



Mawuli Afatsiawo

Theo Eshetu

Ingrid Mwangi

Mendi + Keith Obadike

Digital Africa

November 11 - 25, 2003

Tuesday - Saturday

10am - 6pm

Opening: Tuesday, November 11, 6 - 8 pm

Artist Talk introduced by Okwui Enwezor: Saturday, November 15, 2pm

@ Electronic Arts Intermix

535 West 22nd Street, 5th floor, NY, NY 10011

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AFRICAN FILM **FESTIVAL**



Within a Shadow Lies What Will Fall

2003, Two-channel Video Installation

Within a Shadow Lies What Will Fall is a two-channel video installation in which Ingrid Mwangi and Robert Hutter engage in a dialogue about cultural identity, place, and contextual exchange. While traveling in Kenya, the artists filmed one another as they cut their hair. Projected side-by-side, the artists present the hair-cutting process as a symbolic act of transformation.

Performing with an almost ritualistic concentration, Mwangi severs her dreadlocks with a razor. In an anonymous, grey space, Mwangi's image slowly becomes clearer and more detailed with each fallen dreadlock. Over the course of twenty minutes, as long as it takes for all the hair to be cut, she becomes fully visible. In contrast, Hutter is recorded in a barbershop in a Kenyan village. The surroundings are lively and colorful; as a white stranger, Hutter draws attention from passers-by and children. The original sounds of voices and music swell and recede, while the grating of the electric razor is pronounced. Writes Mwangi, "She has decided to surrender an identity associated with the exotic. He, on the other hand, is taking on the role, putting himself in the situation of being looked at, laughed at, wondered and discussed about."

Hutter, a man of European heritage, positions himself within a new African context. For Mwangi, a Kenyan who has lived in Germany for more than a decade, the loss of her dreadlocks suggests the notion of a hybrid identity. Ultimately, the artists' gesture of hair cutting initiates not only a personal transformation, but also a dialogue across cultures. Mwangi: "Between shared European heritage and unshared African heritage lies a dividing line, which will be breached only through constant and continuous appraisal, examination, renewal, questioning."

Ingrid Mwangi and Robert Hutter

Kenyan-born artist Ingrid Mwangi works in a range of media, including video, installation, photography and performance art. Her works confront issues of race, identity and gender. Often using her body as subject, Mwangi explores her physicality, as well as issues of blackness and heritage, in relation to sociopolitical systems. She investigates identity in the context of personal experience and cultural positions on the foreign and "exotic." Robert Hutter's work centers around the body as an interface between self and society, using computer and performance techniques to investigate such themes as the virtual body.

Ingrid Mwangi was born in 1975 in Nairobi. Robert Hutter was born in 1964 in Ludwigshafen, Germany. They both received New Artistic Media degrees from the University of Fine Arts Saar, Saarbrücken, and have received scholarships from the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes, and residency-scholarships of the Rhineland-Palatinate studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris. Mwangi's work has been shown at the Museum for African Art, NY and the São Paulo Bienal, amongst others. They've collaborated on works for several exhibitions including: *Next Flag 1*, The Casino Luxembourg Forum of Contemporary Art; *Exhibition of Video Works — Ingrid Mwangi and Robert Hutter*, Center of Contemporary Art of East Africa, GoDown Arts Center, Nairobi; and *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad*, Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis. Mwangi and Hutter live in Ludwigshafen.

Brave New World

2000, Multi-media and Video Installation

Theo Eshetu's installation *Brave New World* is an ingenious *trompe l'oeil* that opens, layer by layer, into a hall of mirrors. At first glance, the viewer sees what appears to be a small painting on the wall. When viewed from the front, a flat-screen video monitor seems to show shifting abstract patterns; on closer inspection, a giant globe reveals faceted images of cultural rituals. Peering even deeper, the viewer plunges like Alice through the looking glass into a kaleidoscopic, multi-dimensional space of myriad echoes and iterations of his or her own image. Ultimately, in Eshetu's words, "the viewer is reflected as the sole spectator of a cosmic spectacle..."

Eshetu's resonating theater of self-images, inspired by the multiple reflections in his bathroom mirror, results from a relatively simple device — a video monitor placed at one end of a mirrored box. This illusory space sets in motion a series of cascading meanings that re-cast the subjective into a global context. The recorded images are culled from Eshetu's archives of Super 8 film footage collected on his travels in Ethiopia, New York, and Bali. The non-narrative flow of images from three continents and cultures — ceremonial and religious rituals, cityscapes, television commercials — attempt to capture what the artist terms "the soul of the world." Within the shifting spectra of the theatrical mirrored box, the self meets the Other, and personal reflection collides with mediated spectacle.

With its magical, echoing prism of transformation, Eshetu's *Brave New World* refers not only to the dystopian pathos of the technological future implied in Aldous Huxley's novel, but also to the title's ironic source in Shakespeare's *Tempest*: "Oh wonder... how beauteous mankind is, oh brave new world that has such people in it."

Theo Eshetu has worked in media art since 1982, creating installations, video art works, and television documentaries. As a videomaker, he explores the expressive capabilities of the medium and the manipulation of the language of television. Exploring themes and imagery from anthropology, art history, scientific research, and religious iconography, he attempts to define how electronic media shapes identity and perception. World cultures, particularly the relationship of African and European cultures, often inform Eshetu's work.

Born in London in 1958, Eshetu spent part of his childhood in Ethiopia. In 1981 he received his degree in Communication Design from the North East London Polytechnic. His work has been shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome; the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Nice; the 2nd Video Biennial of Fukui, Japan, and at festivals such as the Venice Film Festival; London Film Festival; International Festival of Film on Art, Montreal; and other venues throughout the world. He received prizes at the Berlin Video Festival; the International African Film Festival, Milan; and the Festival dei Due Mondi, Spoleto, Italy, among others. He has taught video and communications in numerous universities, art colleges, and film schools in Italy. In 1987, he formed White Light, a production company with which he has produced numerous documentaries for television. Eshetu has lived and worked in Rome since 1982.

Man in a Box 2000, 5 minutes, color, sound.

On a Journey... 2001, 6 minutes, color, sound.

Mawuli Afatsiawo's *Man in a Box* was originally conceived as a two-channel projection. This composite version conflates the two elements into one charged space: The artist, his body naked and painted red, is crouched inside a small box. His contorted figure, moving within the enclosed space, is seen against a collage of images: children playing a game, scenes of urban street life in Ghana, construction machinery, and colonial-era monuments. Afatsiawo maps his identity against this backdrop of cultural history and personal memory.

Afatsiawo writes: "*Ampe* is a game ... that I remember well from my childhood. I see it being played today in school playgrounds and around the corner in every neighborhood. The memories of these experiences echo a rhythm in us that shapes our worldview. Then there is a man kneeling in a confined space, yet within this space he defines himself, readjusting his limbs periodically. All the while the earth is being moved, portions of it are relocated and its form changed. Monuments intrude upon it and eventually become a part of it. Yet still the man continues his movements within the box and kids in Ghana still play *Ampe*; its rhythm echoes on in our lives. What if the man stepped out of the box? Are we boxed in by our own definitions of our culture?"

In *On a Journey...* Afatsiawo has crafted a haunting meditation in which fleeting images and somber music evoke loss and displacement. Everyday street scenes in Ghana are juxtaposed with symbolic gestures: hands turning the pages of an English dictionary, fingers tracing characters on a beach, the ritualistic sweeping of sand. Within this fragmented montage of reflection, the artist is seen in a series of striking still poses.

■ **Mawuli Afatsiawo** has worked in video art since 1997, exploring issues of identity, racism, Africa's colonial history, and globalization. Afatsiawo uses the video medium as a tool for challenging cultural perceptions. His works often integrate images of everyday life in Ghana with performance elements, in which he uses his own body as subject and metaphor. In his poetic and often metaphysical visions, Afatsiawo links personal experience and memory with African heritage, rituals and history to confront larger political and cultural realities.

Afatsiawo was born in Ghana in 1974. He was educated for some years in London and then returned to Ghana, where he graduated in Fine Arts at the College of Art, UST, of Kumasi in 1999. His work has been shown at the Studio Museum, New York; the 2nd edition of the Liverpool Biennial; the 25th edition of the Bienal de São Paulo; the African Pavilion of the EXPO 2000, Hannover, Germany; the ifa Gallery, Bonn, Germany; the Pan African Theatre Festival of Cape Coast, Ghana, and in several other exhibitions in Germany and Ghana. He is also creative director of an advertising production agency in Accra, Ghana. Afatsiawo lives and works in Accra, Ghana.

The Pink of Stealth

2003, DVD and Internet project

The Pink of Stealth is an interactive Web and DVD project that explores the relationship of language, color, and class. Here the vernacular of foxhunting and the color pink become springboards for a multi-textual investigation of ideas around race, wealth, gender, culture, and sexuality.

Mendi + Keith write: "The phrase 'in the pink' (also used in the form 'in the pink of health') comes from the English foxhunting culture of the 18th-century. At that time, Thomas Pink was the favored fashion designer of the aristocracy and fashionable hunters were said to be 'in the Pink' — that is, in Thomas Pink's (red) hunting jackets. Though Thomas Pink stores are still around, his name does not register in popular culture as it did a couple of centuries ago. However, the language around his fashions continues to pervade our speech. We use this project to think about the associative properties of language and the way that a word or concept from one can carry along the values of another context. In *The Pink of Stealth*, we tell a story about two characters that attempt to hide something about their identities through different forms of 'passing' and whose distinctive qualities are in some way related to pinkness."

The story is told through five hypertext variations, a text-sound piece created for DVD, a series of Web banners distributed by e-mail, and a foxhunting game styled after early video arcade games, playable through a Web browser. The Web pages foreground different words in the narrative to encourage alternate readings within the story, propelling a multi-layered inquiry into how words and their associative meanings are read (or misread) in blurred contexts.

■ Mendi + Keith Obadike

The real life of new media artists Mendi + Keith Obadike is like a Phillip K. Dick story starring Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis with a laptop and a dial-up connection. Their interdisciplinary art practice includes video and sound art, music CDs and text-based Internet projects. Exploring the implications of social and cultural systems in relation to blackness and identity, they have investigated sex toys, the commodification of race, and the visualization of untold stories as disappearing hypertext.

Keith Obadike was born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1973 and graduated in Fine Art from North Carolina Central University. He is presently studying Sound Design at Yale. Mendi Obadike was born in Palo Alto, California in 1973 and graduated in English from Spelman College. She is presently studying Literature at Duke and teaching at Wesleyan. Their work has been shown at the Studio Museum, New York; MIT/List Visual Art Center, Boston and the International Center of Photography, New York, among other venues. Their public projects include the African Diaspora Film Series at the Center for Documentary Studies, Durham, North Carolina and *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities*. They launched their Internet opera *The Sour Thunder* at Yale. Awards include the John Hope Franklin Documentary Award, the Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship in Humanistic Studies and the Franklin Furnace Performance Art Award. They live in Connecticut.

In 2003, African Film Festival (AFF) celebrated its 10th Anniversary of introducing the work of emerging African filmmakers to audiences in the Americas. Reflecting on the changes we've witnessed over this past decade, we realized that several new filmmakers were not only making "movies," but also exploring new digital technologies and non-traditional forms of storytelling. AFF wanted to draw attention to these experimental works, but decided that rather than including them as part of our annual festival, we would organize an exhibit where the works could dialogue with each other.

We were interested in exploring several issues that delineate this work from the films screened at our annual festival. As the reality of today's African media-makers is indeed a global one, we wanted to ascertain the effect of new digital and communications technologies in shaping an African diaspora consciousness or identity. We also wanted to highlight how these technologies opened new and exciting possibilities for representing, imaging, and re-conceptualizing race and color. Furthermore, we were interested in the potential interplay between traditional and digital materials in African art, as well as how ritual, rhythm, and oral story-telling traditions, motifs which so defined African cinema, are transformed in the digital realm. AFF is proud to be on the forefront of showcasing new media by African artists, as well as creating connections amongst international media professionals.

African Film Festival Curators: Mahen Bonetti and Prerana Reddy

Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) is pleased to partner with the African Film Festival to present five new media works by African artists. The artists represented here work within an international vocabulary of contemporary media art practice: conceptual performance, multimedia installation, interactive Web art. Engaged in critical and aesthetic strategies that integrate the political and the poetic, their works articulate a new diasporic consciousness informed by digital culture.

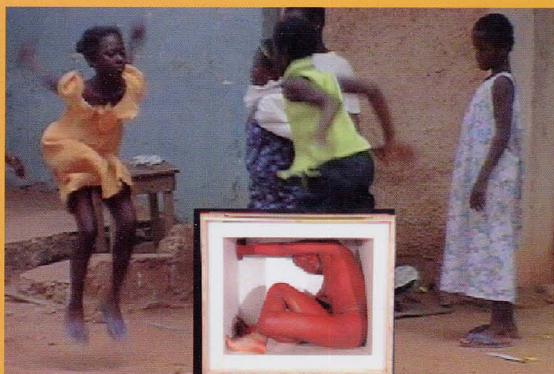
The artists' biographies read like a road map of contemporary diasporic experience. Living and working between Africa, Europe and North America, these artists speak to the hybridization of culture and identity in a digital world. Often they use their own bodies or gestures to propel inquiries into social and cultural systems. Ingrid Mwangi's symbolic ritual of transformation — cutting off her dreadlocks — initiates a charged dialogue of cultural exchange. Mawuli Afatsiawo charts personal memory across a landscape of African history and heritage.

Merging experimental forms with digital media, the artists investigate how electronic technologies both shape and reflect cultural perceptions. Keith and Mendi Obadike's multi-textual investigation of language, race, color and class is an interactive Web project that encourages alternate readings and meanings. In Theo Eshetu's *trompe l'oeil* installation, the viewer plunges through a looking glass into an illusory space, where self-reflection meets cross-cultural media spectacle.

Refracted through a prism of globalization and cultural dialogue, these powerful visions of contemporary African diasporic reality find expression in the electronic media that continue to redefine their borders.

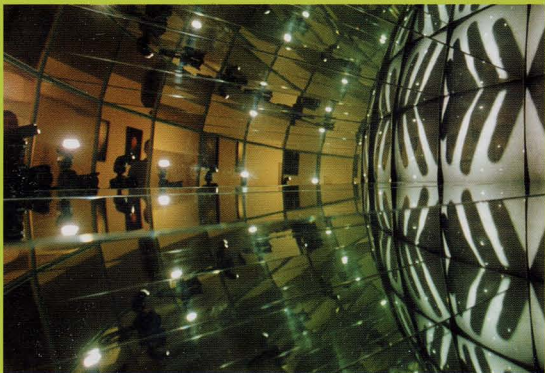
EAI Exhibition Advisors: Lori Zippay and Galen Joseph-Hunter

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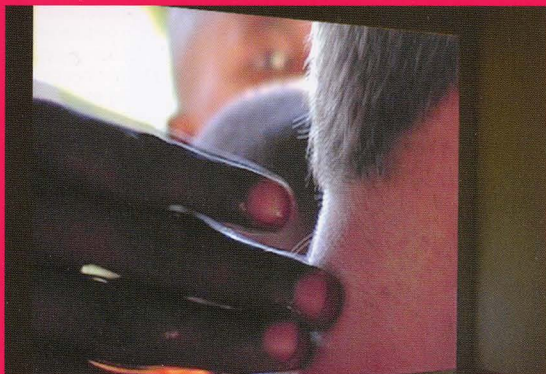
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5 minutes, color, sound

ART



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ALFA



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