

Interview with artist Dan Halter, pt. 2

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South African-based artist Dan Halter

In December 2007, while on his honeymoon, Base partner Geoff Cook unexpectedly came across the work of Dan Halter. He was immediately taken by the combination of artistry, conceptualism and political commentary contained in the work. Two years later, we decided to check in on Halter to see how his work was progressing.



Halter, Dan, *I Don't Know What To Believe Anymore, Farming Region map of Zimbabwe* printed over with a list of the names of the farms seized by the government. This is interwoven with a shredded copy of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* 82 x 89 cm, 2005.

Base: The map pieces are quite striking. Can you talk a bit about them? (the nuances of each, etc)

Dan Halter: Two words that are useful in describing my maps are fabric and fabrication:

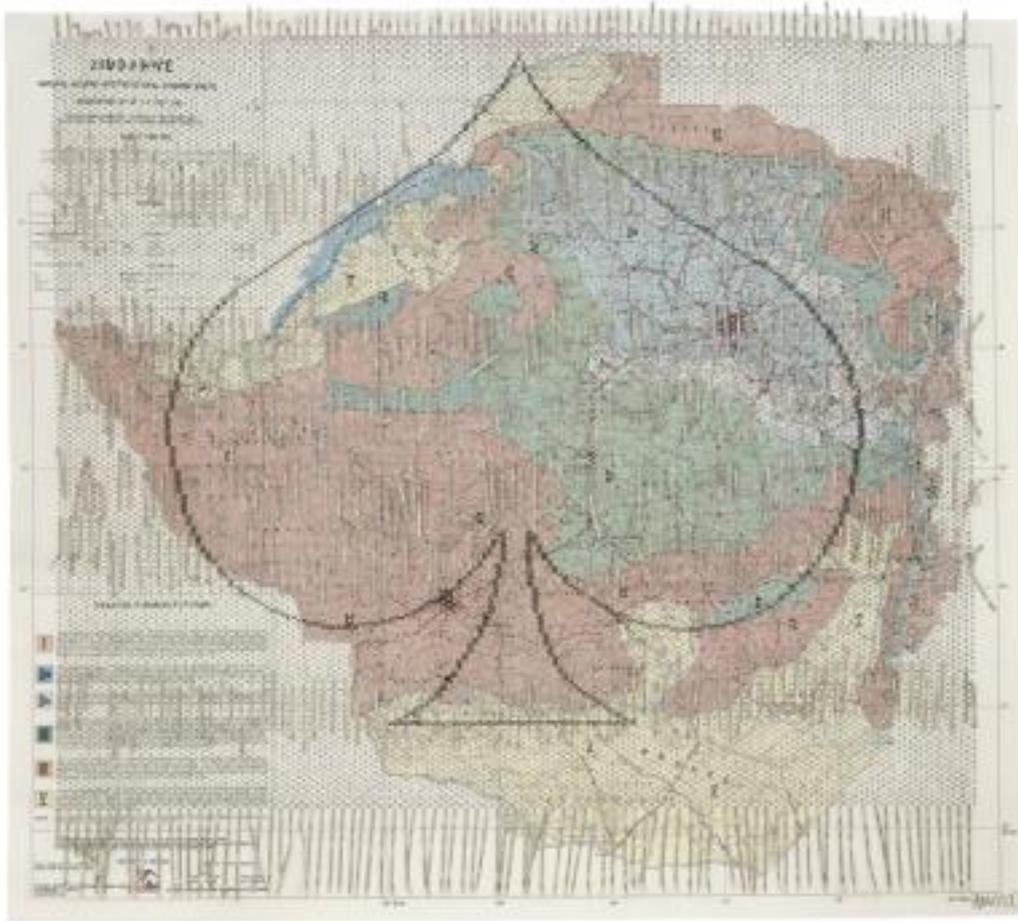
fab·ric (n)

1. cloth of any type made from thread or fibers, whether woven, knitted, or felted
2. the particular texture or quality of a kind of cloth
3. the fundamental structure or makeup of something
4. the material from which something is constructed, especially a building, or the physical structure of something

fab·ri·ca·tion (n)

1. the construction of something, or something that has been constructed or made
2. the invention of something that is not true
3. a fraudulent imitation of a signature or document

These words refer to both the fundamental structure of something, and yet can also mean a false statement. The cross-stitch I sometimes use to construct words and symbols on these maps allude to the classical concept of “X marking the spot”.



Halter, Dan, Space of AIDS, Farming Region map of Zimbabwe woven with a shredded Harare Zimbabwe telephone directory, black thread 82 x 89 cm, 2006.

An example is Space of AIDS, 2007. This is made from a map of Zimbabwe interwoven with a 2006 Harare phone book. The words are a spoonerism of 'ace of spades'. 'Black as the ace of spades' is expression denoting the epitome of blackness. The spade symbol on my map is only an outline, empty of its blackness. This void in the population is the terrible result of both the disease AIDS and the political situation there. Also any aid from the rest of the world has been sorely lacking.

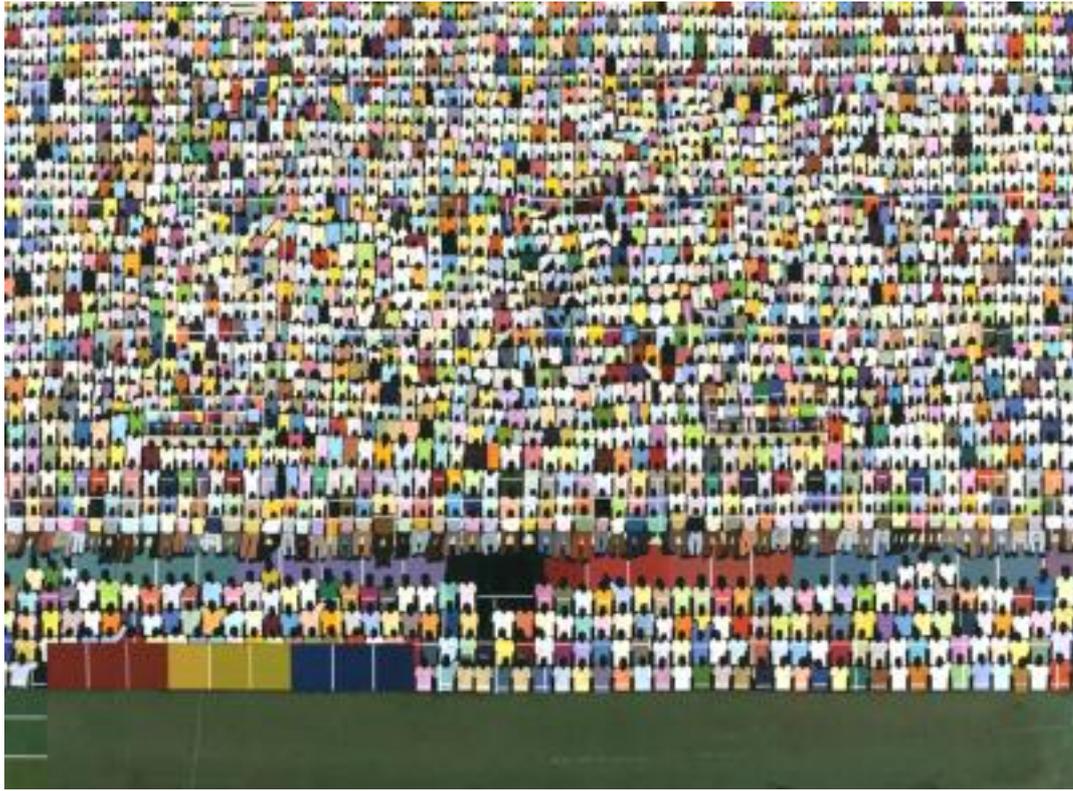


Halter, Dan, My Last Resort, Land Classification map of Zimbabwe woven with Rhodesian database, (<http://www.rhodesia.com/names/names.html>), black thread. 82 x 91 cm, 2006.

Other maps are woven together with books such as George Orwell's *The Animal Farm* or Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Zimbabwean bank notes and an online database of Rhodesians around the world. These woven maps often have an African proverb or well-known symbol stitched into the surface.

B: Do you enjoy working in a particular medium? Or do you prefer to mix it up? Why?

DH: Mix it up definitely. I like to choose materials that resonate for me, and working with different materials creates an interesting challenge in each instance.



Halter, Dan, Study With Colour (Dulux Range), Dulux paint sample cards pasted onto an old blackboard. 88 x 118.5 cm, 2005

B: What's the art scene like in South Africa? Do you find you have valuable interaction with other artists?

DH: The art scene is quite small but vibrant here in South Africa. I do have valuable interactions with other artists.

B: Related question... as an artist, do you find it more interesting to be based from Cape Town or Jo'burg and why?

DH: Recently I have been spent some time in Joburg working on a project for an exhibition there. I find the city fascinating and inspirational and I have considered moving there. Also I believe people in general work harder in Joburg and that I would be more productive there. However I have an established network here in Cape Town and will probably stay here until after my next solo exhibition in June 2010.



Halter, Dan, Black Light. U.V. Black Light neon tubing, cables and transformer. 50 X 100 cm, 2006

B: How about the system of education as it pertains to art? Are there strong art schools? Or are most artists self-taught?

DH: South Africa has quite a high percentage of self-taught artists. Michaelis School of Fine Art (University of Cape Town) is a strong art school in my opinion.

B: You moved to Whatiftheworld gallery not so long ago. It seems to have a very progressive profile. Can you shed some light on your decision to move to them and why?

DH: I was unhappy with my previous gallery and Whatiftheworld appears to be a gallery that a young artist can grow with.



Halter, Dan, Space Invaders V, Plastic mesh bags approx, 65 x 70 x 42 cm, each installation, dimensions vary. This installation was at the Refugee Centre in Cape Town, South Africa. 2008-2009.

B: What's the "Space Invader" work about?

DH: I have been using the Space Invader motif from the popular computer game in conjunction with the cheap Chinese-made plastic-mesh bags that have become synonymous with refugees all over the world. Frequently named after a particular immigrant demographic, these bags are dubbed 'Ghana must go' bags in Nigeria, 'Guyanese Samsonite' in the Caribbean, 'Bangladeshi Bag' in the UK, and recently 'Zimbabwe Bag' in South Africa. These works refer to illegal aliens and the xenophobia that has been a result of an invasion of foreigners, specifically Zimbabweans in South Africa.



B: Do you feel artists have the ability/power to affect change in South Africa?

DH: Yes I hope so.

B: Does the government allocate funds towards art and culture? Are there commissions for public art projects?

DH: There are some government funds for art and culture although these generally require a lot of paperwork and take a very long time to be approved.