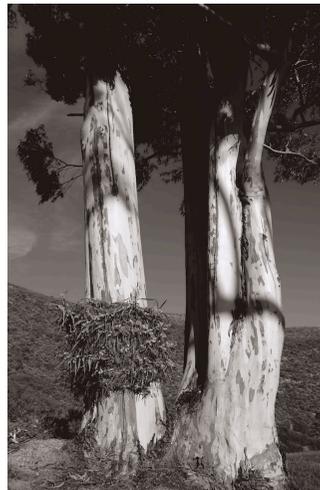


2016 A sense of CONTINUUM – Art, Humans and Environmental Changes

During a trip through South Africa I witnessed many landscapes that at a first glance seemed to be infinite and somehow full with resources. In my inexperienced eye as a traveller for the first time in the country, everything seems very "South African". But along the way, I meet many environmentally concerned people and it becomes clear to me that South Africa's colonial history not only left behind a 400 years of great suffering in terms of human rights and racial affiliation. The colonial past has also brought with it a fauna that in many ways changed the landscapes. Trees from different countries in the world, once planted (1) has been spread and grows in places where they originally were not at all meant to be. Today environmental organizations work hard to maintain an original identity regarding the South African fauna and face the question how to maintain these plants in the landscape. Regions history of colonialism and slavery has left a powerful impact on the communities that inhabit these landscapes, leaving behind contentious debates around land ownership and custodianship.



*The concept of "Homeland" has special meaning in South Africa and was carried out by the apartheid regime in the 1970s. Often it resulted in forced displacement or removal of large black communities to isolated areas around the outer edges of urban cities, settling them into 'townships'. The apartheid regime isolated communities, depriving black South Africans of their equal rights and freedom of movement. Photo models: Soonim Kim (Sydkorea), Izak Vollgraaff (Sydafrika). A site specific Art piece made by Marie Gayatri in Overberg, Porcupine Hills.
Photo: Marie Gayatri*

The stay in South Africa and the material presented here in this document was part of a program organized by Site_Specific Collective, a land art group in South Africa (www.sitespecific.org.za) who hosted the 'Stories of Rain - Global Nomadic Art Project South Africa 2016'. Eight international artists travelled across the South Africa landscape, hosted and joined by 40 national artists along the way at public events, workshops, land art projects, exhibitions and a symposium. The aim was to set up a conversation about the origin of humankind through the oldest people of our contemporary world - the Khoisan - in the context of the unfolding environmental crises. Land and nature art was used to facilitate and stimulate debate and conversation.

Just as in 'GNAP South Africa 2016', the project 'A sense of CONTINUUM' aims to implement activities during the artistic process. Along with various partners, experiences on how human impact on the environment and environmental process for protections are being examined and evaluated with the help of artistic means



Photos (right to left): Re-imagining the Anthropocene (Seminar) at Centre for Complex Systems in Transition Stellenbosch University. Land Art workshop arranged outside Prins Albert. The Green Mountain arts festival at the Crocodile River Conservancy in Tshwane/Pretoria organised a Sangoma ritual ceremony, guiding participants to a sacred site in the area.



Land art performance by Patrick Tagoe-Turkson at Dias Beach in Cape Point. Visit to the Sterkfontein Caves inside the Cradle of Mankind UNESCO heritage site in Gauteng, South Africa. Exhibition at Gallery AVA in Cape Town. Nature Art installation by Marie Gayatri Aswater, Prins Albert. Photographs taken by katty vandenbergh (Site_Specific Collective) and Marie Gayatri.

Notes

(1) Like the Eucalyptus trees originates from Australia, an exotic species that is very water hungry. White settlers planted them because of their ability to survive drought conditions, but they flourished here, drying up a lot of riverbeds. South Africa has been systematically removing these trees, often in the context of social community programs as a way of providing work for unemployed communities. Their systematic removal has resulted in the rivers starting to flow again because they have such a negative impact on our water tables.

UNESCO World Heritage in Cambodia

The World Heritage Angkor contains around 50 temple areas alongside each other. The first temple was built 900's century BC, to be abandoned around the 1400's century after Christ. Today, some temples have been restored, many disintegrated and some parts have been integrated with nature in a marvellous way. To get from one temple to another, you need transportation and a common way is to hire a Tuk Tuk with responsible drivers. This gives rise to jobs for many Cambodians. I take a closer look at those who earn their living in this area, the tourist industry and traces it may leave behind in everyday life.



Many make their living from tourism in the World Heritage area and waste is a huge environmental problem. There are also a few scattered farms between the major temple area where people live on farming and livestock. Child labour is everywhere on farms and in small-scale businesses operated within the family and relatives. Here you go to school three hours a day, other times you are expected to work for your family. Photo: Marie Gayatri

It is not more than 20 years ago Ankor opened its doors to tourism and the pressure of it is enormous! Even if everything is on a large scale here – there is no such thing as emptiness or a quiet place on your own! Yet I am surprised at how photographers (including myself) manage to take so many photographs of the temples without humans on their images. The quiet empty scenario that these images shows, does not match the real experience of the sites. The air is at times so polluted from the tourist buses that it feels hard to breathe inside the area. Commerce is everywhere, beggars asking for money, guards monitors your steps and movements, musicians with amputated legs and arms of war and landmines playing to survive, road dust and immense quantities of vehicles, camera clicks, mobile phones sounds, people wandering around with sun hats, water bottles and flip-flop sandals. Not a very good shoe choice because parts of the temples have large fallen boulders you have to climb.

And all together the fallen parts seem scattered in a seemingly eternal chaos. When one gives the time to come back day after day, you notice that this is also an area many Cambodians also like to spend some free time with. Ankor breathes magic, and part of the temple sites are still used for religious purposes.



A temple at dawn with an altar, offerings and lots of ashes. A tourist that mimic dancing 'Buddhisatvas' carved on a pillar. Once upon a time there were lots of temple dancers. Coconut flour is a path, which leads to a remote temple. Photo: Marie Gayatri.



'Dollar for a ride' – Staged photography commenting environmental problems in the area.

