

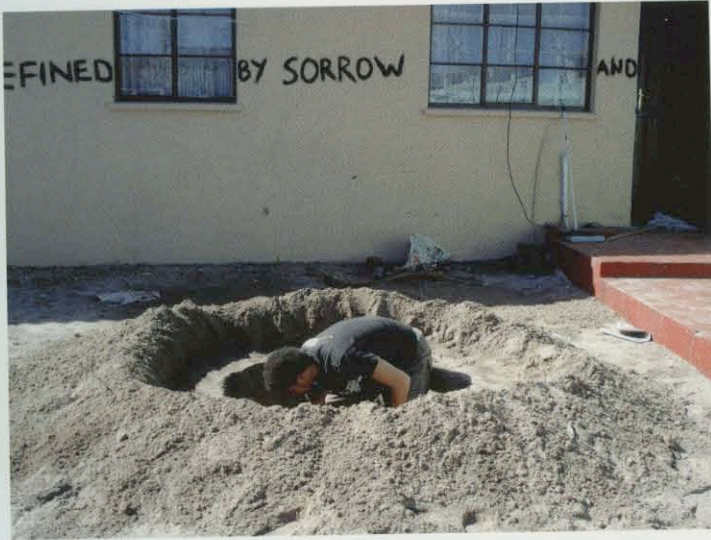
THE UNGOVERNABLES

2012 NEW MUSEUM TRIENNIAL

"The Ungovernables," the 2012 New Museum Triennial, seeks to capture the perspectives, preoccupations, and experiences of an inventive and informed generation born from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s—a generation who came of age in the aftermath of the independence and revolutionary movements that promised to topple Western colonialism but became mired in military dictatorships, the emergence of integrated world capitalism, regional and global economic crises, the rise of fundamentalism, and international interventions and failures to intervene. Faced with this somewhat bleak inheritance, artists in "The Ungovernables" embrace their complex relationship to history and assert a remarkable patience, pragmatism, and resolve in their work. The exhibition features thirty-four artists and artist collectives working in painting, sculpture, drawing, performance, video, and other activities. Through explorations of form, objecthood, material, and temporality, artists in "The Ungovernables" negotiate time and their experience of the contemporary, often demonstrating a profound mistrust of permanence. Many of the works are provisional, site-specific, and performative, reflecting an attitude of possibility and faith in the contingent nature of this moment.



Kemang Wwa Lehulere, Ukuguqula iBatyi 3, 2008. Performance views, Kwa Mlamli, Cape Town, South Africa. Photo: Gugulective



KEMANG WA LEHULERE

BORN 1984, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA LIVES AND WORKS IN JOHANNESBURG

Kemang Wa Lehulere examines the compounded realities of post-apartheid South Africa. His knowledge of performance and theater is evident in his drawings, works on paper, videos, and writings. Collaboration is also an important part of Wa Lehulere's practice, which foregrounds process as the work itself. He is a founding member of Gugulective, an artist collective based in the Gugulethu township outside Cape Town, South Africa; and a contributor to Center for Historical Reenactments, an independent platform founded by artists, curators, and writers in Johannesburg. Much of Wa Lehulere's work addresses the recent amnesia that pervades South Africa, and expresses a distrust of the construction of historical narrative. For Wa Lehulere, his cultural inheritance remains largely unspoken and is carried and enacted within the body.

The installation *Remembering the Future of a Hole as a Verb*, 2010, presented at Kwazulu Natal Society of Arts (KZNSA) in Durban, South Africa, centered around a video of the performance *Ukuguqula iBatyji 3*, 2008, in which Wa Lehulere used an afro pick to dig a hole behind a township shebeen outside Cape Town. The title, which means "to turn a coat inside out," was a phrase that described individuals who underwent race reclassification during apartheid, but here it is applied more abstractly to characterize a process of upending or reversal. During the performance, Wa Lehulere unexpectedly unearthed the bones of a cow, prompting neighbors to recall the conditions surrounding the animal's death, which led to the telling of still more stories from the period. In the gallery, a large chalk drawing on a black wall illustrated a mind map of collective memory while piles of exhumed earth suggested a present turned over to a past that has only started to speak.

Echoes of Our Footsteps (a performance of a rehearsal), 2010, is a two-person work that explores intention and narrative construction. As the title suggests, the work is a study in the processes of dialogue that give dimension to a script. Here Wa Lehulere enacts a play, while a director and frequent collaborator offers feedback and different approaches to the material that emphasize various elements, angles, and perspectives. Exploring rehearsal as both a period for practice and a reproduction of knowledge, the back and forth between artist and director not only draws attention to the layered negotiation involved in the production of a theatrical performance but also implicates the viewers as witnesses who unwittingly find themselves onstage, too.

The performance *30 Minutes of Amnesia: Act 1*, 2011, explores the concept of reenactment through consideration of the 1973 play *The Island*. Conceived during the apartheid era by playwright Athol Fugard and actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona, the work focuses on the interactions of two cellmates at a prison that recalls Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated. According to Wa Lehulere, the play was not immediately written down for fear that its criticism of the apartheid system could be used as evidence against its creators; instead, the work only existed as performance. *30 Minutes of Amnesia* is based on the artist's own memory of the play's opening scene, which features the two prisoners moving dirt between two piles. Distilling this reference from the play and substituting bones in place of dirt (referring back to his earlier performance), five performers shuttle bones between two piles within the gallery space. Here the piles evidence labor but also the histories unearthed.

—Ryan Inouye





Kemang Wa Lehulere, *Remembering the future of a Hole as a Verb*, 2010. Chalk on wall, 10 x 29 1/2 ft (3 x 9 m). Installation views, KwaZulu Natal Society of Arts, Durban, South Africa. Photo: Andrew Griffin