

DOSSIER

UNA MIRADA DESDE DENTRO
AN INSIDE VIEW

Photoeditor
AKINBODE AKINBIYI

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REAL BEAUTY

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EDUCATING FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

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MOUNA KARRAY
IDENTIDAD EN JUEGO
IDENTITY AT STAKE

t/ AKINBODE AKINBIYI

We fly over the african continent amazed at the burgeoning, sprawling mega-cities, the vast expanses of rural lands, meandering rivers weaving through, snake-like in their watery volume. Vast stretches of desert and further south the wondrous grasslands and the knowledge of herds of wildlife, the sight of birds in flight. The airport arrival is but an interlude to the pleasure of finally experiencing the mediated idea of Africa, the drive to the holiday resort, to friends, to the workplace negotiated elsewhere. The continent is so very often welcoming, embracing. The people smile and one's luggage is carried with vigor and a certain degree of swagger. Outside, the pictures latent in us all await us in an onrush of received prejudices.

Few, if any, really try to access the insider's view, how we really see, experience ourselves. Many factors complicate the matter, not least of which is the vexed question of who is really an outsider, who an insider. Is it essentially an issue of national identity or rather one of economic empathy? Does one's skin color include or exclude? One's religion, one's very conscious identity? How long does one have to be there to be considered an insider, an outsider?

Photographically, the dichotomy appears somehow simpler. Too many outsiders have depicted the continent within the narrow viewpoint of their inherent prejudices. Africa and Africans as the backdrop for images of the exotic other, of wildlife in cages and zoos at home, but, here, roaming free. Lately, images of destruction and warfare, of catastrophes, of unbearable diseases and of the seeming incapacity of Africans to place themselves in the turbulent wind of post-industrial development. Inside, the view is much more subtle and nuanced.

The South African Jodi Bieber investigates the very contested space of personal beauty. Who am I and what do I choose to present to the outside. Modern marketing demands a conformity that so often goes against the grain of personal wants and feelings. The blatant domination of certain norms that distort and pervert, leading to all kinds of anomalies. Skin lighteners advertised as blemish removers, as enhancers of the facial image.

Sabelo Mlangeni, also from South Africa, looks into the same contested space but from another angle, that of personal sexuality. His images of young transsexuals is unusual in that they live in the countryside and not in the cities that allow for protecting anonymity. Sabelo empathizes with and gives us a view of a reality many do not even want to acknowledge, even less tolerate.

So, too, the Nigerian, Babajide Adeniyi-Jones. In a country that theoretically could be an economic powerhouse on the continent, many of its essential services are in a completely desolate state. Hospitals, schools, power supply, public infrastructures so destitute that many revert to private initiatives to survive. Babajide's images of primary schools expose a condition that shames us all. The willingness and enthusiasm of the young being cruelly curtailed by the rapacious greed of adults, intent on misusing funds and allocations to garner their own pockets. What we see are sub-standard buildings and spaces bereft of desks and simple utilitarian benches. Do not even ask whether there are any toilet facilities in place.

Many remember the horror of the weeks of mass killings in Rwanda in 1994, atrocities so brutal and harrowing that the effects still resonate. The Egyptian Myriam Abdelaziz portrays survivors of those horrors in images that cut through to the painful bone. Scars that speak out of incredible suffering, and of the even larger scar tissue borne intimately within. The short statements accompanying each portrait cut through our own sense of being, our own sense of physical vulnerability.

Like Myriam, the Ivorian Ananias Léki Dago too has traveled to another country to depict a reality he feels concerned about. His images of days and nights are personal, hours spent drinking, talking, listening and in his case taking, making images.

Here again the view from inside, the knowledge that alcohol was used in the so-called early days of colonialism and imperial exploitation to break the indigenous population. Sold cheaply and in copious quantities, many fell into the cycle of hard physical work, especially in the mines of southern Africa, and hard drinking. Today alcoholism is a self-fulfilling curse, spawning domestic and social violence, ingratiating itself into the very fabric of many communities.

Mouna Karray is Tunisian. Unusual for many on the continent, she studied her photography in far away Japan, by the master photographer Eikoh Hosoe. It was there, as a truly obvious outsider, that she started her serious quest to uncover the many aspects of personal identity. Of being Tunisian, a photographer, a woman, an Arab, an African. In her diptychs of traversed roles, we are challenged to ask who is the real person and who the look alike, ultimately who the African and who the non-African. Her view is very much from the inside, looking outside and simultaneously looking back in.

This is an inherent aspect of much good photography today. The artist asks, probes, strives to go beyond accepted norms. Photography, very much from the inside. Singing, showing the way things are and, at its best, the way things ought to be.

Akinbode Akinbiyi is a photographer, curator and writer. Born to Nigerian parents in Oxford, England, he grew up in Lagos and in England. He currently makes his home away from home in Berlin. Large mega-cities are the primary focus of his personal photographic work, so presently the four major African conurbations: Cairo, Lagos, Kinshasa and Johannesburg.

MOUNA
KARRAY

*IDENTIDAD EN
JUEGO /
IDENTITY AT STAKE*

Hédia, 2006



Leila, 2006



Olfa, 2006



Maryam, 2006



t/Mouna Mekouar*

Mouna Karray se encontraba becada en Tokio cuando produjo los primeros dipticos de su serie *Identity at Stake* [Identidad en juego]. Su estancia en el país nipón fue fundamental para la creación de una obra autobiográfica que aún hoy continúa en diversos formatos.

El proyecto es fruto de varios encuentros con mujeres de muy diferentes estratos sociales. Tras fotografiarlas, Mouna sustituye a la modelo: el espacio del otro es ocupado, sus ropas usurpadas y su postura imitada. La autora cuestiona los límites de la identidad sirviéndose de ingeniosas técnicas escenográficas. Se evocan alternativamente dualidad y otredad, similitud y diferencia, variaciones todas ellas de la “desasosegante extrañeza”, del ser.

En la composición de sus tomas, lo que salta a la vista es lo familiar, y lo conocido se hace extrañamente distinto. Esta serie quiere ser un viaje a través de la extrañeza del otro y del yo. En su obra, esta prueba de otredad se nos presenta como la condición definitiva de todo ser humano.

** Diplomada por el Instituto Nacional del Patrimonio (Conservador, especialidad museos) y doctoranda en Historia del Arte, Mouna Mekouar ha sido comisaria de la exposición Roger Parry celebrada en el Jeu de Paume en 2007 y comisaria asociada de la exposición inaugural del Centro Pompidou-Metz en 2010. También colabora regularmente como comisaria asociada en las ediciones de la Bienal de imágenes del Museo du Quai Branly, Photoquai 2009 y 2011. En la actualidad participa como comisaria asociada en la preparación de la exposición Compartir el sur, que se celebrará en el marco de Marsella-Provenza 2013, capital europea de la cultura.*

Mouna Karray nació en Sfax (Túnez) en 1970. Estudió fotografía en el Instituto Politécnico y Artístico de Tokio entre 1997 y 2002, año en que regresó a su país para impartir clases de fotografía. En 2005 obtuvo una beca como artista residente en la Ciudad Internacional de las Artes de París, ciudad en la que se instaló. La identidad, las fronteras y la memoria de lugares y personas son los temas centrales de sus fotografías e instalaciones: *Identity at Stake*, *Cut out* [Recortado] (2004), *Something on the Shore* [Algo en la orilla] (2008), *Murmurer* [Murmurador] (2007-2009). Su obra se ha expuesto en varios países y eventos, como los 7os Encuentros Africanos de Fotografía de Bamako de 2007, en París Photo, en Photoquai en 2009, y en *A Useful Dream*, en BOZAR (Bruselas), 2010.

t/ Mouna Mekouar*

Mouna Karray was in Tokyo, thanks to a grant, when she produced her first diptychs in the series *Identity at Stake*. Her stay there is the nodal point of an autobiographical work she continues today in various forms.

This project is the fruit of different encounters with women from many different backgrounds. After photographing them, Mouna Karray substitutes the models with herself. The other's space is monopolized, her clothing seized and her posture imitated. Utilizing ingenious staging techniques, Mouna Karray questions the limits of identity. Duality and otherness, resemblance and dissemblance are alternately evoked; each one itself a variation of “the disquieting strangeness” of being.

In the composition of her shots, the familiar and the intimate are inverted with their opposite. It is the presence of the strange within the familiar that springs forth; what is familiar becomes strangely different. This series is intended as a voyage through the strangeness of the other and of oneself. But, in her work, this test of otherness comes across as the ultimate condition of every human being.

** A graduate of the Institut National du Patrimoine, with a degree in conservation, specializing in museums, and a doctorate in history of art, Mouna Mekouar curated the Roger Parry exhibition at the Jeu de Paume in 2007 and was joint curator of the opening exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in Metz in 2010. She also works regularly as guest curator on the selection committee of Photoquai, the biennial exhibition of images at the Musée du Quai Branly (2009 and 2011). She is currently working as joint curator of Sharing the South, an exhibition to be held as part of Marseille-Provence's year as European Capital of Culture in 2013.*

Mouna Karray was born in Sfax, Tunisia, in 1970. Karray studied photography at the Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics and Arts from 1997 to 2002, when she returned to Tunisia and started teaching photography. In 2005 she was awarded an artist residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris and settled there. Identity, borders, the memory of places and people are the central themes of her photography and installations: *Identity at Stake*; *Cut out* in 2004; *Something on the Shore* in 2008; *Murmurer*, 2007-2009. Her work has been exhibited in different countries and events, such as the 7th African Encounters of Photography in Bamako in 2007; Paris Photo and Photoquai in 2009; *A Useful Dream* at BOZAR in Brussels in 2010.

Anna, 2007

