



A union between art and anthropology

HELENÉ BAM

The National Art Gallery of Namibia hosted the opening of the exhibitions 'Luanda Nights' and 'My Past, My Present, My Future' last Thursday evening. Both are rooted in the anthropological observations and work of Michael Pröpper.

"I am an artist and an anthropologist. The one inspires the other. Practically that means that I am a figurative painter, but I also photograph, steal and alienate strange photos and build sculptures and installations.

"My works and positions are often inspired by ethnographic – sometimes even empathetic, and energetic or even emotional – impulses," explains Pröpper.

'Luanda Nights' is a series of night scenes from African cities. Pröpper says that he is "fascinated by the dynamism, the sounds, the smells and the diversity of impressions collected at urban dwellings every night".

'My Past, My Present, My Future'

consists of portraits and stories of people in the Kavango and the project was undertaken by a group of students from that region.

Ernest Sirefwe, Olavi Munkanda and Lukas Kafuro with the guidance of Joseph Mbambo from the Rundu office of the Ministry of Culture and Pröpper, made use of digital cameras to take portraits to document the stories of locals.

"These faces tell stories of a long life. Experience, suffering, pride and happiness have each been engraved," he says.

"They tell intimate stories about the human condition and are a portrait of life in Africa's Kavango.

"Visual art is not widespread in the Kavango, so to exhibit faces of people from there as an expression of the fascinating stories life tells, and is envisioned as a way of using art to empower people."

Both these exhibitions can be viewed in the National Art Gallery until 3 August 2015.



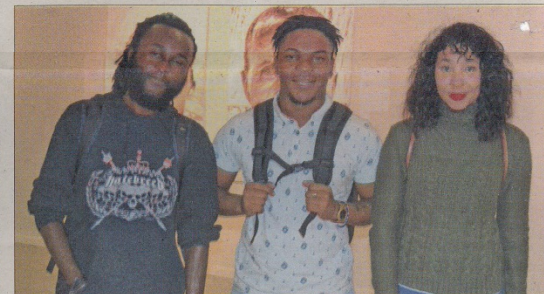
Ernest Sirefwe and Olavi Munkanda



One of portraits featuring in 'My Past, My Present, My Future'. PHOTOS HELENÉ BAM



A work of art that is part of the 'Luanda Nights' exhibition.



Vilho Nuumbala, Martin Amushendje and Khadija Mouton at the opening night.



For more information on these events, visit www.whatsonwindhoek.com or www.we.com.na

MONDAYS TO SATURDAYS UNTIL 24 JULY

Exhibition: Rising Giants by Elke le Roux at House of Arts & Frametique

MONDAYS TO SATURDAYS UNTIL 1 AUGUST

Beauty in a Blade of Grass: Exhibition of alternative photography by Marita van Rooyen at La Bonne Table

MONDAYS TO SATURDAYS UNTIL 1 AUGUST

Luanda Night and My Past, My Present, My Future at the National Art Gallery

MONDAYS TO SATURDAYS UNTIL 5 AUGUST

UN/Declared UN/Desirable – An exhibition by Jo Rogge at the Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre

MONDAYS TO FRIDAYS UNTIL 13 AUGUST

Ghetto Soldiers - exhibition of graphic art at the College of the Arts Main Campus

16 JULY

18:00 Public discussion: Land reform:

Quo Vadis Namibia? at the Nampower Convention Centre

16 JULY

19:00 Dance Meets Poetry - Finding Middle Ground at Jojo's Music and Arts Café

17 JULY

19:00 NAMJAMS with Stardust at Hilton Kalabar

17 JULY

20:00 Grappi Live in Concert at the Boiler Room

17-18 JULY

PTA Tennis Tournament at WHS Tennis Courts

17-19 JULY

Southern Star Party (SSFT) 2015 at Midgard Country Estate

18 JULY

15:00 Rugby: Windhoek Draught friendship series at Hage Geingob Rugby Stadium

18 JULY

15:30 and 18:00 Screening: Vanishing Kings - Lions of the Namib: wildlife

documentary at the Warehouse Theatre

19 JULY

06:00 Nedbank Citi Run at Zoo Park

21 JULY

18:00 Screening: Timbuktu at the Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre

21 JULY

19:15 Nairobi Half Life at the Goethe Centre

22 JULY

18:30 Screening: Timbuktu at the Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre

22 JULY

19:00 Film: The Quantum Indians at Scientific Society

EVERY SUNDAY

17:00 Salsa Classes at Zum Grünen Kranz Steakhouse

EVERY SUNDAY

16:00-17:00 Sunday Yoga at the Goethe Centre



Visitors on the opening night.

'Luanda Nights'

• Martha Mukaiwa

IN most of 'Luanda Nights', the world is oddly indistinct. As if illuminated by a beam from a car rushing by, as though viewed in a street lacking light and even somewhat like the world when wandered through without spectacles.

Presenting a collection of night scenes from different African cities, German artist and anthropologist Michael Pröpper marries his fascination with art and anthropology in an ongoing series currently offering glimpses into Luanda, Chitembo and Rundu after dark.

Unconcerned with the hustle and bustle of the day, in oil and acrylic on canvas, Pröpper presents individuals within scenes in detail diminishing darkness more as a manifestation of mood than any clear comment on society.

The result is a sombre offering in which the viewer is sometimes forced to search for the figures in the frames by following the curve of silhouettes or by seeking souls illuminated by splashes of light.

Beguiled by the dynamism of soundscapes, 'smellscapes', fuzzy mobility and the diversity of impressions capable of collection during nightly urban existence, 'Luanda Nights' alights on couples in doorways, women at work and men in lonely areas imprecise in a way that implores imagination.

As the figures are faceless and even the backgrounds black and



blurred, the viewer must navigate through a narrative that is only hinted at. To flesh out forms and buildings in the dark, Pröpper's use of colour is subtle and suggestive with just the moon or a cut of artificial light to catch the colour of a garment or the form of a figure.

The effect can be captivating, sometimes dreamlike and it is most successful in 'Rundu Man'. A mostly black and white piece in which a man has his back turned off centre and exists only as a silhouette... Some lightness of shirt and some humanness of form in a room that threatens to swallow him whole.

Equally absorbing is 'Luanda Nightyard' in which women cook and trade in a dilapidated yard and a dog is only just visible in a slice

of light.

Though most of the figures in 'Luanda Nights' are turned away from the viewer. In 'Chitembo Girls,' one faceless figure looks our way. Hurrying by past traffic and a tree, she turns towards the artist as if suddenly aware of being observed as her two friends rush to places unknown.

A female face is also attentive in 'Epingiro' where women gather in traditional dress to converse under trees or show a baby off to a police officer. All but one who smiles out at the viewer and is all the more remarkable for smiling distinctly by day in a collection which mostly turns away indistinctly by night.

An odd addition in an erratic exhibition by a 'figurative painter' concerned with 'ethnographic, empathetic, energetic or even emotional impulses', 'Epingiro' looms large and as absorbing as the more moody night scenes.

Certainly a series caught in the middle rather than edited and pursued to artistic, thematic and cohesive conclusion, 'Luanda Nights' has some bright moments in a collection captivated by the dark.

'Luanda Nights' will be on display at the National Art Gallery of Namibia until 1 August. Visit michaelproepper.de or email kunst@michaelproepper.de

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