



/ GRADA KILOMBA

/ THE DESIRE PROJECT, 2016

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## / BIOGRAPHY

Grada Kilomba (b. 1968, Lisbon, Portugal) is an interdisciplinary artist, whose work draws on memory, trauma, gender and postcolonialism, interrogating concepts of knowledge, power and violence. "What stories are told? How are they told? And told by whom?" are constant questions in Kilomba's body of work, to revise post-colonial narratives.

With a singular beauty, Kilomba subversively translates text into image, movement and installation, by giving body, voice and form to her own critical writings. Performance, staged reading, video, photography, publications and installation are a platform for her unique practice of storytelling, which intentionally disrupts the proverbial 'white cube' through a new and urgent decolonial language and imagery.

Her work has been presented in major international events such as: La Biennale de Lubumbashi VI; 10. Berlin Biennale; Documenta 14, Kassel; 32. Bienal de São Paulo. Selected solo and group exhibitions include the Pinacoteca de São Paulo; Bildmuseet, Umeå; Kadist Art Foundation, Paris; The Power Plant, Toronto; Maxim Gorki Theatre, Berlin; MAAT-Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, Lisbon; Secession Museum, Vienna; Bozar Museum, Brussels; PAC-Pavillion Art Contemporanea, Milan, among others.

Strongly influenced by the work of Frantz Fanon, Kilomba studied Freudian Psychoanalysis in Lisbon - at ISPA, and there she worked with war survivors from Angola and Mozambique. Early on, she started writing and publishing stories, before extending her interests into staging, image, sound and movement.

Kilomba holds a distinguished Doctorate in Philosophy from the Freie Universität Berlin. She has lectured at several international universities, such as the University of Ghana and the Vienna University of Arts, and was last a Guest Professor at the Humboldt Universität Berlin, Department of Gender Studies. For several years, she was a guest artist at the Maxim Gorki Theatre, in Berlin, developing 'Kosmos', a political intervention with refugee artists.

She is the author of the acclaimed "Plantation Memories" (Unrast, 2008) a compilation of episodes of everyday racism written in the form of short psychoanalytical stories. Her book has been translated into several languages, and was listed as the most important non-fiction literature in Brazil, 2019.

The artist lives and works in Berlin.

Kilomba's work features in public and private collections worldwide.

Sometimes, I fear writing.

So, why do I write?

I have to.

Grada Kilomba, The Desire Project, 2016, Stills. Courtesy of the Artist.



Grada Kilomba, *The Desire Project*, 2017, Installation view at Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, 2018. Photo by Anthea Pokroy. Courtesy of the Artist.





Grada Kilomba, *The Desire Project*, 2017, Installation view at Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, 2018. Photo by Anthea Pokroy. Courtesy of the Artist.

## / SYNOPSIS

*In her video installation *The Desire Project*, Grada Kilomba uses the written word as the only visual element, accompanied by a rhythmical drumming as a metaphorical voice, indicating the emergence of a speaker who has been historically silenced by colonial narratives.*

*The work is comprised of three films representing three chronological moments: „While I Walk”, „While I Speak” and „While I Write”. In each film white text appears against a black background in time with a soundtrack of rhythmical drumming, composed by Moses Leo. The drumming is used instead of the usual voice over, becoming a form of narrative and recalling the African tradition of storytelling.*

*Kilomba foregrounds the importance of writing in the work which, she explains, is “almost an obligation to find myself.” As Gabi Ngcobo, writes „ In her visual work, Kilomba exits the book form by stretching its pages, spilling them out and extending them into the field of vision.”*

In her strong text, Kilomba plays with the concept of memory as a theory of forgetting: “one cannot simply forget and one cannot avoid remembering” she writes. Before entering the video installation, one passes a shrine dedicated to the ancestor Anastácia, an emancipated enslaved African woman whose mouth was sealed, to implement a sense of fear and speechlessness. For Kilomba, Anastácia not only embodies the conflictuous triangle Africa-Europe-America, but also raises the pertinent questions of ‘who can speak?’ and ‘what can we speak about?’ and ‘what happens when we speak?’

This work was commissioned for the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo – *Incerteza viva [Live Uncertainty]*, 2016.



Grada Kilomba, The Desire Project, 2016, Installation view at the 32. Bienal de São Paulo, 2016, São Paulo. Photo by Leo Eloy. Courtesy of the Artist.

## / PRESS

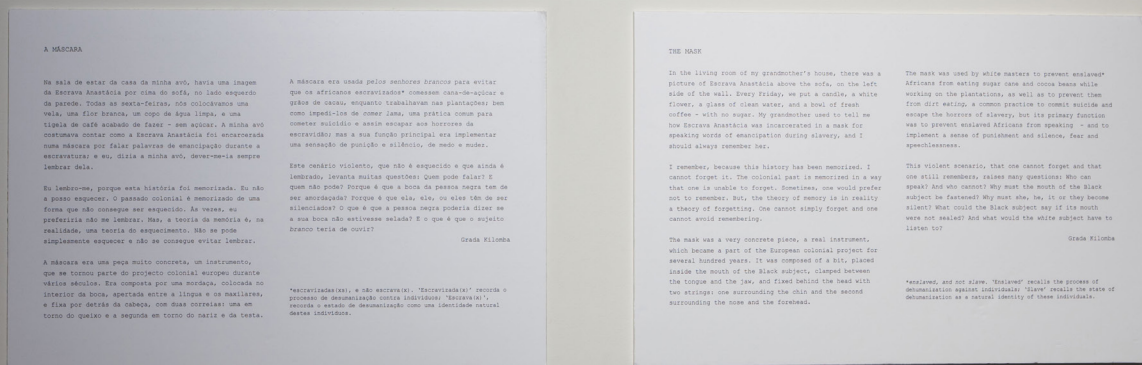
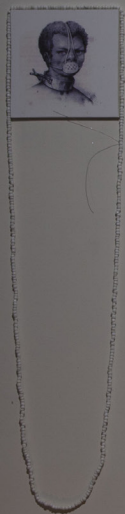
"(...) probably the strongest work of art in this Bienal. Grada's speech beats like a drum and cuts like a knife." - UNIQUEVISITORS

"Finally, more radically, the Portuguese Grada Kilomba presents three short videos of single texts. (...) That was my main discovery at this Biennial of São Paulo, the most powerful and the most compelling." - LE MONDE

"The rhythmic beat is also a prominent feature of Grada Kilomba's moving installation The Desire Project (2015-16)" - ART-AGENDA

"This is the work of a Black woman artist, writer, political and interdisciplinary, that goes beyond any kind of convention." - UMBIGO MAGAZINE

"(her) work underlines the perpetuation of colonialism. A proud and irreducible political and feminist interpellation, and it explodes in lucid writing." - VISÃO MAGAZINE



Grada Kilomba, The Desire Project, 2016, Installation view at the 32. Bienal de São Paulo, 2016, São Paulo. Photo by Leo Eloy. Courtesy of the Artist.



Grada Kilomba, The Desire Project, 2016, Installation view at the 32. Bienal de São Paulo, 2016, São Paulo. Photo by Leo Eloy. Courtesy of the Artist.



Grada Kilomba, Table of Goods 2017, Installation view at The Power Plant, Toronto, 2018. Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid. Courtesy of the Artist.

## / CAPTIONS

Grada Kilomba, The Desire Project, 2016, three-video installation. HD, Sound, 2'46", in loop, with environment.

Title: The Desire Project

Year: 2016

Medium: Three-channel video projection, in loop, with one sound channel. The environment is composed of two printed impressions in vinyl, and a shrine installation composed of a shrine with two different stools, ca. 60 white candles, coffee beans, a bowl with liquid coffee, a pipe and tabac, a glass of water, beads, a white flower.

Length: 2' 46"

Edition 5+2Ap

Vimeo Link:

[act 1: https://vimeo.com/213990320](https://vimeo.com/213990320)

[act 2: https://vimeo.com/211454221](https://vimeo.com/211454221)

[act 3: https://vimeo.com/213993767](https://vimeo.com/213993767)

Vimeo Password: thedesireproject

Credits: Written, directed and edited by Grada Kilomba. Music by Moses Leo. Co-commissioned by the 32. Bienal de São Paulo, 2016





Grada Kilomba, The Desire Project, 2016, Installation view at the 32. Bienal de São Paulo, 2016, São Paulo, Brazil. Photo by Leo Eloy. Courtesy of the Artist.



Grada Kilomba, *The Desire Project*, 2017, Installation view at The Power Plant, Toronto, 2018. Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid. Courtesy of the Artist.

## / EXHIBITED AT

- 2018 *Speaking the Unspeakable*, Solo Exhibition at Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- 2018 *Secrets to Tell*, Solo Exhibition at The Power Plant, Toronto, Canada.
- 2017 *Desintegriert Euch*, Group Exhibition 3. Berliner Herbstsalon at the Maxim Gorki Theatre, Berlin, Germany.
- 2017 *Secrets to Tell*, Solo Exhibition at MAAT - Museum for Art, Architecture and Technology, Lisbon, Portugal.
- 2017 *Incerteza viva, [Live Uncertainty]*, 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, Museum Serralves, Porto, Portugal.
- 2017 *Incerteza viva [Live Uncertainty]*, 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, Palácio Das Artes, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.
- 2017 *South-South: Let me begin again*, Group Exhibition at Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2016 *Incerteza viva [Live Uncertainty]*, 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.



#### THE MASK

In the living room of my grandmother's house, there was a picture of *Escrava Anastácia* above the sofa, on the left side of the wall. Every Friday, we put a candle, a white flower, a glass of clean water, and a bowl of fresh coffee - with no sugar. My grandmother used to tell me how *Escrava Anastácia* was incarcerated in a mask for speaking words of emancipation during slavery, and I should always remember her.

I remember, because this history has been memorised. I cannot forget it. The colonial past is memorised in a way that one is unable to forget. Sometimes, I would prefer not to remember. But, the theory of memory is in reality a theory of forgetting. One cannot simply forget and one cannot avoid remembering.

The mask was a very concrete piece, a real instrument, which became a part of the European colonial project for several hundred years. It was composed of a bit, placed inside the mouth of the Black subject, clamped between the tongue and the jaw, and fixed behind the head with two strings: one surrounding the chin and the second surrounding the nose and the forehead.

The mask was imposed by *white* masters to prevent enslaved\* Africans from eating sugar cane and cocoa beans while working on the plantations, as well as to prevent them from *dirt eating*, a common practice to commit suicide and escape the horrors of slavery, but its primary function was to implement a sense of fear and speechlessness.

This violent scenario, that one cannot forget thus it is still remembered, raises many questions: Who can speak? And who cannot? Why must the mouth of the Black subject be fastened? Why must she, he, it or they become silent? What could the Black subject say if its mouth were not sealed? And what would the *white* subject have to listen to?

Grada Kilomba

\*enslaved, and not slave. 'Enslaved' recalls the process of dehumanisation against individuals; 'Slave' recalls the state of dehumanisation as a natural identity of these individuals.



# Act I.

## "WHILE I WALK"

by Grada Kilomba (2016) Biennial de São Paulo

1# Someone points at me (links)  
2# and says something.  
3#  
4# Something about being  
5# different.

6# I ask myself:  
7# different from whom? *D. capital*

8# "I cannot go to a film,  
9# (...) I wait for me."  
10# I wait for the savages,  
11# the barbarians,  
12# the servants, *imprisoned*  
13# the prostitutes,  
14# the whores,  
15# and the courtesans,  
16# the criminals,  
17# murder *ers*,  
18# and drug dealers.

19# I wait for what I am not. *like a ?*

20# I only become different,  
21# if others have the power to  
define themselves by  
22# (as the) reference point.  
23# From which I differ.  
24# Who is different?

25# Am I different from you?  
26# Or you from me?

27# I think, this is a delusion.  
28# A colonial tragedy,  
29# that wants to make me  
believe,  
30# that I am discriminated  
against,  
31# because I am different.

32# Well (central)  
33# let me say, (central)

34# that I am not discriminated  
against,  
35# because I am different.  
36# I become different through  
discrimination.

37#

ACT I

# Act II

## "WHILE I SPEAK" ENG.

2:36

by Grada Kilomba (2016) Biennial de São Paulo

02:37  
1# Comments and remarks (links)  
2# seem to imprison me  
in an old colonial  
3# dichotomy. (central)

4# Inadvertently, I am told  
what counts as true,  
5# and in whom to believe. *Central?*

7# This reminds me,  
8# that the concept of  
knowledge is not a simple  
9# apolitical study of truth,  
10# but the reproduction of  
power relations.

11# When they speak, it is  
scientific;  
12# when we speak, it is  
unscientific.  
13# When they speak, it is  
impartial;  
14# when we speak, it is  
partial. *1, 7, 3*  
15# When they speak, it is  
objective;  
16# when we speak, it is  
subjective.  
17# When they speak, it is  
neutral;  
18# when we speak, it is

personal.  
19# When they speak, it is  
rational;  
20# when we speak, it is  
emotional.

21# They have facts,  
22# we have opinions.  
23# They have knowledge,  
24# we have experiences.

25# We are not dealing here  
26# with (central)  
27# a 'peaceful coexistence'  
28# w-o-r-d-s, (central)

29# but rather with  
30# a violent hierarchy,  
31# which defines:

32# who can speak,  
33# and  
34# what we can speak about.

37#

FI. ACT II  
# links

Reminding me of  
an old dichotomy:  
A  
of an old dichotomy  
odd

change  
constant  
persistent  
peculiar  
vision  
fatal  
delicate  
scholarship



Act III  
 "WHILE I WRITE"  
 by Grada Kilomba (2016) Biennial de São Paulo

1# Sometimes, I fear writing. (links)  
 2# Writing turns into fear,  
 3# for I cannot-escape so many  
 colonial constructions.

4# In this world,  
 5# I am seen as a body,  
 that cannot produce knowledge.  
 6# As a body 'outside place'.

7# I know that while I write,  
 8# each word I choose  
 9# will be examined,  
 10# and maybe even invalidated.

11# So, why do I write? (central)  
 12# I have to. (central)

13# I am embedded in a history  
 14# of imposed silences,  
 15# tortured voices,  
 16# disrupted languages,  
 17# forced idioms and,  
 18# interrupted speeches.

19# And I am surrounded by  
 20# white spaces  
 21# I can hardly enter or stay.

22# So, why do I write?  
 23# I write, almost as an obligation,  
 24# to find myself.

25# While I write,  
 26# I am not the 'Other',  
 27# but the self,  
 28# not the object,  
 29# but the subject.

30# I become the describer,  
 31# and not the described.

32# I become the author,  
 33# and the authority  
 34# on my own history.

35# I become the absolute  
 opposition  
 36# of what the colonial project  
 has predetermined.

37# I become me.



Grada Kilomba, The Desire Project, 2017, Installation view at MAAT - Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, Lisbon, 2018. Courtesy of the Artist and EDP Foundation.

/ GRADA KILOMBA

/ PRESS





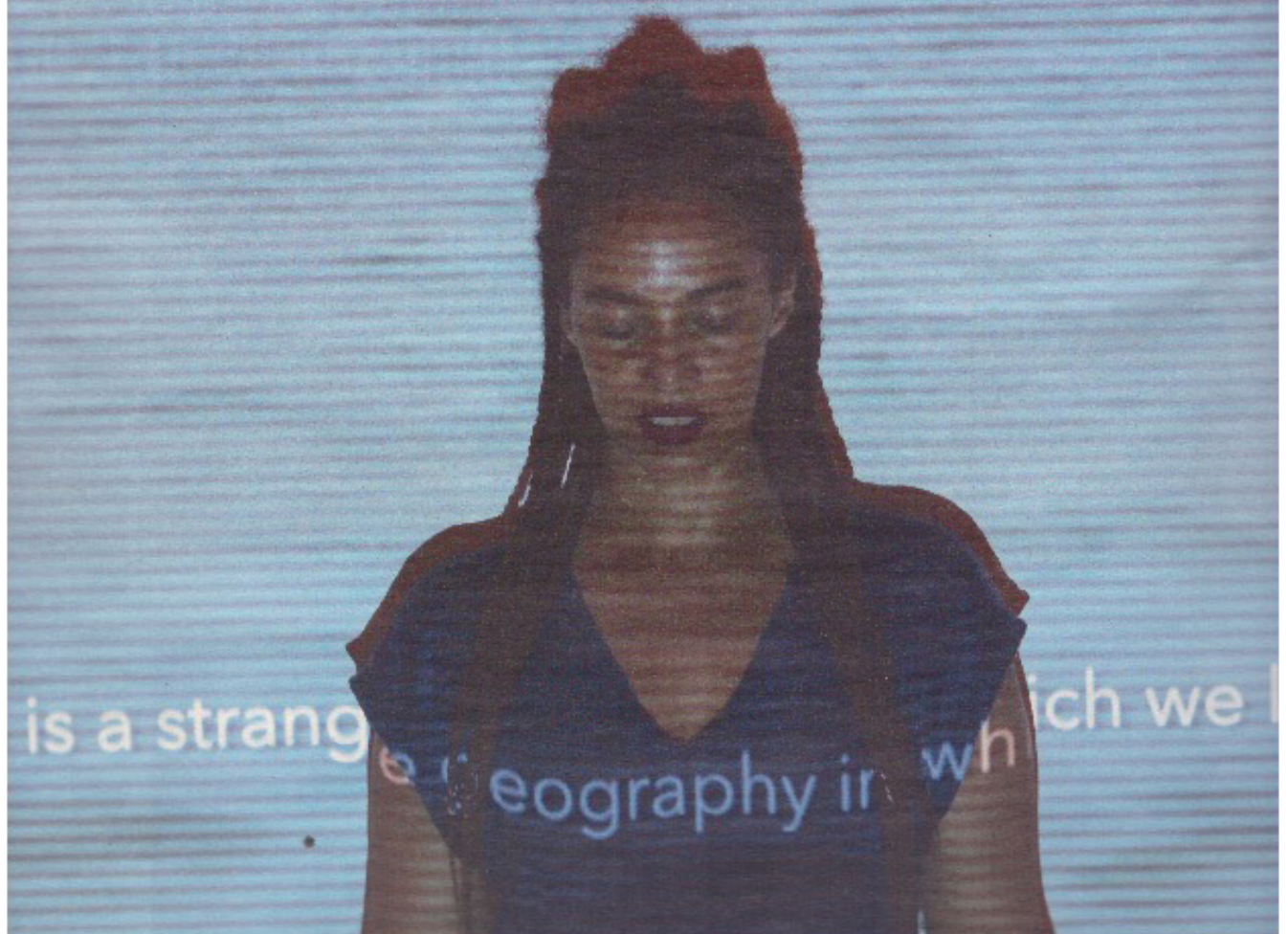
Sexta-feira | 30 Setembro 2016 | [publico.pt/culturaepsilon](http://publico.pt/culturaepsilon)

CRATA ARTISTICA GRADA NIKOLAYEVITZ V.P. KRAVCHENKO ARTE INTEGRADA DA COLOMBIA 2016 4-8 P. 11-8 MUSEU DE SERRALVES DO SETACADAMENTO

**ípsilon**

# A arte feita por mulheres é diferente?

**Bienal de São Paulo estará no Verão em Serralves**





## “Live Uncertainty,” 32nd Bienal de São Paulo

PAVILHÃO CICCILLO MATARAZZO, São Paulo

September 10–December 11, 2016

Almost a year ago, when chief curator Jochen Volz announced his proposal for the 32nd edition of the Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil was already undergoing a severe political crisis, with the country split between those who supported the democratically elected coalition government and those who called for the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. Titled “Incerteza Viva” [Live Uncertainty], the exhibition opened to the public only a few days after Rousseff was permanently ousted from office in a controversial trial based on corruption charges that paradoxically ensured that political sectors known to be corrupt remain in power. In his inauguration speech, unelected president Michel Temer stated that uncertainty had finally ended, but the demonstrations that have been taking place almost daily across the country since Rousseff’s impeachment seem to point to the contrary. During the biennial’s preview, a group of artists wearing black t-shirts with slogans from the late dictatorship days—such as *Eu quero votar pra presidente* [I want to vote for president] from the Diretas Já [Elections Now] campaign, and the more up-to-date *Fora Temer* [Out Temer]—took to the Oscar Niemeyer pavilion that hosts the exhibition. Apart from a few scuffles with members of the public, the protest was mainly peaceful—street demonstrators have recently been severely repressed by São Paulo’s military police.


But Brazil’s political turmoil is only one among the many big questions of our time that the team of curators of “Incerteza Viva”—Volz, Gabi Ngcobo, Júlia Rebouças, Lars Bang Larsen, and Sofia Olascoaga—have brought to the table for this edition of the biennial. Rather than focusing on a specific event, the exhibition addresses uncertainty as a contemporary condition brought on by global warming; loss of biological and cultural diversity; economic and political instability; global migration; and the dissemination of xenophobia, among other destabilizing factors whose effects on the future of the human species remain unknown. These may seem like too many topics to take on in a single exhibition, but in spite of the grim prospects suggested by this long list of human-led disasters, the curators claim that uncertainty should be dissociated from fear and that art’s rebellious imagination feeds on uncertainty. Indeed, most of the work by the 81 artists and collectives featured in this Bienal is less accusatory and more propositional, often incorporating or praising indigenous and vernacular forms of knowledge that may offer an alternative to the destructive logic of late capitalism.

“Incerteza Viva” is an exhibition that eschews monumentality and avoids the usual international art stars; more than half of its participants are women. At the main entrance to Niemeyer’s pavilion, visitors encounter a large group of sculptures made with burnt wood from illegal forest fires by 95-year-old Frans Krajcberg, a Polish émigré who settled in Brazil in the late 1940s. Although fairly well-known in the country, the artist has largely remained beneath the international circuit’s radar, and his “forest” of burnt trees, formed by three groups of sculptures, “Gordinhos” [Fatties], “Bailarinas” [Ballerinas], and “Coqueiros” [Palm Trees], functions both as an indoor extension of the park that surrounds the building and a prelude to a biennial in which organic forms and ecological concerns recur. Next to Krajcberg’s installation, the subject is reinforced by Bené Fonteles’s *Ágora: Oca Tapera Terreiro* (2016), a large adobe construction that resembles the rounded dwellings built by indigenous Brazilian peoples and filled with altar-like assemblages of vernacular objects and photographs of scientists, political and spiritual leaders, and artists. The agora doubles as a gathering space that will host a series of conversations with the artist—who has also been an environmental activist since the 1970s—in order to “postpone the end of the world.”

Some of the works on the ground floor speak less directly of ecology while still implying the need to reconnect with nature’s cycles in the age of the Anthropocene. This is the case in Jonathas de Andrade’s new film *O Peixe* [The Fish] (2016), an engrossing and beautifully shot fable of fishermen who embrace their prey after capture, creating an imagined ritual of empathy between humans and beasts; or in Ruth Ewan’s *Back to the Fields* (2015–16), an installation where the artist has brought to life the French Revolutionary Calendar—based on seasonal changes—through a collection of more than 300 plants, minerals, and objects traditionally associated with each month of the year.

Further along the pavilion, the trilogy of short films *Cantos de Trabalho* [Work Songs] (1975–6) by filmmaker Leon Hirszman documents the fading tradition of work songs among rural communities in northeast Brazil, a simple yet powerful reminder of the importance of a shared culture as a means of resistance. Music is

1 Frans Krajcberg, *Untitled (Ballerinas)*, undated.2 Frans Krajcberg, *Untitled (Ballerinas)* (detail), undated.3 Bené Fonteles, *Ágora: Oca Tapera Terreiro*, 2016.4 Jonathas de Andrade, *The Fish*, 2016.5 Leon Hirzman, *Work Songs - Cocoa*, 1976.



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## A LÍNGUA MAIS BELA 27 OUTUBRO

Ouvimos uma declaração de Grada Kilomba num vídeo online, a propósito da sua performance *Illusions* e aquelas palavras derrubam-nos logo ali. Elas apontam-nos o dedo, a cada um de nós, como uma seta lançada à nossa responsabilidade – à nossa responsabilidade individual. Diz ela: "Insistimos imenso na fantasia de que a marginalização existe porque há falta de conhecimento. Isso é um mito que nos acompanha constantemente e que é muito importante desmistificar. Não é uma falta de conhecimento, é um exercício de poder: não querer saber, ou não precisar de saber."

Adaptada a Lisboa, *Illusions* é uma das cinco obras da artista portuguesa sediada em Berlim que vão estar, sob o título *A Língua Mais Bela*, na Galeria Avenida da Índia, em Lisboa, depois de ter passado pela 32ª Bienal de São Paulo. Kilomba é também uma das artistas cujas peças integram *Incerteza Viva: Uma Exposição a Partir da 32ª Bienal de São Paulo*, que pode ainda ser vista no Museu de Serralves, no Porto. E inaugurará a Project Room do MAAT – Museu de Arte, Arquitetura e Tecnologia, a 8 de novembro, com *Secrets to Tell* (a sua obra *The Desire Project* tornou-se a mais recente do espólio da Fundação EDP). A videoinstalação é composta por três atos – *Enquanto Caminho*, *Enquanto Falo* e *Enquanto Escrevo*. No ato II, lemos, a letras brancas sobre fundo preto, "Enquanto falo/ Comentários e avisos/ parecem aprisionar-me/ numa velha ordem colonial./ Inadvertidamente, dizem-me/ o que conta como a verdade./ e em quem acreditar./ Lembrando-me/ de uma estranha dicotomia:/ Quando eles falam, é científico/ quando nós falamos, é não científico." Para termos acesso à instalação-grito, temos de passar por um pequeno santuário dedicado à escrava Anastácia, cuja boca foi selada, lembrando-nos de que o poder da palavra serve para quebrar os silêncios a partir dos quais as narrativas coloniais insistem em manter-se atualizadas. As de que não queremos saber, as de que não precisamos de saber. Muito ouviremos falar de Grada Kilomba, artista portuguesa radicada em Berlim, nos próximos tempos.



**Galeria Avenida da Índia** > Av. da Índia, 170, Lisboa > T. 21 583 0010 > 27 out-4 mar 2018, ter-sex 10h-13h, 14h-18h, sáb-dom 14h-18h > grátis

## THE WORLD OF STEVE MCCURRY 10 OUTUBRO

A cara da menina afegã é sobejamente conhecida, mas há muito mais do que este exemplar da Mona Lisa dos tempos modernos para ver na extensa carreira do americano Steve McCurry, repórter de imagem da *National Geographic*, que em 1984 fez capa na revista com o retrato *Afghan Girl*. São 250, os trabalhos que vão poder ser vistos na Alfândega do Porto, sob o título *The World of Steve McCurry*, representativos de uma obra que em boa parte se encontra ligada à paixão de longa data do fotógrafo pelo continente asiático.



**Alfândega do Porto** > R. Nova da Alfândega, Porto > T. 22 340 3000 > 10 out-31 dez, ter-sex 10h-18h, sáb-dom 15h-19h



*In Conversation with Grada Kilomba*

## Living in a Space of Timelessness

C& talks with Grada Kilomba about her transdisciplinary work, the presence of the past, and how to perform knowledge for the sake of forcing transformation



"ILLUSIONS" by Grada Kilomba. Photo by Moses Leo (2016). Courtesy the artist and Goodman Gallery.

BY THERESA SIGMUND  
5. July 2017



**Contemporary And: From staged readings to performances and video installations, your work is truly transdisciplinary. How do those different approaches come together?**

Grada Kilomba: I am very interested in producing hybrid spaces where different formats and different languages coincide. I find this to be one of the most urgent tasks of this postcolonial era. If we look back, the classic disciplines always ask us to be disembodied artists, disembodied authors and theorists. We are expected to create a distance to an object that we study, describe, and stage. And we are asked to distance ourselves, our biographies and our bodies, from the questions this object might raise – and this is exactly the core of colonial knowledge production. There is a violent marginalization of certain bodies and simultaneously this fantasy of being objective, neutral, and universal. But what happens when you have historically been this object? What happens when you become the speaking subject? In which languages and formats should you speak your reality?

I believe we need to be experimental with these questions. Maybe that is why I often use different formats from project to project: because I think I have a different question for each format and each project takes me to a different dimension. It is an experimental process in which I want to position myself – my biography, my body, my emotions, my memories and history – as part of the work. This is what decolonial knowledge means to me.



C&: Considering that perspective, the absence of yourself or a physical body in *The Desire Project* (2016) is quite interesting.

GK: There is indeed an absence of physical bodies. I wanted to subvert the artistic practices and find a language that emphasizes the desire of this project: "coming to voice." That's why I wanted to work with video but not use any imagery besides the text itself. I think the visualization of text announces its urgency, the audience is invited to look at the text, read it, and see it. It becomes prominent. And because the installation I created has three channels, you feel surrounded by stories.

At the same time, I wanted to have music as the only sound. Instead of having the usual voiceover, I wanted to work with drumming as a form of narrative and remember the African tradition of storytelling, which involves so many different layers of knowledge production, including music. I worked on this with Moses Leo for several weeks until he composed the final music for the entire text, then I changed the text as many times as possible and edited the video countless times until the music and text became one, like a breathing body.

It was very important to me to have music, to remember the many physical spaces Black people cannot enter, to come to voice. But music enters those spaces. That's why music has been used so centrally by many communities and people in the Diaspora. Music is something you cannot filter, it crosses time and space. You can exclude a person from a physical space, but you will hear the music this person plays outside. People in the African Diaspora have occupied many spaces through music. I see music as a form of political resistance, and I wanted to include it as such. In my work, music is like the direct translation of what you see.

C&: What do you mean by "performing knowledge"?

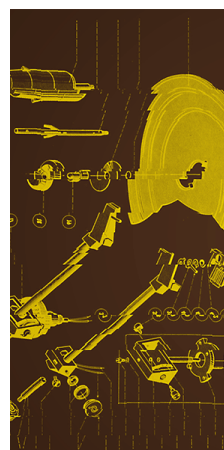
GK: I first came to this title, *Performing Knowledge*, when I developed a series of seminars to my students in 2010–15, and later this concept became the title of a book that I am now finishing. During my work in academia, I often felt incomplete. In academia, we produce knowledge by producing answers. And in the arts, we produce knowledge by producing questions. I am mostly interested



### MOST POPULAR

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The first installation I saw as I walked into Joburg's Goodman Gallery was a collection of microphones looming over a pine box - a makeshift seat, I realised. The absence of someone who would speak into the microphones was notable. Above and behind the microphones, there's a line of text on the wall: "Speaking and listening seem to be an analogous project. A project between those who speak and those who listen; a negotiation between the speakers and the listeners: it seems one can only speak, if one's voice is listened to."

Thus begins Grada Kilomba's first solo exhibition in Africa with her 2017 installation called *The Simple Act of Listening*.

The exhibition, titled **Speaking the Unspeakable**, uses video and sound installations, staged readings, text collages and other formats.

Kilomba explains that she pulls knowledge relegated to text into the exhibition, thereby "performing" her own writing and feminist theory. Using this performance, Kilomba works to interrupt the often sterile, silent "white cube" of traditional art galleries with a lyrical, visual language comprised of historically silenced voices and narratives.

A work that struck me at the exhibition is *The Desire Project*, which is comprised of a three-channel text-based video installation.

Kilomba's thoughts on the invalidation of knowledge and experiences of colonised subjects is explored, as is the framing of colonial knowledge as inherently objective.

Kilomba stresses the positionality of those who speak, and how their/our knowledge is invalidated depending on their/our position when it comes to race, gender and sexuality, as well as a host of other factors.

"I write as an obligation to find myself," the text of *The Desire Project* reads, and Kilomba seeks to be the describer of her experiences - not the described.

Kilomba was born in Portugal and lives in Berlin, Germany. She explored her work with exhibition curator Lara Koseff in a recent public discussion, and Kilomba provided me with further details in an interview I had with her later.

Out of respect for and in acknowledgement of her desire to be the describer and not the described, I have chosen to use her words verbatim as far as is possible.

"My work can be placed everywhere and nowhere at the same time. I think this is a characteristic of a decolonial feminist work, where you are reinventing language and it disturbs classic platforms, and people don't know where to place it because it crosses disciplines. I find that very exciting; that when we start telling stories or create a visuality to stories that have been silenced, that sometimes the platforms are inadequate to react to those new stories. Traditional and classic spaces often try to tell stories in a particular format, and then we come with a new perspective and a new language that is a hybrid of disciplines," she says.

"I think many marginalised bodies have to find new languages and new artistic practices to express ourselves, and we also need to find spaces where we can speak these languages. Most of these [gallery or museum] spaces are dominated spaces where we were once denied entrance, or where our works are not to be seen, or where our work is not in accordance with the 'white cube'. I think we need to go into these spaces and experiment as we seek to create new languages that were not there before.

"I think it's important that we enter these spaces and occupy them, interrupt them, disrupt and appropriate them; and to bring a new agenda and to change the

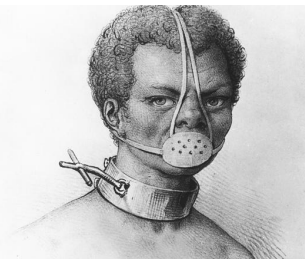
## WHO CAN SPEAK THE unspeakable?

In her first solo exhibition on the continent, interdisciplinary artist and scholar Grada Kilomba negotiates the dynamics of speaking that which is unspeakable about colonialism, gender and the hierarchy of knowledge - not only in terms of what shouldn't be spoken or cannot be spoken, but in terms of what happens when we do so, writes **Michelle Solomon**



**TUNE IN**  
Grada Kilomba with her installation called *The Act of Listening*, at the Goodman Gallery in Joburg  
PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

ART  
EXHIBITION



**ESCRAVA ANASTÁCIA** Grada Kilomba exhibits the image and story of Escrava Anastácia, an enslaved woman who was forced to wear a mask to stop her from speaking against colonialism and slavery



**TABLE OF GOODS** A mound of soil with small pockets of sugar, coffee, dark chocolate and cocoa illustrates the relationship between slaves and their masters  
PHOTO: BRUNO LOPES

Another particularly jarring piece Kilomba includes in her exhibition is *Table of Goods*, an installation comprised of a mound of soil with pockets filled with coffee, sugar, dark chocolate and cocoa - all of which are goods associated with and produced by past and modern-day slaves.

The mound, which resembles a grave with its surrounding white candles, is a visual representation of all those things that enslaved people were forbidden from consuming as they worked on plantations around the world. To physically prevent these enslaved people from consuming these products, many were forced by their colonial owners to wear a gagging mask. The masks had the further effect of preventing enslaved people from speaking or from consuming dirt as a way to commit suicide, thereby reclaiming their agency as subjects as opposed to objects owned by their masters.

"For enslaved people, killing yourself

upon its own life. But a subject, a person, can decide upon her own life, can decide to end her life. That was seen as a loss of property [by slave owners]," says Kilomba.

"One aspect of the work that I wanted to do was to look at these forms of oppression that are like ghosts; that keep interrupting our lives, keep bringing the past into the present and keep interrupting our everyday life - just as ghosts do, symbolically - and bring fear into your life where it shouldn't be. So I started working with this metaphor of a ghost - slavery is a ghost, colonialism is a ghost, sexism is a ghost. All these oppressions are violent ghosts that interrupt your life and scare you.

"We need to talk about these ghosts and give them a proper burial. We need to name them, put them in the right place, like a graveyard, and give them a dignified burial so that the ghosts disappear. The ghosts are there because these [forms of oppression] are not



**MOTEL MOBBOING** Maggz's new video is cool, but the lyrics are humdrum  
PHOTO: YOUTUBE SCREENGRAB

## Simple and slick, but not unique

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**Maggz: Big Time featuring Reason and pH**

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The new track **Big Time** boasts two of our more seasoned local rappers in Maggz and Reason, which means the actual music is slightly above average. The two are accompanied by pH, who rides the hook.

The video shows the trio on a road trip with a couple of women in new and shiny SUVs with no licence plates. I'm not sure what a Haval H2 is, but it must be a big deal as the insignia is shown many times. Two of these cars are filmed by a drone as they pass through some lush scenery and over a bridge.

The destination of this trip would seem to be a motel, and the texture of this imagery reminds me of a video by Travis Scott for the song *Mamacita*. You know those videos in front of a roadhouse or a flea market with gritty shots and not too much going on but

rapping and finessing? That recipe works, strangely enough.

Reason and the boys channel this well, wearing all black with a few goons

rocking some Stylz Gang merchandise. I'm not sure what Reason is doing with the golf glove, but, okay, cool. I enjoyed the shots of pH chilling on a stoep with a tortoise.

This is not what I would call a lyrically intensive record. Truth be told, I feel like Maggz gives us very little in the way of quotables as his delivery is lost in the autotune. It comes across as if this is Reason's track featuring Maggz. Reason kicks a scheme about him and his "hitters" chilling at villas... it would've been cool if they were standing in front of one of those instead of a motel, but that's just semantics. Reason actually kicks a decent verse and this beat slaps pretty hard.

Love and Glory is Maggz's sophomore offering, even though the brother is a household name. I gather staying relevant entails wavy beats and distorted lyrics, but it would be nice to hear those old cats really snap on a beat and

MUSIC  
VIDEO REVIEW