

Roger Ballen and Phumulani Ntuli on Representing South Africa at the 59th Venice Biennale

ArtReview Venice Questionnaire 15 April 2022 artreview.com

Start typing

ArtReview



We use cookies to understand how you use our site and to improve your experience. This includes personalizing content.
By continuing to use our site, you accept our use of cookies, revised [Privacy](#).

OK



**59th Venice Biennale
Review: Revelation and
Illusion**

Mark Rappolt [Reviews](#)

**Venice Biennale 2022:
Four Pavilions To See in
the Giardini**

Louise Darblay [Reviews](#)

**Venice Biennale 2022:
Three Pavilions To See in
the Arsenale**

Fi Churchman [Reviews](#)

We use cookies to understand how you use our site and to improve your experience. This includes personalizing content. By continuing to use our site, you accept our use of cookies, revised [Privacy](#).

ArtReview sent a questionnaire to artists and curators exhibiting in and curating the various national pavilions of the 2022 Venice Biennale, the responses to which will be published daily in the leadup to and during the Venice Biennale, which runs from 23 April to 27 November.

Roger Ballen, Phumulani Ntuli and Lebohang Kganye are representing South Africa.

ArtReview *What can you tell us about your exhibition plans for Venice?*

Phumulani Ntuli I am showing two stop motion films, the first is titled *Cloud Migration* – the film began with an engagement of the Voortrekker Monument archive consisting of landscape prints, my intervention included juxtaposing the prints with Alfred Duggan Cronin’s series of ethnographic images, these images document Southern African tribes. Another film is titled *Godide* which is a series of episodes following Godide my fictional character who travels through imaginary geographies. Along with the works on the show are a series of collages animated through an Augmented Reality App. The works speak to the themes of the exhibition framed within the reflections and refraction of light experienced through a screen – this points to the contemporary representation of filters prevalent within social media and image-making technologies.

Roger Ballen My exhibition includes images from the *Theatre of Apparitions* series. These images were taken by using various products such as spray paints and epoxies on windows. The result is a series of scenes in which transient, ghost-like figures perform and engage in absurd activities. Our plan is to suspend lightboxes of these photographs from the ceiling, as if the figures are floating in the ether.

ArtReview *Why is the Venice Biennale still important?*

PN I believe the Venice Biennale is important for two reasons, firstly it frames the social-political context emerging from each specific country, secondly showing at this prestigious exhibition assumes forms of networking for artists to forge institutional relationships and market exposure with collectors, curators, artists, and institutions.

RB The Biennale is the oldest and most well-known of all the art fairs. It tends to show work that is contemporary and cutting-edge, but which also has substance and longevity. In addition, it provides extremely comprehensive artistic representation of art from countries all around the world.

AR *Do you think there is such a thing as national art? Or is all art universal? What is misunderstood or forgotten about your country’s art history or artistic traditions?*

PN I believe the notion of national art is fragmented, as there are different spheres within the artworld. For example, South African art is driven by commercial galleries which forge a meagre representation amongst a diverse group of artists – this assumes that the small fraction of artists that are represented mirrors the artistic landscape and language of a country. There is also a sphere of non-commercial and experimental artmaking which happens within project spaces. The sphere of knowledge production is centred around foundations and museums and since there is a lack of national art institutions, the focus of national art in South Africa is opaque. Having said this, we can agree that national art hovers around socio-political discourses prevalent in artistic works of each country. I believe art is rather a universal language reflecting on the human condition that we all share. Instrumental within the context of South Africa is the very idea of an archive of black people, which has been consistently erased by 20th-century painting, and when that happened the images tended to be ethnographic which carried demeaning nuances;

Surrealism, Magic and Brains: Exhibitions To See in Venice

En Liang Khong Reviews

‘We Transform Life’s Impulses’: Skuja Braden on Representing Latvia at the 59th Venice Biennale

ArtReview
Venice Biennale 2022

RB They can merge. There can be ‘national’ art, for people are affected by their unique environments and such themes and styles may emerge across works. However, great art should go beyond the immediate circumstances and be timeless.

AR *Which other artists from your country have influenced or inspired you?*

PN I am consistently reflecting on the works by late and living artists, the latter being Louis Maqhubela and Cyprian Shilakoe and the former are Pat Maoutloa and David Koloane. However these artists work with traditional forms, their artistic oeuvres have evolved from two to three-dimensional forms, and often reflected on the political conditions of their times, ‘the draconian period’. It’s also interesting to learn how the later artists carried with them the burden of the apartheid institution. Amongst diasporic contemporary artists, I ponder around the work of John Akomfrah and Isaac Julien with their mysterious moving images, as a way of thinking through the context of documentary and fictional, in this case, the archive of black bodies and their immediate communities.

RB Having been a geologist for many years, my most profound encounters have been with prehistoric cave paintings around the country. I am especially captivated by their style (which evokes the art brut movement that I love), and their spiritual and shamanistic quality.

AR *How does having a pavilion in Venice make a difference to the art scene in your country?*

PN The South African Pavilion at the Venice Biennale propagates economic and geopolitical discussions not only within art-making and exhibition displays but also reflections on current conversations occurring within South Africa, that is issues of belonging, immigration, and the land question. This for me means that the cleavage of narratives within our country has international relevance and South African art becomes an agent and a space to reflect on seemingly different, but rather interrelated topics within the political foundations of African futures.

RB It gives artists in this country a sense of possibility. The national pavilions give us the space in which to express our unique culture, and to shape the views, or preconceptions, that outsiders have towards this country, and Africa in general. I have travelled extensively in Africa. I have also established the Inside Out Centre for the Arts (which exhibits art related to African continent), and I still feel that the richness and diversity in Africa and its art forms is not fully understood or embraced.

AR *If you’ve been to the biennale before, what’s your earliest or best memory from Venice?*

PN This is my first appearance at the Venice Biennale; the Venice Biennale has a long-standing history within the context of international exhibitions. I have always followed artists represented from the previous editions through essays and articles written about the exhibitions. This has been my consistent and only memory.

RB In 2003, I took my wife and twins to the Venice Biennale for a most memorable trip. Our strongest memory was of seeing Patricia Piccinini’s *We are Family* in the Australian pavilion. It featured half-human, half-pig silicon sculptures. The realism – the hair and other details – were so convincing that it begged questions about the relationship between man and beast: our civilized and brutish parts. How close might we be to the condemned pig?

AR *What else are you looking forward to seeing?*

PN I am looking forward to seeing the other three participating African Pavilions, which is Ghana, Uganda, and Zimbabwe and to

RB I am most looking forward to seeing the Ghanaian, Zimbabwean and Ugandan pavilions. Terrence Musekiwa’s playful sculptures are near the top of my list, as is Diego Araúja’s contribution, *A Congress of Salt* – I read that it will reimagine the Atlantic Ocean, the main body of water for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. I think this work will bear interesting relationship to Phumulani Ntuli’s, which will be shown in our South African pavilion.

ArtReview Venice Questionnaire 15 April 2022 artreview.com

Most recent



Alexander Leissle Future Greats ArtReview

Future Greats 2024: Dana Kavelina



ArtReview Partnership with Creative Australia artreview.com

ArtReview Talks with Australia Pavilion at 60th Venice Biennale



ArtReview Future Greats ArtReview **Introducing Future Greats 2024**

Ar
art
M
ar
W

Follow us on social media



Sign up to the ArtReview newsletters

Your email

Your name

Country ▾

Subscribe

ArtReview

Contact Shop Advertise Partnerships Careers FAQ Privacy Policy

© 2020 ArtReview

We use cookies to understand how you use our site and to improve your experience. This includes personalizing content. By continuing to use our site, you accept our use of cookies, revised Privacy.