

ILUMINANDO VIDAS: Portugal Debut

Galeria da Culturgest, Porto

9.10.–12.12.2004

Project Summary (1.10.2004)

«Illuminando Vidas. Fotografia Moçambicana 1950–2001. Ricardo Rangel & the Next Generation» is the title of the exhibition of contemporary Mozambican photography curated by Bruno Z'Graggen (Switzerland) and Grant Lee Neuenburg (USA/Mozambique). «Illuminando Vidas» will be presented at the Culturgest Gallery in Porto from October 9 to December 12, 2004. More than 10 years after the end of the 16-year civil war in 1992, this marks the first time that Mozambican photography has been presented on such a comprehensive scale in Portugal.

«Illuminando Vidas» offers the Portuguese public an unprecedented opportunity to (re)discover, through an inverted perspective, a part of their colonial past and the Mozambique's scintillating present. The exhibition is a moving testament to the search for identity by a remarkable group of 15 photographers from this young nation, which will celebrate its 30th year of independence on June 25, 2005.

In 2002, «Illuminando Vidas» was presented alongside workshops and discussions with great success, in three places in Switzerland. In 2003 and 2004 the exhibition was presented in Mozambique, also with accompanying workshops and, in 2003, in Bamako (Mali) at the biennale of African photography. An extensive catalogue accompanies the exhibition, with contributions by recognised authors, published by Christoph Merian Publishers (Basel) in two editions (German/French and English/Portuguese). The project is the result of a unique cooperation between various Mozambican and Swiss partners and is supported principally by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Content, Significance and Aims of «Illuminando Vidas»

The point of departure of the exhibition is the work of the 80-year-old doyen of Mozambican photography, Ricardo Rangel, who is widely regarded as one of Africa's outstanding photographers in the area of photojournalism and whose socially critical work is in the tradition of the Magnum photographers. Since 1983, Rangel has directed the Centro de Documentação e Formação Fotográfica (CDFF), an educational and documentary centre that is unique in Africa, in Mozambique's capital of Maputo. He has had a seminal influence on the younger generation of photographers through his life and work as a photographer, journalist and teacher.

In addition to 25 photographs by Rangel, the show includes over 100 black-and-white pictures by 14 of his «disciples», who are among the leading representatives of contemporary Mozambican photography. The photographers' personal statements, biographies and self-portraits accompany the photographs. A 7-minute colour ambient video («Life Goes On»), especially produced for the exhibition by co-curator Grant Lee Neuenburg, comprises a slice of life at an informal market stand in the streets of Maputo. The project also runs a popular, regularly up-dated website (www.iluminandovidas.org).

Mozambican photography is a success story. The pictures, which were captured under difficult circumstances, are conspicuous for their high formal quality, and there can be no doubt that they rank among the best that African photography has to offer. The aim of the exhibition is to pay tribute to this hitherto unknown photographic tradition as an outstanding cultural achievement, as well as to cast a light on the way the photographers see themselves and their work. At the same time, it should correct the cliché, so prevalent in the north, of Africa as a continent determined largely by disasters. The African perspective allows us a poetic, resonant insight into the quotidian, characterised as a post-colonial search for identity.

The Itinerant Exhibition: Previous and Future Venues

«Illuminando Vidas» is a travelling exhibition. It has been shown successfully at three venues in Switzerland: from 13.4.–19.5.2002 in the Photoforum PasquArt in Biel/Bienne, from 8.6.–21.7.2002 in the Museo Cantonale d'Arte in Lugano, and from 29.11.–15.12.2002 at the School of Art and Design in Basel (SfG Basel). «Illuminando Vidas» was presented equally successfully from 26.4.–25.5.2003 for the first time in Mozambique in Maputo at the gallery of the Associação Moçambicana de Fotografia (AMF), the Mozambican photography association. The following station was the prestigious 5th African Photography Encounters in Bamako, Mali, from 20.10.–20.11.2003. From 2.5.–1.6.2004 the show was presented in the National Museum of Ethnology in Nampula, in northern Mozambique. After Porto it is envisioned to bring the show to South Africa in 2005.

North-South Cultural Dialogue

Within the framework of a north-south cultural dialogue, the opening of the exhibition in Biel/Bienne was accompanied by a ten-day photoreportage workshop on the theme of «From Day to Day – Observations from Everyday Life» with the three photographers Ricardo Rangel, Joel Chiziane and Sérgio Santimano in collaboration with the SfG Basel and Ecole Cantonale d'Art du Valais Sierre. The workshop was part of further encounters between the photographers and students of the School of Art and Design Berne/Bienne and the Swiss Centre for Media Studies (MAZ) in Lucerne.

At the exhibition in Basel, eleven pupils of the SfG Basel presented 80 of their photographs as a complement to the work of the Mozambican photographers. It also featured a panel discussion at which Joel Chiziane and Swiss professionals were the guests.

The Nampula exhibition afforded the opportunity for another type of North-South cultural dialogue in Mozambique itself. A series of presentations and talks attended by Ricardo Rangel, João Costa and Alfredo Mueche (the current president of AMF) and a group of local enthusiasts resulted in the formation of a new chapter of the organisation, the northern region delegation of AMF.

Organizational and Financial Support

«Iluminando Vidas» was realized by the two curators in direct collaboration with the 15 photographers, the CDFF, AMF, the museums and the publisher. All the silver gelatine prints were produced at the CDFF in Maputo. The project's main sponsor is the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Additional support has been received from the Pro Helvetia Arts Council of Switzerland, the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, the Lottery Fund of Canton Berne and other partners. The project is patronized by the Club of Mozambique (Zurich).

The exhibition in Basel was realized together with the School of Artistic Design (SfG) Basel and assisted by the Lottery Fund of the Cantons Basel-Landschaft and Basel-Stadt, the Schweizerischen National-Versicherungs-Gesellschaft and the publisher Christoph Merian Verlag. The exhibition in Bamako was supported primarily by the SDC and realized in close cooperation with the organizers of the Biennial, the Association Française d'Action Artistique (AFAA).

Culturgest is the exclusive patron of the presentation of «Iluminando Vidas» in Porto. Rui Assubuji will represent his colleagues at the press conference and at the exhibition's inauguration, thanks to the generous support of the SDC.

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