

The Trinity Session (Hobbs/Neustetter)
presents

ataya/thé/tea – Hillbrow

tea ceremony & video installation - 2012-2013

Contributions by visiting artist Samuel Nja Kwa (France/Cameroon)
Thursday 15 November, 17:00 – 22:00

Olivia Road between Fife and Tudhope Avenue,
Hillbrow/ Berea



Hobbs/Neustetter's first-hand experience of working with immigrant communities in Johannesburg has fuelled their interest in looking at ways of reframing, interacting and dialoguing with these communities in an effort to better understand the transformations of the city after apartheid and their own memories and experiences of the city prior to its degeneration and the influx of African Francophone immigrants.

Considering the French Season in South Africa, Hobbs/Neustetter's attention is immediately drawn to their existing relationship with Senegalese and Malian immigrants in particular, living in Johannesburg. The interest is not only in the pressures of xenophobia and the challenging living conditions, in Hillbrow, for example, but in the way in which such neighborhoods are re-appropriated and transformed.

During the apartheid era, Hillbrow was a melting pot of European culture with places like Cafe De Paris to cater for the middle class Eurocentric sensibilities of the time. Following the flight of white residents from Hillbrow in the 80's and 90's, Johannesburg Central has become home not only to a majority black South African population, but a large population from other parts of the African continent. The Café de Paris' are now replaced by, for example, Senegalese kitchens that cater for the palettes of a new West African clientele.

As with Francophone African communities in Johannesburg, cities such as Marseille and Paris are challenged with cultural segregation, redefinition of cultural space and socio-political issues that set into question the identity and integration of its diverse inhabitants.

It is with this repopulating and reshaping of the 'post-apartheid city' that Hobbs/Neustetter is responding not only to the 2012 French season in South Africa, but the parallels for this form of investigation and production in the 2013 South African season in France.

ataya/thé/tea relates to the West African tradition of tea making that has welcomed Hobbs/Neustetter on many of their visits in Dakar, Mali and Hillbrow. The ritualistic act of making tea is not only one of connecting people but is a gesture of generosity and engagement. In contrast to the negative image of Hillbrow and the harsh realities of a complex urban landscape, drinking tea in a social setting is a comforting pastime and intimate personal moment, an assertion of the everyday in the city, but peculiarly at odds with Johannesburg's familiar aggression and intensity.

The ritual of tea drinking is a stimulus for conversation and exchange, as the brewing process takes up to an hour with the three different stages of tea, short tea glasses are shared, and it is considered a time for relaxation. Conceptually the three stages of serving tea have cultural meaning in the creation of friendship. The first serving of tea is strong and bitter, the second is sweeter and the third is very sweet and smooth, supposedly representing the growth of a friendship during the time of drinking tea.

Hobbs/Neustetter's contribution to the SA/FR 2012 Seasons will involve a large-scale tea ceremony in public space on the boundary of Hillbrow and Berea, welcoming both French and South African audiences. The spectacle of this mass 'action' is intended to blur the boundaries between our fears of such spaces in our city and the rich cultural conditions that have resulted from the perverse separatism that plagues South Africa.

For this intervention in Johannesburg, artist Samuel Nja Kwa from Paris will be invited to collaborate on a projection at the event and to document the ceremony. Through his lens a portrait of the event will be created – a photographic and short film record and document aimed at informing the intervention in France in 2013. Samuel Nja Kwa is a French self-taught photographer and journalist by training. He spent part of his childhood in Cameroon. Today he lives in Paris and works as a photographer, especially in the music community on the issue of "l'africanité" in American jazz, and the visibility of Africans in French cinema. Following his travels in Asia and Africa, he has photographed many tea ceremonies, focusing on the different social and cultural codes, while investigating aspects such as tea colour and texture and the history of the ceremony. This, coupled with his interest in engaging with immigrant communities, has resulted in Hobbs/Neustetter's invitation to him to collaborate.

ataya/thé/tea is produced by Mains d'Œuvres (www.mainsdoeuvres.org) and The Trinity Session (www.onair.co.za) with the support of Ker Thioassane (www.ker-thioassane.org).

This event is organised as part of the France-South Africa Seasons 2012 & 2013.
www.france-southafrica.com

The France – South Africa Seasons 2012 & 2013 are organised and implemented

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For South Africa:

By the Department of Arts and Culture and the National Arts Council (NAC), with the support of the Department of Science and Technology, the Department of Sports and Recreation, the Department of Tourism, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Higher Education and Training, the Department of Basic Education, and the Embassy of South Africa in France. Chairman: Dikgang Moopeloa. General Commissioner: Bongani Tembe.

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