
THE BOX

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Dan Halter

Beitbridge Moonwalk, 2010



Image courtesy of the artist

"I find that I'm constantly concerned with the complex relationship between South Africa and Zimbabwe. I crossed the border with my family numerous times and it always had a great impact on me. This context always filters into my work." The simplicity of Dan Halter's *Beitbridge Moonwalk* belies the complex political landscape in which it was made. Poverty, corruption, and violence over the past 25 years have sent thousands of Zimbabweans fleeing the country for the promise of a better life across the border in neighboring South Africa. Although South Africa has welcomed many of these immigrants, illegal immigration has now become as highly politicized and contentious an issue there as it is here in the United States. This video is inspired by a true story that Halter was told by a Zimbabwean immigrant. The man was a part of a group who was crossing the border to South Africa illegally and who walked backwards across the bridge to avoid detection. Their idea was to throw off the border police by leaving footprints facing in the opposite direction. Walking backward also allowed the immigrants to change direction instantly if they were seen.

Halter's unique perspective on the tumultuous postcolonial politics of Zimbabwe is informed by his own complicated background. Born in Zimbabwe to Swiss parents who had immigrated there after World War I, Halter is now based in Cape Town, South Africa. Working in video, photography, sculpture, and installation, he has mined the social and political issues that surround him, often incorporating traditional materials and techniques and found objects with a specific political or cultural significance. In a recent series of work entitled *Space Invader*, for example,

Halter uses "China bags," the cheap, woven bags used by refugees worldwide, to create sculptural versions of the iconic, pixelated alien from the video game *Space Invaders*. The juxtaposition is unsettling but apt as Halter points out that the bags are frequently named after an immigrant, "alien" population ("Ghana Must Go" bags in Nigeria; "Bangladeshi Bag" in the UK; "Guyanese Samsonite" in the Caribbean). In another recent project, *Shifting the Goalposts* (2010), Halter switched the goalposts from soccer fields in South Africa and Zimbabwe, leaving each field with one foreign and one local goalpost. Of these subtle interventions and plays on meaning, Halter has said, "I don't have a particular moral stance, or any overriding beliefs. I am interested in people, in humanity as a whole. I am not religious. I am an observer of the world and the things I make offer a social commentary in a somewhat ambiguous way. Coming from Zimbabwe, I am no stranger to the corrupting effects of power and the irony that so few people or just one person can have a hold over or affect so many."

Born in 1977, Dan Halter completed his BFA at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, Cape Town, South Africa, in 2001. In addition to three solo exhibitions Halter has participated in numerous group shows including *US* at the IZIKO South African National Gallery; *Zeitgenössische Fotokunst aus Südafrika* at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (NBK), *VideoBrasil* in São Paulo, and the 2009 Havana Biennale. He has completed three international residencies, in Zürich, Rio de Janeiro, and Scotland. Recent exhibitions include the 7th Triennial of Contemporary Textile Arts of Tournai, Belgium, and *Dan Halter / Mappa Del Mondo* at the Nassauischer Kunstverein in Wiesbaden Germany.

Jennifer Lange, Curator, Film/Video

Dan Halter

Beitbridge Moonwalk, 2010

(3 mins., video)

Courtesy of What If the World Gallery,
Cape Town, South Africa.

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