



TOP Jacques Coetzer, *This is Charlie Oscar Echo Tango Zulu Echo Romeo*, performance on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, 2010, HDV **MIDDLE** Jacques Coetzer, *Long live the Pacifists and the Activists*, performance with Garry Williams in Barcelona, 2009, DV **BOTTOM** Jacques Coetzer, *Playing Guitar for Goats*, performance in Moshi, Tanzania, 2010, HDV

the camera could be standing on a tripod, silently recording. In *Aloha Zanzibar*, Coetzer is dressed in a white polyester, one-piece Elvis jumpsuit, complete with rhinestones rimming the plunging neckline. He sits very still on his guitar case in the sand on what looks like a lovely tropical beach in Zanzibar, strumming his acoustic guitar plugged into a small, old amplifier. We see two expensive, gleaming white yachts anchored behind our present-day travelling Elvis impersonator.

When one chooses to depict Elvis, it is always a question as to which Elvis you choose: young or old, thin or fat. In 1992, when the Elvis special-edition stamp was being considered by the United States Postal Service, a public debate was launched to decide which Elvis should be depicted. (Over 1.2 million people voted, 75% chose a young version.) Recalling Elvis's legendary *Aloha from Hawaii* concert, when Elvis was the same age as Coetzer is now, Coetzer depicts an Elvis as an alternate version of his own forty-two-year-old self.

For the duration of the song, the only moving action in the video is a pair of canoeists rowing their boat across the screen. Coetzer said that he did not realise the canoeists were there until he watched the replay. The live performance does not register in the locals' world. It seems quite magical that Coetzer can occupy his space in this way. In each performance he tests some of his presumptions about his world. Like an intrepid explorer investigating the ambiguity

of middle age, Coetzer examines what it means to have dreams float past. By choosing the older Elvis, Coetzer demonstrates that he himself recognises that he is older, finding comfort in his spreading thighs and soft midriff. He chooses the easily identifiable costume of a rock star, but prefers the isolated location of a deserted beach, sitting on his guitar case surrounded by sand. He could have chosen to enact this performance on one of the many stages set up in bars and other island hot spots. In deciding not to, Coetzer is showing that our imaginings can find life, even if only for ourselves. The self-referential and autonomous nature of the work suggests that no grand narrative or large purpose is being sought beyond the performance itself.

There is little interaction between any of the live performances and the world outside of Coetzer's imagination. In *Temporary Rebellion*, a drummer sits behind guard rails on the N1 between Johannesburg and Pretoria, the busiest highway in the country. Decked out in a bling shirt and baggy-kneed chinos, the drummer rocks out. Cars whizz past. The drum solo is accompanied by the steady roar of traffic, intermittently punctuated by a car's hooter. There are four men working in a construction team on the road – no one glances at this odd spectacle. In the introductory text to the video, Coetzer notes that a few people called into local radio stations to query the event. Even in the case of performances in pedestrian urban centres, such as in *Long Live the Pacifists and the Activists*, few passersby acknowledge Coetzer's actions, however outlandish. When I came to visit the show, I shared the space with only the Goethe-Institut's receptionist.

Coetzer climbs aboard containers bound for other lands and in this way he can become a great explorer of the present age. Without elaborate props but rather through his imagination and a great propensity for travel, Coetzer does not discover new territories but rather invents new worlds in these performances. This exhibition as a whole is an elegant statement on what it means to create art.

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COLLECTIONS

Home & Away

DURBAN ART GALLERY | DURBAN

Home & Away, an exhibition of the Ifa Lethu and Art Against Apartheid collections, has been a long time coming. More than a decade-and-a-half after the country's first democratic elections, these two important collections – both intimately connected to the movement for a democratic South Africa – have finally received their first public showing in major galleries around the country.

The international protest movement Art Against Apartheid will be familiar to many, even if the work itself is not. The Ifa Lethu collection, which acquires works from around the world produced by South African artists during apartheid, is less well known. Together, the two collections offer a powerful set of multiple narratives that easily transcend the parameters of politics and protest, and suggest instead a broad and deeply rich spectrum of human reality.

The show, curated by Carol Brown, is divided into several different sections: "Suffering and Conflict", "The Body", "Work, Leisure and Culture" and



TOP AND BOTTOM *Home & Away*, installation view, Constitutional Court. Photos: Anthea Pokroy

"Whose Land is it?". This approach helps to integrate the two collections and provides a broad social and historical perspective for the work. It is instructive that, exhibited together, the two collections do not appear discretely separate from each other. Looked at from the safe distance of the twenty-first century, the complex op art of Carlos Cruz-Diez segues with remarkable ease into the figurative work of Eric Mbatha; the works of Nat Mokgosi or Hugh Nolutshungu seem no less modernist than those of Roy Lichtenstein or Ernest Pignon-Ernest. Collectively, the works break down the barriers between so-called abstraction and so-called representation.

A further breaking down – of representation itself – is reflected in many of the works from both collections and emerges as an art-historical narrative deeply embedded in the struggle to produce images in response to the racist fascism of apartheid. And if you start thinking beyond the immediate political context of the show, an endless interplay of history and art history – in which the conceptual paths between North and South fuse into a single, hugely complex cartography – becomes evident.

Home & Away is supplemented by a collection of apartheid-era protest posters, but I suspect they would have more power shown separately from the two collections (although this impression might also have to do with compressing a show that has shown elsewhere into a new space). While *Home & Away* was beautifully curated at the Durban Art Gallery, it also felt a little cramped, and I would liked to have seen the exhibition in its inaugural showing at Constitution Hill, where I imagine the works would have conversed with their environment in a way that they simply cannot do in the baroque colonialism of the DAG.

The exhibition also begs the question as to where these two collections will find a permanent home when they have finished touring. At the moment, neither has its own dedicated exhibition space, which is extraordinary considering their significance. Hopefully, the momentum generated by *Home & Away* will go some way towards resolving this situation.

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