

Three stories:

Pieter Hugo, Mikhael Subotzky, Paolo Woods



Three stories ...

about Africa, presented by two African photographers of the post-Apartheid generation and a Dutch-Canadian photographer, seeking to give visibility to the inhabitants and to the complexity and nuances of African culture; such is the topic of the present exhibition. These young authors do not wish to exercise judgement upon the situations unfolding before their camera lenses, but instead, by revealing marginal events, to convey a sense of the values, conditions, objects and incidents of everyday life, while keeping a political eye on the changing world around them.

Wishing to keep their distance from traditional photojournalism, setting little store by the rules of the mass media and refusing to apply the clichés with which the image of Africa has been imbued since the colonial period and the era of Apartheid, they are inspired of the photographic approach of artists like David Goldblatt, Roger Ballen and Guy Tillim.

Rather than scouring the continent camera in hand, seizing the moment, as it were, they forge personal relationships with their models, working over long periods of time, focusing on calm and "secondary" situations, switching between documentary and artistic photography while having recourse to portrait and a degree of *mise en scène*.

Besides these common characteristics, it is important to underline certain particularities of these three photographic undertakings.

Pieter Hugo uses the contrasts and oppositions that arise between the urban and the wild, affection and brutality, beauty and atrocity, to create a dramaturgy stemming from the protagonists themselves and not from their actions. Via this approach he eliminates the notion of the spectacular and manages to give importance to the non-visible to reveal another – a new – image of Africa, not that of a country ravaged by war or famine, nor that of wonderful "safarique" , settings.

Mikhael Subotzky plays with colours and luminosity (the city shots are often dark and somewhat drab, while those of the prison are shot in vivid colours and with greater luminosity). Hence his discourse reveals surprising twists... For example, life behind bars seems – contrary to what one might expect – better than that of the underprivileged inhabitants of Beaufort West. Via such surprising and unexpected moments, he manages to bring to the surface people and situations of which the mass media does not speak.

Paolo Woods, the only one of the three photographers who is not of African origin, opposes two cultures: that of the Chinese workers and investors who come to Africa to live out their "American Dream" and that of the Africans who hope for a better life through this new form of colonisation. He makes portraits – often staged to a degree, icon like, imbued with a striking symbolism – and opposes these pictures with photographs of a more documentary nature. The portraits highlight African/Chinese cohabitation and its consequences, a phenomenon that the mass media overlooks when talking about the subject.

The dissemination of these three stories takes place at various levels. Pieter Hugo and Mikhael Subotzky, represented by a gallery and a photographic agency, have their work presented in museums, galleries, festivals of renown or in art publications. Paolo Woods, who has teamed up with a journalist in order to carry out his work has chosen to publish his work in magazines and journalistic investigations. As a result, he accepts that his photos take on the status of illustration. Yet via this means of distribution he manages to access a very large public which does not hail simply from the worlds of photography or art, thus enabling him to extricate the subject from its tendency to marginalization on a much larger scale.

The stylistic and thematic approaches which have led to this collection of "stories" overlap on several occasions, yet each photographer – by bringing to bear his own personal vision, experience and commitment – has created his own universe and his own discourse. By leaving shocking imagery behind them – which in any case no longer has any impact due to overexposure – they seek instead, in order to pass on a message, to adopt a new photographic language via which they surprise the viewer, inciting us to observe more wisely, to ask why and to call ourselves into question.

Marguy Conzémus

Pieter Hugo – *The Hyena and Other Men*



- 1 - *The Hyena and Other Men*, Mallam Mantari Lamal with Mainasara, Nigeria, 2005 © Pieter Hugo
- 2 - *The Hyena and Other Men*, The Hyena Men of Abuja, Nigeria, 2005 © Pieter Hugo
- 3 - *The Hyena and Other Men*, Abu Kikan with Frayo, Asaba, Nigeria, 2007 © Pieter Hugo

The Hyena and Other men is the story of men, who in the company of hyenas, pythons and baboons, earn their living doing street performances for the crowd and selling traditional medicine. Captivated by a picture he came across in a South-African news paper depicting men with their hyenas in the streets of Lagos and Nigeria, Pieter Hugo decided to go and meet them. A few weeks later, accompanied by a local reporter, they hooked up with them in shanty town on the outskirts of Abuja, to take to the road with this troupe and to get to know their fascinating world a little better. Bit by bit, he got to meet the animal merchants, with their traditional rites and strove to photograph their daily round. He quickly realized that what really interested him in this subject was the hybrid crossover of the urban and the wild and the paradoxical, often very affectionate, at other times cruel and brutal, relationship that the merchants have with their animals. Via a series of extraordinary portraits of this marginal existence taken over the space of two years (2005 to 2007), we discover a world characterized by complex relationships and interdependencies, a world which wavers between traditions, myths and modernity, domination and submission.

Biography

Pieter Hugo was born in 1976 and grew up in Cape Town. After a two-year residency in 2002/03 at Fabrica in Treviso, Italy, he was included in *ReGeneration: 50 Photographers of Tomorrow, 2005-2025* (Musée de l'Élysée, Lausanne, and Aperture, New York), won the first prize in the Portraits section of the 2006 *World Press Photo* competition and was the *Standard Bank Young Artist for Visual Art* in 2007. In 2008, Pieter Hugo was the winner of the *KLM Paul Huf Award* and the *Arles Discovery Award* at the Rencontres d'Arles (Photography Festival in France).

He has had solo exhibitions at Michael Stevenson, Cape Town; Yossi Milo, New York; Extraspaio, Rome; the Museum of Modern Art, Rome; Fabrica Features, Lisbon; Bertrand & Gruner, Geneva; Stephen Cohen, Los Angeles; FOAM Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam and Warren Siebrits, Johannesburg. His most recent body of work *Nollywood* is shown this year at Michael Stevenson.

Recent group exhibitions include: the *27th São Paulo Biennial* (2006); *Street: Behind the cliché* at Witte de With, Rotterdam (2006); *Lumo '07 - 'Us'*, International Triennial of Photography, Finland (2007); *An Atlas of Events* at Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon (2007); *Faccia A Faccia: Il nuovo ritratto fotografico* at FORMA, Centro Internazionale di Fotografia, Milan (2007); *Street & Studio: An urban history of photography* at Tate Modern, London (2008); *Make Art/Stop AIDS* at the Fowler Museum, UCLA (2008); and *Unbounded: New Art for a New Century* at the Newark Museum, New Jersey (2009). His work is included in the travelling exhibition *Room for Justice* presented by Avocats Sans Frontières until September 2010.

His publications include *Looking Aside* (Punctum Editions, 2006), *Messina/Musina* (Punctum Editions, 2007) and *The Hyena and Other Men* (Prestel, 2007).

www.pieterhugo.com

Mikhael Subotzky – *Beaufort West*



1



2



3

1- *Beaufort West*, Prison Beaufort West, 2006. Beaufort West Prison is contained in a traffic circle in the centre of the N1 highway which connects Cape Town and Johannesburg. © Mikhael Subotzky

2- *Beaufort West*, Samuel, Beaufort West rubbish dump, 2006 © Mikhael Subotzky

3 - *Beaufort West*, Contestants in the fancy dress competition at the Beaufort West agricultural show, 2007 © Mikhael Subotzky

Beaufort West is a small town in the middle of the desert, intersected by the national N1 highway, lying halfway between Cape Town and Johannesburg, and crossed every year by millions of cars. Here, as in most South African rural towns, agricultural activity has fallen off considerably from one generation to the next, causing an exodus to the big cities. Beaufort West is a desolate place. Unemployment is rife and it has a very high crime rate. Those who remain, or who return here, have been rejected everywhere else. Yet as one leaves the town centre one happens upon an amazing sight: a prison, standing in the middle of a roundabout.

Mikhael Subotzky, having already carried out several photographic projects in South African prisons, decided to spend time in Beaufort West to sketch a portrait of the town. Between 2006 and 2008, he would return there regularly, to live with the people, going out to meet them in the company of Major, a very popular guy about town. He took a particular interest in problems of marginalization, incarceration and disillusion to create an inventory of the social reality of South Africa in the post-Apartheid world.

Biography

Mikhael Subotzky, 27, was born in Cape Town, South Africa and is currently based in Johannesburg. He has worked as a photographer since graduating from the University of Cape Town in 2004. His final-year university project, entitled *Die Vier Hoeke* (The Four Corners), consisted of an in-depth study of the South African prison system. It has received widespread acclaim both in South Africa and internationally. Recent prizes include the *Special Jurors Award* at the 2005 Vles Recontres Africaines de la Photographie in Bamako, the 2006 *F25 Award for Concerned Photography* (promoted by Fabrica, Treviso and Forma, Milano), the 2007 *Young Photographers Award* at Perpignan, the 2007 *KLM Paul Huf Award*, the 2008 *ICP Infinity Award* (Young Photographer), and the 2008 *W Eugene Smith Grant*.

In 2005, Subotzky extended his focus on the criminal justice system by running photographic workshops with prisoners and photographing ex-prisoners in a series entitled *Umjiegwana* (The Outside). His project, focusing on the small Karoo Desert town of Beaufort West, was shown in Cape Town, Amsterdam, Verona and New York (2007/2008).

Subotzky has held solo exhibitions inside Pollsmoor Prison (2005), at the Goodman Gallery (2006), at Constitution Hill (2006), at Goodman Gallery Cape (2007) and FOAM (FotoMuseum in Amsterdam, 2007). His prints are held in the permanent collections of the South African National Gallery (Cape Town), The Johannesburg Art Gallery, FOAM (Amsterdam) and the Museum of Modern Art (New York).

www.imagesby.com

Paolo Woods - *Chinafrica*

In 2007, Paolo Woods set out to recount the adventure of the conquest of the African continent by the Chinese. In search of coveted raw materials – copper, uranium and timber – Beijing has sent forth its most adventurous companies and entrepreneurs.

500.000 Chinese emigrants to Africa are striving to make their fortune, in a continent which the West only deemed worthy of receiving humanitarian aide. Some are managing large conglomerates, while others are selling bargain items along the roadsides of some of the world's poorest countries. Accompanied by the journalist Serge Michel, Paolo Woods travelled across 15 countries, criss-crossing the entire continent to encounter these two very different worlds, from the threatened forests of the Congo to the karaoke bars of Nigeria, along the pipelines of Sudan and the railroads of Angola, from the top ministries in the capitals to the devastated countryside.

Chinafrica also tells us of a bygone era. The Chinese have little in common with the former colonisers – they build roads, hospitals and schools. For the Africans, it's a new phenomenon which makes no claims of democracy or transparency, a law beyond dictatorial regimes. The images in *Chinafrica* are a rare and surprising portrait of an unsuspected here and now, as well as a condensed portrait of a globalized world.



Chinafrica, Nigeria, Lagos, 2007 © Paolo Woods



Chinafrica, Congo, Imboulou dam, 2007 © Paolo Woods



Chinafrica, Nigeria, Lagos, 2007 © Paolo Woods

Biography

Paolo Woods was born of Canadian and Dutch parentage. He grew up in Italy and now is based in Paris.

Paolo Woods ran a laboratory and a photo gallery in Florence, Italy, before dedicating himself to documentary photography in 1998. He is devoted to long-term projects that blend documentary photography with investigative journalism. In 2003, along with journalists, Serge Michel and Serge Enderlin, he produced a book, entitled *Un monde de Brut* for Le Seuil (Paris). Tackling the subject of oil, this story involved working in, among other places, Angola, Russia, Kazakhstan, Texas and Iraq. In 2004, again for Le Seuil, and working with Serge Michel he produced a book called *American Chaos*, a detailed reportage on the Western debacle in Afghanistan and Iraq. Both books have also been published in Italy, and as magazine pieces in 15 different countries. In 2007/2008 he documented the spectacular rise of the Chinese in Africa. The book, *Chinafrica*, has been published in France and will be translated into ten languages.

His work regularly appears in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Stern*, *le Monde*, *Geo* and many other international publications.

He has had solo exhibitions in France, Italy, Spain, Holland and Austria. His pictures are held in the French National Library, the FNAC collection and the Sheik Saud Al-Thani collection in Qatar. He has received various prizes for his work, including a *World Press Photo award* for his work in Iraq, the "*Alstom Prize for Journalism*" and the *GRIN prize*.

www.paolowoods.com

Exhibition :

Curators : Marguy Conzémus, Michèle Walerich
Production : Département Photographie / CNA
Assistant : Mylène Carrière

Archival follow-up : Hélène Kaiser
Assistant : Sandy Dos Santos

Image treatment : Myriam Kraemer, Nelly Lefflot
Lighting : Romain Girtgen
Technical team : Kurt Gelhausen, Druis Schlessler

Exhibition : 29/03/2009 - 31/05/2009.
Tuesday - Sunday : 10 am - 10 pm.

Centre national de l'audiovisuel (CNA) - DISPLAY01
1b rue du Centenaire
L-3475 Dudelange

Guided tours upon request
Information : Tél. : 52 24 24-1 / www.cna.lu / info@cna.etat.lu

Catalogue :

Publisher : Centre national de l'audiovisuel (CNA) / Dudelange

Texts, interviews, editorial direction : Marguy Conzémus, Michèle Walerich (CNA)
Translation : Peter Leonard (english), Yusuf Samantar (french)

© 2009 Centre national de l'audiovisuel (CNA) – Département Photographie
Ministère de la Culture, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, Luxembourg

ISBN 978-2-919873-04-3



CNA gratefully acknowledges Michael Stevenson, Cape Town, and Yossi Milo, New York / Magnum Photos, Foam and KLM Paul Huf Award / Paolo Woods