

2017

LHOLA AMIRA

Looking for Ghana & The Red Suitcase

ARTWORK INFORMATION

smac

2017

LHOLA AMIRA
BIOGRAPHY

LHOLA AMIRA

b.1984, Gugulethu, South Africa.

Lhola Amira was borne from the realisation of an obligation to say and, if necessary, shout what others could or would not. Lhola Amira is imagined and yet powerfully real, her body navigating boundaries between 'self' and 'other'. In this vein Lhola Amira is interested in the intersectionality between that which is 'real' and that, which is 'imagined'. While maintaining an invariably accessible dialogue, she produces work that deals with global issues of contention, such as socio-economic and political conditions of race, gender, sexuality and geographical location. Lhola Amira is primarily considered a 'performance artist' however; she refuses to adhere to any preconceived theories of 'art' or 'performance'. She unashamedly intertwines definitions that academia attempts to separate, such as 'activist', 'poet', 'philosopher', 'artist' and many more.

Lhola Amira questions the idea that a performance is a force or a temporary 'pretend reality' from which audiences can take an interval; in her own words "You cannot perform being black. Only the black body is viewed by society to be in a perpetual state of performance." Due to her extensive research and dedicated quest to gain differing experiences, she is able to reject the notion that her statements are available for consideration, the conviction of her appearances is palatable and unequivocal. It is for this reason that her unconventional 'performances' are notably only ever referred to as 'appearances'. To limit her practice to the medium of 'performance' would not only be inadequate, but also misleading. Lhola Amira consistently builds and edits her practice in relation to both contemporary discourses, and past misconceptions. She continues to meticulously calculate her circumstances, through both her own understanding as well as others' interpretations. Each appearance and interaction becomes site-specific, through the exploration of both physical and geographical limitations of the environment in which it takes place.

Adding to her appearances' unique nature, Lhola Amira engages with observers or passers-by, encouraging interrogation of the "junctions between blackness, queerness, revolution and love". Viewers are

invited to be present with Lhola Amira throughout her appearances while she seamlessly negotiates between the roles of orator, activist and sage. As Lhola Amira approaches centre stage, in a medley of sculptors, painters, and photographers all of whom have had their practice inseparably preceded by the term 'African', she disputes and rejects this simultaneously sparse and generalized description. Her most recent project is the first of many endeavors to physically investigate assumptions, contradictions and associations placed on contemporary definitions of Africa, this larger thematic direction is described by the artist as "Looking for 'Africa' in 'Africa'..."

The artist was born in Gugulethu, South Africa in 1984. She has recently been awarded the AIRS (Artist in Residence Skövde Art Museum) residency in Skövde, Sweden to take place in April 2017. Earlier residencies include participation at the Jivar Creation and Society in Barcelona, Spain in 2015, and at Vast Artists' Collective in Islamabad, Pakistan in 2010. Lhola Amira has made numerous solo appearances both locally and abroad, most recently: *Lhola Amira Looking for Ghana in Accra* at The Studio Accra, and *Lhola Amira Looking for Ghana in Jamestown* at Brazil House, both in Ghana in 2016. Notable earlier appearances include, *Lhola Amira Will Make You Cry* in Cape Town, South Africa at the AVA in 2016, and *Lhola Amira: Acknowledgements, Distinctions and Being Lhola Amira* as well as *De/Colonial Love*, all at MITE-Barcelona in Barcelona, Spain in 2015.

Lhola Amira's recent group exhibitions include, *Lhola Amira in Conversation with Rinamanyanga Hariputirwe at Instruments of Memory* -a solo exhibition by Masimba Hwati- and *As Long as the World is Anti-Black: Of Course this is Personal* at group exhibition *Nothing Personal*, both at SMAC Gallery in Stellenbosch, South Africa, in 2016, as well as *Lhola Amira neZambatho ezoMoya* at DETAILS at 6ix Studio, New York City, USA in 2014. The artist has recently presented her first solo exhibition at SMAC in Stellenbosch titled *Looking for Ghana & The Red Suitcase* (4 February - 1 April 2017).

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LHOLA AMIRA BACKGROUND

On Being LHOLA AMIRA

Lhola Amira is a persona inhabited by artist Khanyisile Mbongwa (b.1984 Gugulethu, Cape Town, South Africa). Currently based in Cape Town Khanyisile Mbongwa is an award winning performance and installation artist/curator, who uses movement, poetry and sculptural works in her practice. In 2006, she was amongst the founding members of robust and innovative arts collective called Gugulective. The group focussed on performance-based practices around re-imagining the psychological and physical spaces of the township using photomontage, video and sound.

Mbongwa has exhibited and performed in and around Cape Town and Johannesburg, and internationally; in Berlin, Barcelona, Islamabad, Edinburgh, Hamburg, New York, Basel and Colombo. In 2014 she interned at the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts (GIPCA) at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, during which she curated the *PreLIFE* talks and assisted with the facilitation of *Life Art Festival*.

Khanyisile Mbongwa has engaged in various curatorial and artistic projects. She won the Africa Centre – Artist in Residency Laureate in 2014, and thereafter was the resident artist at JIWAR in Barcelona, Spain in 2015. Continuing to create and curate, Mbongwa was the invited Special Guest at Liste Art Fair, in Basel, in 2015.

As part of Cape Town Art Week, Mbongwa curated a collaborative performance piece titled *My Body Is Not An Apology*. In 2013, she curated *Demonstrations: Performing Being Black* in Cape Town, a two part exhibition that focused on photography, installation pieces and performances in township public spaces. In 2012, together with the late Unathi Sigenu, she won the MTN New Contemporary Artist Award. And in 2010 she had a solo experimental exhibition in Cape Town, titled *Ndizakuyivula Ibhayibile*. In addition, Mbongwa is the curator of the *Twenty Journey* – that had its first exhibition in 2015 also in Cape Town. Currently doing her Masters in Interdisciplinary Art, Public Art and Public Spheres at the Institute for Creative Arts (ICA) through the University of Cape Town, Mbongwa also works with the International Union of

Puppetry South Africa (UNIMA SA) and HANDSPRING TRUST as Executive Director.

LHOLA AMIRA

The character of Lhola Amira, is primarily a 'performance artist' however she does not adhere to any preconceived notions of 'art' or 'performance'. The character of Lhola Amira first appeared in Mbongwa's own creative practice as early as 2009, during Khanyisile Mbongwa's time as a participating artist in Hamburg, Germany at the Subvision Kunst Off Festival. From there Mbongwa found herself becoming Lhola Amira more frequently during her performances throughout her residency at Theerta Sri Lanka in Colombo in 2010 and though her contribution to a group curated project titled: *Category Error 2* at the Association for Visual Arts (AVA) Gallery in Cape Town also in 2010. Thereafter Khanyisile Mbongwa has recognised Lhola Amira as an independent artist.

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LHOLA AMIRA

Looking for Ghana
&
The Red Suitcase



Video Stills: Looking for Ghana & The Red Suitcase | 2017 | Ed 1 of 3 + 2AP

And all I ever wanted as a young black girl was to be visible, but all the spaces I entered, performed an extreme violence of either making me silent or loud. But I might be known if I die or when I'm killed.

—Lhola Amira

As Lhola Amira approaches center stage, in a medley of sculptors, painters, and photographers all of whom have had their practice inseparably preceded by the term 'African', she disputes and rejects this simultaneously sparse and generalized description. In her signature fusion of politics, economics and arts, Lhola Amira has developed Looking for Ghana & The Red Suitcase as the first of many more physical investigations into assumptions, contradictions and associations placed on contemporary definitions of Africa.

This video is rooted in Lhola Amira's recent project based in Ghana. This project saw the artist engaging with local and current issues through a number of appearances and interactions in Ghana. The project, described by the artist as 'Looking for 'Africa' in 'Africa', engages with contemporary discourses around decolonization, nationality and race.

Lhola Amira is primarily considered a 'performance artist' however; she refuses to adhere to any preconceived theories of 'art' or 'performance'. She unashamedly intertwines definitions that academia attempts to separate, such as 'activist', 'poet', 'philosopher', 'artist' and many more. Lhola Amira questions connotations of performance, such as 'farce' or 'play' from which audiences can take an interval; in her own words, "You cannot perform being black. It is only the black body, that tends to be viewed, by society, as in a perpetual state of performance."

As she stalked the streets of Accra, Lhola Amira tackled her own preconceptions of the country widely considered the first sub-Saharan country to demand independence from colonialism. Not only were the artist's own expectations of Ghana unsettled but this recent journey also served to emphasize the futility of attempts to fully understand issues and controversies facing an area without extended personal experience. Lhola Amira remained a visitor during her time in Ghana, seeing and experiencing only a small collection of lifestyles possible in the country. Looking for Ghana & The Red Suitcase should not be seen as a summary of an entire country; Lhola Amira intentionally highlights the inadequate borders and geographical divisions that continue to enforce colonialism in Africa.

Lhola Amira worked with local photographer, Francis Kokoroko and filmmaker Wanlov Kubolor to produce a body of work that took place in Ghana but left residues that could be exhibited in South Africa and elsewhere.

LHOLA AMRIA

Looking for Ghana & The Red Suitcase

Looking for Africa in Africa is to be nostalgic about an unknown future. What does a 'de-colonial' Africa really look like? This is the small portion of the context in which Lhola Amira approached her project in Ghana. Through this visit, the artist tackled her own ideas of de-colonialism. While being well versed in this subject in a South African context, Lhola Amira came across more examples of further splinters of colonialism that still clutch to the African continent.

For example, her experience of the dumping of electronic waste in Ghana- products that are designed by those outside of the African Continent, produced outside of the continent, and primarily sold to a non-African market are unceremoniously dumped in Ghana, as a means of disposal.

Considering that much of the raw material used in this machinery is mined on the African continent, then exported and manufactured into hugely valuable electronic merchandise. Finished products that occasionally -once out of date- get resold back to the African continent, but ultimately find their way back in the form of waste. This perpetual irony or system of waste disposal from Europe is perhaps one of the most significant illustrations that despite political variation, little has changed throughout the last century.

For as long as I can remember, Africans have been Futurist. But suddenly, the world seems to have taken the time to brand us as such.

How have Black People survived without being futurists? Every time a Black Woman gives birth she is a futurist ...

Everywhere in Africa there are monumental colonial reminders. Present in the economy, institutions, street names, buildings, infrastructure, language, clothing, culture, and yet- Africans are labeled immigrants or aliens by the colonisers. How absurd that we are hyper-invisible and hyper-visible even in our politically correct 'independent democratic de-colonial states' ... I am nostalgic about the future ...

remember that time for my People is not as linear as in euro- western philosophy. The past, the present and the future are all intertwined, Ghana did things to me - things I am still sinking and drowning in, and resurrect from. I don't have an in-depth view of Ghana - but something happened to me there and this constellation are recollections of walking for 6hrs in 6inch heels through parts of Ghana ... "

To look for Africa in Africa is a real thing ...

-Lhola Amira 2017

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LHOLA AMIRA
CURRICULUM VITAE

LHOLA AMIRA

b.1984, Gugulethu, South Africa.

BIOGRAPHY

Lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa.

AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

[Upcoming]

- 2017 Artist in Residence at AIRS, Skövde Art Museum, Sweden.
- 2015 Artist in Residence at Jivwar Creation and Society, Barcelona, Spain.
- 2011 Artist in Residence at Vasil Artists' Collective, Islamabad, Pakistan.
- 2010 Artist in Residence at Theertha Red Dot Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Looking for Ghana & The Red Suitcase*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa
- 2016 *Lhola Amira Will Make You Cry*, appearance at AVA Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2015 *De/Colonial Love*, appearance at Mitte, Barcelona, Spain.
- 2014 *Lhola Amira is Here*, appearance at Greatmore Studios, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Lhola Amira, Her & Him*, appearance at Greatmore Studios, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Lhola Amira neZambatho ezoMoya*, installation at 6ix Studio, New York City, USA.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 Cape Town Art Fair, (SMAC Gallery) CTICC, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2016 *Lhola Amira in Conversation with Rinamanyanga Hariputiwe*, appearance at *Instruments of Memory* a solo exhibition by Masimba Hwati at SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- As Long as the World is Anti-Black: Of-course this is Personal*, appearance at *Nothing Personal* at SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- 2014 *DETAILS*, appearance at 6ix Studio, New York City, USA.
- 2010 *Category Error 2*, appearance at Association for Visual Arts Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2009 *Subvision Kunst*, appearance at Off Festival, Hamburg, Germany.

COLLECTIONS

Zeitz MOCCA Collection, Cape Town, South Africa.

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