

Ik Ben Een Afrikaner IV

The Unequal Conversation

Curated by Teresa Lizamore

About the Ik Ben Een Afrikander Project

“Being an “Afrikander” is not a simple task, and the complexity is evident in translating the word, as it has different meanings in different languages.”

Mandy Rossouw (late), Political Editor, City Press - Ik Ben Een Afrikander catalogue essay, 2012.

Rationale and curator’s perspective

Ik Ben Een Afrikander is an on-going exhibition project curated by Teresa Lizamore under the auspices of Artspace Gallery (recently rebranded as Lizamore and Associates).

“In 2011 when we initially decided to curate an exhibition based on the exploration of the Afrikaner’s place as an African within the contemporary South African context , little did we anticipate how overwhelming the response would be. The curatorial narrative took as its cue the first person recorded (according to legend) to have identified himself as an Afrikaner, Hendrik Biebow. In March 1707 he proclaimed, “*Ik ben een Afrikander*”, when he was threatened with expulsion from the Cape. He did not want to be deported from South Africa and his use of the phrase at the time was meant to claim his ‘African-ness.’

We initiated the first *Ik ben Een Afrikander* exhibition at Artspace Gallery in 2011 which attracted significant critical response and media attention. The underlying narrative had touched a nerve. The gallery show was thereafter followed by a second exhibition presented at the 2012 Stellenbosch University Word Fest and following that a third exhibition was presented at the 2012 Absa Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK). *Ik ben Een Afrikander III* received a prestigious Kanna nomination for the best visual art exhibition of 2012.

As an Afrikaner of a certain age I was raised during the Apartheid era and also witnessed its downfall and the birth of a new democratic South Africa. In my personal capacity I have had personal experience and often within my sphere of activity a direct role, in unpacking some of the baggage that the post-Apartheid South Africa has been grappling with for the past 19 years.

In the space of my lifetime, I was told by my society and South African society at large, that as an Afrikaner I am one of a superior race. I am dominant and I should be proud of my heritage and what my people have achieved.

Then post 1994 the message was that I, as an Afrikaner, was part of a race that was responsible for some of the greatest human rights atrocities of our time, and I should be ashamed of my heritage and what my people have done.

According to Wikipedia, I share a language with between an estimated 15 and 23 million South Africans, yet I don’t share a culture with all of them. Of these many million South Africans who claim Afrikaans as their first language, only an estimated 10 to 19 million call themselves Afrikaners - so defined by their language, culture and skin colour. Approximately 4.5 million Afrikaans speakers are (so called) Coloured, and more often than not, do not identify themselves as Afrikaners.

While I personally am challenged to at once grapple with being both proud and ashamed of my heritage, millions of Coloured South Africans have spent the first part of their lives being too black for the white community, and now, too white for the black community. Although a contentious comment to make, in a country where its citizens have spent hundreds of years defining each other by skin colour, this type of racial classification is not something that nearly 20 years of democracy has yet managed to move the nation beyond.

The current political turmoil attests to this. The 'race-card' issue has in the recent past resurfaced following a brief honeymoon period. It once again dominates the media and public debate.

One statement that as an Afrikaner I have never been allowed to easily make is that I am an African.

During the height of Apartheid, African meant black. In this period of our history for the white supposedly 'superior' race, being African or in any way black, or sympathizing with a black person or cause, was deemed inconceivable and a betrayal of Afrikaner values and beliefs - the worst thing to do. It was for some punished by death. Now that the political landscape has dramatically changed and this racially segregated era has ended, trying to claim that I am also an African, born, bred and invested in this country, is almost as contentious a matter as it was previously and often perceived as downright insulting!

Somewhere between the Dutch landing at the Cape and Nelson Mandela's long walk to freedom, the entire very complex and rich heritage of a language, culture and people became replaced by what is now an outdated political definition of who and what we are. It's an interesting irony then to examine the roots of the term 'Afrikaner' and to interrogate and consider this identity within a contemporary context.

The first person, or by some accounts, the first European, recorded to have identified himself as an Afrikaner, was Dutch settler Hendrik Biebouw. In March 1707 he stated, "*Ik ben een Afrikander*". Although accounts of this incident vary, and interpretations of spelling and intonation of the phrase also vary, he is widely considered to have meant, *I am an African*. At the time he spoke these words (or drunkenly shouted them out, depending on the source), he was resisting expulsion from the Cape Colony by the Magistrate of Stellenbosch. As Wikipedia puts it, he was showing "loyalty and a sense of belonging to the territory of modern South Africa, rather than to any ancestral homeland in Europe."

In 1996 many years after colonial occupation, then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, started in his now iconic speech on behalf of the ANC the now famous phrase, "I am an African" continuing ironically with the phrase, "Not because I was born there, but because my heart beats with Africa."

These two moments stand in stark contrast and sum up the challenges faced by the modern day Afrikaner who is claiming his place in South Africa. Moving past the shame and guilt of Apartheid has been near impossible for many people in my position.

New voices of Afrikaans intellectuals, artists, poets, singers and performers have begun to explore their identity and challenge the notion of what is an African. Through their work, relevant questions about the real heritage of Afrikaners is being revisited - the heritage that predates Apartheid. A heritage that acknowledges the bad, but also demands that the

depth and breadth of a culture and language embedded in this country be afforded its rightful attention. These are people who are not prepared to accept the labels that they have inherited and are re-examining what it means to be an Afrikaner.

This was the starting point for what has become an incredible journey, and so the Ik Ben Een Afrikaner project was born – one that has continued to explore the legacy and the complex and often contentious relationship that Afrikaans and Afrikaners have with their homeland and their fellow South Africans.

Project history and components

The initial group exhibition was represented through the works by ten artists; the number of artists grew as we progressed and subsequently ended with 24 artists represented on the third exhibition at the KKNK. A publication profiling the works by all 24 artists was produced and launched at the KKNK in 2012.

Highly respected political journalist, the late Mandy Rossouw, wrote an exceptional essay for our publication titled *Tweeledigheid van identiteit*. We had looked forward to a long working relationship with her but sadly she passed away suddenly earlier this year. She will always be remembered as an outstanding journalist on topical issues. Mandy, being Afrikaans-speaking herself, understood the complexities related to the identity of the Afrikaner, and having cut her teeth in journalism at the University of Stellenbosch, she was a valuable asset to our project.

To date project interventions have included:

- **Ik Ben Een Afrikaner I, Curated Group Exhibition, Artspace Gallery, Rosebank, JHB 1 June 2011**
Francki Burger, Hannelie Coetzee, Johann du Plessis, Pauline Gutter, Clare Menck, John Murray, Mea Ox, Henk Serfontein, Cobus van Bosch and Reney Warrington.
- **Ik Ben Een Afrikaner II, Curated Group Exhibition, Stellenbosch Woordfees 2012**
Hanneke Benade, Willie Bester, Lien Botha, Hannelie Coetzee, Johann du Plessis, Pauline Gutter, Sandra Hanekom, Marieke Kruger, Clare Menck, John Murray, Mea Ox, Henk Serfontein and Jaco Sieberhagen
- **Ik Ben Een Afrikaner III, Curated Group Exhibition, KKNK (Nominated for a Kanna Award) 31 March – 7 April 2012**
Hanneke Benade, Willie Bester, Lien Botha, Hannelie Coetzee, Johann du Plessis, Pauline Gutter, Sandra Hanekom, Marieke Kruger, Clare Menck, John Murray, Mea Ox, Henk Serfontein and Jaco Sieberhagen.

Publication

- **Launched March 2012**

Planned for 2014 -2015

- **Touring Museum Exhibition titled: *The Unequal Conversation***
Proposal under consideration by the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown
As the next phase in this project, a touring museum exhibition has been planned. A proposal was submitted to the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown for 2014. Should it be accepted by the Festival it will show in late June early July 2014. Thereafter the plan is to tour this exhibition to several significant art museums in South Africa over an 18 month period. Oliewenhuis Art Museum located as it is in a community where the curatorial

concerns underpinning the works would be relevant and topical, would provide an appropriate and prestigious platform for this exhibition.

The Curatorial Brief - The Unequal Conversation

When identifying artists for this show, significant artists were considered whose artistic practice engage and would lend itself to this narrative. When interrogating our list, we realised that, like other industries, a pattern emerged – one that gave us a new insight.

Looking at artists who have established important careers in South Africa, the list became heavily weighted toward the white male artist.

This is a reflection of and a telling comment on the state of both the racial and gender hierarchy in South Africa twenty years ago. So what does this mean?

In business, politics and other spheres of life and at boardroom level, now more senior and established South Africans with years of work experience take decisions about our future; this leads us to question how much these conversations have changed?

Only now are the 'born frees' starting to enter the workplace; however, they still have years ahead of them to notch up the achievements and experience of the older generation.

The realisation then dawned that the ratio of artists we had spoken of were still overwhelmingly white and male and the narrative emerging from these preliminary lists and discussions was one reflecting the current status quo. Namely, that many of the artists currently occupying the higher echelons of our industry reflect the demographics that were advantaged to develop their practice and build careers during Apartheid's grip. As a result, there exists a gap between established artists who have significant career profiles and those now emerging and beginning to gain attention. A gap that is still wide.

This background therefore informed both the curatorial narrative and the title - ***The Unequal Conversation*** - of this exhibition in the Ik Ben Een Afrikaner project series of exhibitions. The brief proposed to the specifically selected male and female artists will challenge them to consider and engage with this conversation through the medium of the artworks they create.

This fourth show is a significant step forward for the project and will engage no more than 7 senior artists around the proposed curatorial narrative.

To address what emerged from these deliberations the following curatorial narrative was proposed. With a working title of *'The unequal conversation'* the show proposes 5 white male artists in conversation with one white female and one black female artist all of whom were born and came to maturity prior to 1994. Their formative years, whether moving from childhood to adulthood, or as adults climbing the ladder of artistic success, coincided with the transition to democracy. In all cases their lives straddle the two South Africa's and so too does their professional artistic practice.

The brief to the artists is to engage one another in a conversation through their work and to explore how much or in what ways the conversation has changed

On the one side we have the gender issue. Women are still woefully underrepresented in structures of power the world over, and especially in South Africa, despite our having the most progressive constitution in the world. On other side we have these white men raised by their mothers and in many cases a black woman - the South African nanny. The plight of many black women today is still to act as surrogate mothers to children of other women while leaving behind their own in the care of others.

In addition we have the complex relationship that exists between white women and the black women who raise their children. In many homes and in many ways, these women, separated by race and class, are one another's support - both emotionally and practically.

Gender issues are often contentious and as a result these debates are on-going. Gender hierarchies tend to resurface from time to time. *The unequal conversation* not only opens a debate on gender issues within the Afrikaner context but also asks artists to look back at the last 20 years and explore the meaning of the Afrikaner/African in post-apartheid South Africa.

The Artists

The artists listed below were invited to participate on the basis of the relevance of their practices. They have accepted the invitation and will create new works in conversation with one another.

- **Senzeni Marasela**
- **Rosemarie Marriott**
- **Luan Nel**
- **Hentie van der Merwe**
- **Willem Boshoff**
- **Strijdom van der Merwe**
- **Jan van der Merwe**

About Lizamore & Associates (previously Artspace Gallery)

Established in 2001, by Teresa Lizamore, Artspace has recently been re-branded as Lizamore and Associates. The Gallery has shown the work of talented up and coming, as well as established contemporary South African artists for over eight and a half years. The gallery's services the growing market of buyers who are interested in and wish to invest in South African contemporary art. By showing the work of newer up and coming artists, as well as the more senior established names, the gallery provides collectors (both corporate and private), opportunities to acquire artworks by artists that have a proven investment value, as well as works by artists who have been earmarked as developing promising career potential.

Artists such as Wayne Barker, Karin Preller, Judith Mason, Colbert Mashile, Collen Maswanganyi, Walter Oltmann, Richard Smith and Angus Taylor have all been exhibited at Artspace, in a series of solo and group exhibitions, several of which were sell outs. In March 2008 Artspace moved from its former location in Fairlands to its current premises on Jan Smuts Avenue, alongside prestigious industry players such as David Krut Art Projects and Gallery 21, Resolution Gallery and Goodman Gallery. Together these institutions form what has become known as "the artstrip" - consolidating a variety of visual art foci as one offering for the Johannesburg audience.

About Teresa Lizamore

Over the past 33 years, Teresa Lizamore has developed a sound career in the industry as an art consultant, curator and gallerist.

Lizamore's interest in the industry developed during her early years as a student at the then Rand Afrikaans University (now University of Johannesburg) where she studied history of art. She went on to obtain formal qualifications in Public Relations from The Public Relations Institute of South Africa and interior design from the Boston College in Rosebank. Her work as a public relations practitioner, art consultant and gallery director has merged her interests and experience with her strong entrepreneurial spirit. She served as the Curator for the Sasol art collection between 1982 and 2009 and was responsible for building the collection to over 2000 pieces of contemporary South African Art. The collection is recognized as one of the premier collections of contemporary South African art and is displayed in Sasol's offices locally and internationally.

Lizamore also currently serves as Advisor and Curator to Rand Merchant Bank, a position she has held for the past 15 years. This collection too hosts about 1500 art works. During her career, she initiated and developed the Telkom art collection, has worked on the ATKV collection and has initiated several smaller private and corporate collections. In addition Lizamore started other smaller collections for companies. Lizamore also acted as the art consultant in the formalization of the first Brett Kebble Art Awards in 2003, and has been involved in many ad hoc short term projects.

Since relocating to the Art Strip in Rosebank at the beginning of 2008, a host of new programmes have been initiated and run under the auspices of the gallery. The most significant programme Lizamore developed following her relocation was the Mentorship Programme.

This mentorship programme aims to expose new visual artists, who have previously had little or no exposure to the market. This is achieved by identifying established artists in the sector and having them collaborate with new talent through their nurturing and guiding the previously unexposed artists. The final outcome is a commercial exhibition where the mentee's work is publicly showcased, thereby exposing them to an audience. The established artist's endorsement of the newer talent gives credibility to the new artist's work and enhances their profile to the audience.

The Ik Ben Een Afrikander is another of Lizamore's projects which has garnered her critical acclaim.