



# THE EXUBERANCE PROJECT

## EXHIBITION



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Exhibition | 2012

curated by Raél Jero Salley

This exhibition is part of *The Exuberance Project* which is convened by Raél Jero Salley and Jay Pather; presented by the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts (GIPCA) as part of the UCT Africa Month celebrations.

To:  
JPR, for giving me butterflies.

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and *the names we give*.

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GORDON INSTITUTE  
**GIPCA**  
FOR PERFORMING  
AND CREATIVE ARTS



**MICHAELIS**  
**GALLERIES**

CENTRE FOR  
**AFRICAN**  
STUDIES

**the**  
**names**  
**we**  
**give**

# JOY LIVES CONCEALED IN GRIEF<sup>1</sup>

Raél Jero Salley

*Exuberance* is an abounding, ebullient, effervescent energy. It is unrestrained, kinetic, joyful and irrepressible. Nature is self-evidently abundant and exuberant. In humans, exuberance is an emotion that is not quite happiness, but is more like a restless, energetic state of being.

Exuberance flows, outward and upward. But it is also a shining, flickering, fragile state. As an intense emotion, the joyous upswings of exuberance are matched by sorrowful downswings. Bubbles burst, the sun and the moon are clouded over. Our greatest joys and sorrows come from the same root, says one proverb. Another proverb maintains that danger and delight grow on one stalk.

Writing about such intense emotions, the psychiatrist Kay Redfield Jamison explains that exuberance is a survival mechanism. “[Exuberance] demands not only defense but exposure, for despair far more than joy has found sympathy with poets and scholars” (Jamison 2004: 5). Joy seems to lack the *gravitas* that suffering commands.

Discourses and *ideas* of Africa have grounded its substance on a threshold. Placed between something and nothingness, the world Africans occupy is seen and described by a view that is relentlessly grim. Africa and its people fare poorly in representations from global media, academic scholarship, and creative production. Africa often appears as a place, object and symbol that is always already at risk, precariously perched on the margins, and heartbreakingly depressing.

In 2006, Okwui Enwesor noted that such Afro-pessimism “is as old as the invention of Africa as the darkest of all places in human history. Afro-pessimism proceeds by first invalidating the historical usefulness of African experience”(Enwesor 2006:11). If global media is filled in this way—from a terrain of Afro-pessimism that produces a “pernicious objectification” of African life—the result is depressed, abject, *nonexuberant* views. The task of trying to better understand the notion of “Africa,” and trying to make sense of this continent’s diverse places should excite passion. But such dark visions make it impossible to fathom gleaming, exuberant kinds of understanding about what Africa stands for in the larger imagination.

Yet, like imagination, joy is essential to our existence. Exuberance is a material part of our pursuits—love, learning, games, exploration—and is the force behind victories and celebration. Exuberance is, then, an essential human trait. As a pushing-upward and forward force, it is critical to survival. Exuberance is a particularly pleasurable state, and in that pleasure is power (Jamison 2004: 6).

I believe that exuberance is more than fleeting joy or blind pleasure. Exuberance provides the enthusiasm to moods of mind—the figment of the imagination—that can begin to inform studies and artworks of/from/about Africa.

*The Exuberance Project* attempts to help put conflicting emotions into meaningful perspective. We float up and away from the indiscriminate sinking that marks conventional visions of Africa. We note that variation in temperament is necessary, because the fixity of indiscriminate Afro-pessimism leads to exhaustion and chaos. In thinking about *African* exuberance, we are here primarily concerned with the creative practice that widens one’s view of the world and expands the imagination. Creative and performance endeavors

activate. They make physical and intellectual exploration possible. Exuberance excites, it is infectious, and can dispel tension. One joy, another proverb states, scatters a hundred griefs.

*The Exuberance Project* hopes to find opportunities and generate energy, to alert us all to change and possibility. In unique ways, each of the creative works in *The Exuberance Project* exhibition open new, productive opportunities to re-visit, uncover, develop, and newly imagine creative activity in African context.

We begin with a rare question: What is distinctively *exuberant* about the arts in and of Africa?

Rather than accept fixed, reductive representations about a complex continent, *The Exuberance Project* delights in individual imaginaries and vibrant, collective sensibilities. One aim is to acknowledge fractured identifications and pathologies without recapitulating them. We follow the examples of critics and artists who have—in diverse and particular ways—observed and responded to the pessimistic representations that continue to appear in intellectual, political and aesthetic realms.

*The Exuberance Project Exhibition* endeavors to foster new views and fresh understandings by means of a developing archive of the extremely good, effusive and uninhibitedly enthusiastic. A further aim is to contribute to the democratic public sphere by generating informed public discussion and debate.

Our particular interest is with the creative realm in Southern Africa. The focus is on aesthetic capacities, as they appear in particular instances of the visual, textual, sound, performance, digital and virtual arts.

If pleasure is power, our goal is to generate unrestrained joy, to act with audacity, to have a delighting time. *The Exuberance Project*

hopes to enchant its public, so we can make better sense of the complex effervescence of Africa's places and spaces, ideas and passions.

1 Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi (1207 – 1273), Persian philosopher, theologian, poet, teacher, and founder of the Mevlevi (or Mawlawi) order of Sufism.

References:

Enwezor, Okwui 2001 'The Uses of Afro-Pessimism' in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*, edited by Okwui Enwezor. Munich: Prestel Verlag.

Jameson, Kay Redfield. 2004. *Exuberance: The Passion for Life*. New York: Vintage Books.

# THE CREATIVE PROJECTS

Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR)

George Mahashe

PhotoXP

Mohau Modisakeng

Fragments of Tahrir (Curated by Nicole Sarmiento)

Zanele Muholi

The Callings

# THE CENTER FOR HISTORICAL REENACTMENTS

*Not a storm in a tea cup after all*

2012

Mixed Media

In March 2012, CHR invaded the Alf Kumalo Museum for a residency project titled *Fr(agine)*. For three days we sorted/searched/cleaned/learned/ate/slept/talked/listened/sorted boxes, bags, images, documents, equipment, people people and more people some we knew most we didn't – many people, many black people in agony, in love, in protests, in sports, at funerals. They said, if you like Idi Amin... you will love Nelson Mandela! Now they love him, do they love Idi Amin too? We are confused, we protest, why are we doing this? Explorers!!! Winnie Mandela, the beautiful Nomzamo Winfreda Madikizela Mandela sitting with one of her daughters "after 12 midnight on a story that was to quote her". Mandela, Tutu, Biko, Ongopotse Tiro - assassinated! Letter bomb, says Mr. Kumalo. It's all too much!

Ali in the Congo. Ali! Bumaye! Kill him! Kill them! The archive is alive, the archive is dead, no! It has all the ingredients that make up a potential time bomb. We are alive? They will never kill us all.

*The Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR) is a Johannesburg based independent alternative platform employing citations, transversal research processes, subversion and mediation. CHR members are Kemang Wa-Lehulere, Donna Kukama, Sanele Manqele, Gabi Ngcobo and Jabu Pereira.*



# GEORGE TEBOGO MAHASHE

Dithugula tša Malefokane: *Seeing other people's stories, telling tall tales*  
2012

Installation

The piece *Dithugula tša Malefokane: Seeing other people's stories, telling tall tales* interprets the overlapping aspects of being a researcher of anthropology and history while being a curator/artist interested in the aesthetics presented by the materiality of the photograph. I explore the metaphor of the darkroom as a space of vision (that renders things visible) and the limits of the photograph as a reliable permanent record, drawing on similarities between the magic of photography and the myth/legends surrounding Balobedu's fame. Mostly I tell tall tales while discovering photography's infinite possibilities, concluding that only stories survive the archive, stories told by imaginative storytellers, told to a keen audience.

*Born around Bolobedu in 1982, Mahashe is an MA[FA] candidate with UCT's Centre for Curating the Archive, and works in Cape Town.*



# PHOTOXP WITH MEMBERS OF FREEGENDER

*Ikhaya which means home*

2012

Digital Photographs

'Ikhaya' (Home) a part of the Photo XP community project, featuring a collection of 60 hours of photographic memories that were taken in different areas of Khayalitsha by seven women. All of them are black lesbians between 21 and 31 years of age, from various places within and outside of Khayalitsha. Each of the women created a body of work around a specific aspect of life in their immediate environment.

*Participants are Gcobisa Nogova who was born in 1985 in Nyanga East, Cape Town and currently lives in Site B, Khayelitsha. Hlomela Mselele from KwaNgwenya village in the Eastern Cape and now living in Site B. Khayelitsha. Ntombozuko Ndlwana commonly known as 'Nzura' to her friends. Nzura lives in Kuyasa, Khayelitsha. Nyameka Patho Mkosana who was born in 1981 in King William's town, Eastern Cape and currently lives in Site B, Khayelitsha. Pearl Mali, born in 1992 in Motherwell, Port Elizabeth currently living in Cape Town. Phumeza Nkoanyane (b.1982) from Stellenbosch and Velisa Jara who she grew up in Site B Khayelitsha.*

*Co-facilitators are Lindeka Qampi and Muholi Zanele. Qampi was born in Bolotwa, Lady Frere, Eastern Cape. She currently lives in Ilitha Park, Khayelitsha with her four kids. Muholi was born in Umlazi, Durban. Muholi started PhotoXP project in 2004 to share basic photographic skills with women and the lesbian community.*



# Mohau Modisakeng

*Untitled*

2010

C-print on watercolour paper

The young Soweto-born Mohau Modisakeng is all for the coming together of the peoples of post-colonial Africa, but feels that this can't be done at the expense of history. There are scores to settle, and better that they are settled in symbolic combat than blood. For the most part Modisakeng works as a sculptor, with recourse to performance, video and photography as the concept requires. In the triptych *Untitled*, the artist himself embodies that need for confrontation to resolve differences. His apron speaks for the hard, industrial labour that was the fate of his ancestors; the leopard print signifies high status among his fellow men (male members of Zulu royalty wore leopard skins to remind their enemies that this fierce animal hides, waits and attacks at the right moment); the bowler hat stands for the patriarchal white man, the 'civilized' oppressor. The body language is clear: this is a fighter come to seek justice. He emerges from a dark past, striding forward into the light, clothed in history.

*Text by William A Ewing (Source: [http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/mohau\\_modisakeng.htm?section\\_name=photography](http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/mohau_modisakeng.htm?section_name=photography))*

*Mohau Modisakeng was born in 1986 and grew up in Soweto, Johannesburg, South Africa. Modisakeng is completing his Masters degree at The Michaelis School of Fine Art, and works between Johannesburg and Cape Town.*



# FRAGMENTS OF TAHRIR: VIDEO INSTALLATION

*Curated by Nicole Sarmiento*

In this curatorial project we use the visual and aural in order to explore shreds, fragments, dissonances and imaginaries, rather than overarching narratives. Using the work of interdisciplinary video and performance artists who straddle the realms of the digital, visual, aural and performative, this series of works touch on the ongoing uprisings across what has been called 'North Africa'.

The works grapple with and through the meanings of 'tahrir' (freedom), through the series of events that began in Tunisia and have spread across Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and beyond. The works also bring to bear local experiences of resistance to structural violence, and raise questions about the imaginaries these uprising draw on, work through and engender. Imbricated in this series of films is how deeply our lived realities and ways of seeing are shaped by the digital and the visual, in a time of increased visibility of social movements.

JUSTIN DAVY

*Winter of discontent* (2012)

HD Video installation. Duration: Loop. Dimensions Variable.

'Winter of discontent' chronicles and re-imagines two weeks of footage taken in Cairo, Egypt in October of 2011. Alongside charged scenes of protest in the aftermath of revolutionary uprisings is a further installment of his performance *Mediation* in which a language of miscommunication is explored on the streets of Cairo.

*Justin Davy (or 'DjyGhoemaHare') is a visual artist from Cape Town. His works are almost always in the public domain away from gallery or institutional spaces and invite public participation and often delve into the colonial history and psyche of South Africa.*

JASMINA METWALY & PHILIP RIZK

*Remarking January 25 – a series of six (2011)*

Video installation. Duration: Loop. Dimensions Variable.

'Remarking January 25 - A Series of Six'. An event does not happen in a circle - more likely in a broken sphere. The wave of protest that led to the January 25 Revolution did not start in Tahrir. It occurred in places, spaces, some of which were hidden, unspoken of, some darker than others. In every telling of histories there are silenced moments, yet every moment has its voice. Detached and intertwined, these are six stories of the Egyptian "January 25 Revolution" - told by some of the silenced voices. Filmed violently. Collected and edited by Intifadat Intifadat.

*Jasmina Metwaly is a visual artist based in Cairo, Egypt. She is a member of Mosireen video collective [www.mosireen.org](http://www.mosireen.org), [www.youtube.com/mosireen](http://www.youtube.com/mosireen). Philip Rizk is a filmmaker based in Cairo, Egypt. He is also a member of the Mosireen video collective, and is co-directing in collaboration with Jasmina Metwaly a film project about workers entitled "Out/In the streets".*

DYLAN VALLEY AND ARYAN KAGANOF

*Uprising of Hangberg* (2010)

HD Video (short). Duration: Loop.

'Uprising of Hangberg' is a six-minute video documents the human rights violations in Hangberg, Cape Town. Through stark, often shocking footage and interviews they explore the aftermath of the recent police brutality on the Hout Bay community. Moving from character to character, perspective to perspective, the film is a complex and moving portrait of parallel lives thrust into violence.

*Dylan Valley is a documentary filmmaker who sees film as a tool for social change and awareness, but he still has a sense of humour. He works in Cape Town. Aryan Kaganof is a novelist, poet and fine artist as well as a film maker. He drives a 1966 Valiant 200, shoots a Glock 19, has three cats and works in Cape Town.*

About the curator:

*Nicole Sarmiento is currently curator of the Centre for African Studies Gallery at the University of Cape Town and a PhD candidate based at the Centre for African Studies. She works on questions of power, knowledge and silence in performance and visual works.*

# MUHOLI ZANELE

EyeMe

2012

Video Installation

*Muholi is a visual activist born in Umlazi, Durban. She lived in Johannesburg and later worked for Behind the Mask ([www.mask.org.za](http://www.mask.org.za)). In 2002, co-founded the Forum for the Empowerment of Women ([www.few.org.za](http://www.few.org.za)). Studied photography at Market Photo Workshop, Newtown, Johannesburg. Muholi started PhotoXP project in 2004 to share basic photographic skills with women and lesbian community. She has trained more than 50 women since then. Currently lives and works in Cape Town. Her work has been published in various academic and art journals. Muholi's photography is widely exhibited nationally.*

# THE CALLINGS

2012

Site-specific performative & visual intervention

Devised by:

Memory Biwa

Nicole Sarmiento

Tazneem Wentzel

Collaborating artists:

Tracey Rose (dance/performance)

Jethrouw Louw (spoken word, performance)

Weaam Williams (video)

Nafia Kocks (video)

Mawande Zenzile (video, performance)

Toni Stuart (poetry)

Lucelle Campbell (storytelling, performance)

Justin Davy (performance)

Sara Gouveia (video)

Bradley Van Sitters (performance)

Dylan Valley (video)

Collaborating musicians:

Monwabisi Xhakwe

Dani Swai

Alaa Rhabani

Ferdinand van Tura

In this performative, visual, aural/oral installation and site-specific intervention, we walk spaces of the city – through spectral landscapes that recall a past as much passed, as lived in the present. We bypass memorialised sites that form part of the matrix of heritage tourism towards sites that form part of the everyday of urban street traffic, yet remain unmarked and silent(ced). Visiting spectrality using performance, poetry and audiovisual interventions, we walk in dissonance with linear notions of space and time in order to engage our multiple and layered senses, to listen to silences, trees that once stood, bodies that dream.

Venues:

Michaelis – old slave lodge and zoo

As a site of a slave lodge, and in other iterations a zoo and site of zoological and botanical research, it calls to mind the multiple intertwined links in a colonial past and post-apartheid settler coloniality we still inhabit. It opens up questions around spatiality, the university and sites of power and control of bodies, minds, imaginaries and subjectivities.

Burg Street/Keerom Street Archway

Keerom and Burg Street during various times were spaces of brothels for sailors, Burg Street was also known as ‘Venus Street’ for a period of time. On Keerom, Malay Choirs would perform near the archway where the performance will be staged. It is said that Sara Baartman also lived near this street. On this site we re-call the intimacy between women’s bodies and forms of power – or rather, ways in which power operates through and on bodies.

Spin Street – Old Slave Tree behind Slave Lodge

This is 'the old slave tree' that is referred to in the museum. It is in the middle of Spin Street, behind the Slavery Museum. It is across from the slavery monument, which is a spin-off of the Holocaust monument in Berlin.

Walkway between Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and the Old Granary

'Justisie Plaats' across from the castle was a space, a public square, where executions and torture took place. It stands across from the Old Granary, which was a women's prison for a period of time, before 1838. Lady Ann Barnard lived in the Castle and sketched photos of daily life in and around the Castle. This photo shows the public square where people were tortured and executed publicly, their bodies often put on display. Today this space is occupied by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, across from the Old Granary on Buitenkant.

