wall

“Some are cute, some are sad, some on simple—a job, a house. Oh, look—‘I wish I could fly’.”

— Cathy, homeless

“Quite revealing and across the spectrum. Quite frighteningly beautiful. A wonderful idea—the whole programme.”

— Wendy, fine artist

On Facebook

“The shows were well produced and executed correctly—thank you Infecting The City team for an art-filled morning.”

— Marilyn Simmons

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**Tied and tested**

Collaborating on Meet Market is multi-media performer, Lerato Shadi. Aliyah Khan met this dynamic young artist.

She may be one of the youngest artists at Infecting The City (ITC), but as far as pushing boundaries goes, visual and performance artist Lerato Shadi is no stranger to difficult and uncomfortable situations. In a piece, titled Moselo, Shadi wrapped her entire body in masking tape, and then painstakingly unpeeled herself. “I remember not being sure if I’d make it,” she says. Originally from Methane, but now based in Johannesburg, Shadi’s interest in architectural/visual installations pieces explores time and its effects on the body.

The project has included being elevated on a platform in an office space while constantly blowing up balloons for six hours. In 2006, she collaborated with cutting-edge South African band, Blixa, as an en-suite of ‘Wordbead’.

Shadi laughed. “I put my head in a bucket and sang. And we danced.”

The ITC concept resonated with ideas the duo had explored in her own work.

“My first experience of real racism was in Cape Town, when I was still studying Hospitality Management in 2000. I felt this segregation—which is part of what the ITC concept resonates with ideas the duo had explored in her own work. My first experience of real racism was in Cape Town, when I was still studying Hospitality Management in 2000. I felt this segregation—which is part of what the ITC concept resonates with ideas the duo had explored in her own work. My first experience of real racism was in Cape Town, when I was still studying Hospitality Management in 2000. I felt this segregation—which is part of what the ITC concept resonates with ideas the duo had explored in her own work. My first experience of real racism was in Cape Town, when I was still studying Hospitality Management in 2000. I felt this segregation—which is part of what the ITC concept resonates with ideas the duo had explored in her own work. 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