

African Leipzig

a scholarship project of the LIA-Leipzig International Art Programme, Germany
in cooperation with the Centre for the Less Good Idea in Johannesburg, South Africa

The Centre for the Less Good Idea is a physical and immaterial space to pursue incidental discoveries made in the process of producing work. Founded by William Kentridge and myself in Johannesburg in 2016, The Centre aims to find the 'less good idea' by creating and supporting experimental, collaborative and crossdisciplinary arts projects.

The African Leipzig project is the first time The Centre has had an opportunity to invite multidisciplinary artists from South Africa to take up residence in Germany for three months at a time. The collaboration between The Centre and the Leipzig International Art Programme was brave and ambitious. We created a collaboration in a constant state of not knowing what the possibilities were or outcomes might be. This required empathy, intimacy, and trust. It also meant that we had to value, above all else, questioning, risk-taking, honesty, and self-awareness in ourselves as much as in the artists.

Rather than insisting artists are good or right, we asked artists to be present. It sought to be a safe space for vastly different artists to be together and to collaborate. It tried to encourage a rigour in the artists, not through a critical stripping down of one another's ideas, but rather from acknowledging the fragility of ideas and making the work vulnerable by exposing and sharing it in all its stages of growth.

As individuals and as institutions we have experienced deep learning when it comes to holding artists in contexts foreign to them, as well as encouraging artists to pursue ideas and practises new to them.

Bronwyn Lace, Co-founder & Director of The Centre for the Less Good Idea

Participating artists:

Katherine Bull

Freshwoyen Endrias Feyissa

Bongile Gorata Lecoge-Zulu

Roxy Kaczmarek

Hemali Khoosal

Motlhoki Nono

Natalie Paneng

Oupa Sibeko

Tzung-Hui Lauren Lee

Khanti Zwelendaba

Sebastian Burger

Silke Koch

Bjørn Melhus

Maria Ondrej

Vlado Ondrej

Ramona Schacht

Jana Schulz

Maria Schumacher

Raul Walch

Angelika Waniek

This project was made possible with the generous support of the German Federal Foreign Office.

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A cultural exchange with African artists is something very special. Learning to understand each other, sharing experiences, discovering common ground, enjoying togetherness, but also acknowledging the historical and contemporary systems of power between Germany and Africa were central to this experimental venture.

The visiting artist leaves their familiar everyday life for a few weeks and experiments with a new, unknown one. They observe, eagerly, what creative potential this change releases. The artist's residency abroad becomes their own experimental field for living and working, a starting point for travel as well. Of course, an experiment can fail. But even if it seems so at the beginning, inspiration can come unexpectedly. The ten invited artists from South Africa and Addis Ababa (Leipzig's twin city) presenting their works here were able to embark on this experiment full of expectation. They were supported by ten German artists.

The multimedia artists spent three months in studios on the old spinning mill site in Leipzig, Spinnerei, surrounded by the historic atmosphere of the converted industrial buildings from the last century. The Leipzig cotton spinning mill, founded in the 1880s, developed into the largest on the European continent within a few decades as a result of the textiles taken out of Africa under German colonisation. This history of injustice, present in contemporary discourses about the restitution of looted art, was not ignored. And was it a coincidence that Roxy Kaczmarek's parents discovered a piece of a plough on a South African farm with a reference to the place of manufacture "Leipzig Plagwitz" at the time we started our exchange? A steel artefact with a memento message? This moment was to accompany us in our attempt to practise "cultural exchange" in a completely different way. When, on a January morning in a cold workshop full of heavy printing presses, two strangers face each other, still undecided about what to do here, and when, in the course of a day, these two work on a graphic plate while skating (Oupa Sibeko) and playing the guitar (Vlado Ondrej), then the experiment is a success. A joint performance emerged – agitating the surfaces and yet full of the joy of movement and sound.

Part of the scholarship was a three-month graphic symposium with printmaking in the Vlado & Maria Ondrej Studio for Contemporary Etching, Leipzig, in cooperation with David Krut Projects in Johannesburg. Previous knowledge of graphic techniques was not required for participation. After all, one of the challenges was precisely to create interfaces between the newly learned and one's own artistic productivity with an unfamiliar technique and with unfamiliar material – especially between the analogue medium of printmaking, which has a long tradition in Leipzig, and digital forms of production. At the end of the skate engraving, there was dancing, scratching, and printing in front of and with the audience. A film was also created as a stand-alone work to accompany the performance.

Each of the works shown here reflects moments that became possible because cross-cultural encounters could be allowed and artistically shaped. Each work documents a part of the journey on a trip to Leipzig.

Anna-Louise Rolland,

Founder & Director of the LIA-Leipzig international Art Programme

We would like to thank our project partners in Johannesburg, The Centre for the Less Good Idea under the direction of Bronwyn Lace, the David Krut Projects and Vlado & Maria Ondrej Studio for Contemporary Etching in Leipzig, most sincerely. Also to all the artists on both sides who have shown us how art can grow – and we with it.

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Dear Friends of art and cultural cooperation! As we continue to navigate a rapidly changing global landscape, cultural exchange has become more important than ever before. Through programs such as the Leipzig International Art Programme, we have the opportunity to build bridges between Germany and Africa, and to promote greater understanding and appreciation of each other's cultures. By engaging in cultural exchange, we can deepen our connections, learn from one another, and create new opportunities for collaboration and growth. I am confident that this exhibition will inspire new dialogues and partnerships between artists, cultural institutions, and communities in Germany and Africa, and contribute to a more vibrant and diverse cultural landscape for all.

We are proud to support the Leipzig International Art Programme, which has played an integral role in fostering artistic collaboration and promoting cultural exchange between Germany and other parts of the world. The residence provides a unique opportunity for artists to engage with new cultures, develop their skills, and create new works of art that reflect the diversity of our global community. I am delighted that this exhibition will showcase the works of African artists who have participated in the residency programme. Their works reflect the rich cultural heritage and artistic traditions of their respective communities, while also exploring contemporary themes and issues that are relevant to our world today.

This exhibition marks an important occasion for us to celebrate the artistic talents of international artists from Africa, and to advance the cultural relations between Germany and the African continent. I would like to express my gratitude to the Leipzig International Art Programme as well as to the "Centre for the Less Good Idea" for their tireless efforts in promoting cultural understanding and artistic expression. I also extend my congratulations to all the artists whose works are being exhibited in this exhibition in Johannesburg, and wish them every success in their future endeavors.

*Sincerely,
Jens Wagner*

*Deputy Head of Unit
Department 602
Cultural & Media Relations
Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Australia/Pacific, Latin America/Caribbean*



Federal Foreign Office