

WHATIFTHEWORLD is pleased to present *The Original is Unfaithful to the Translation*, an exhibition of new work by Dan Halter.

Plato was perhaps the first philosopher to argue that art's act of imitation distorts our understanding of the thing-in-itself. As an adjunct to this idea Jean Baudrillard went on to argue more recently that as a consequence the simulacra that are created in our post-modern world have become a proxy for the original and it is through these that we currently encounter the world.

Dan Halter has for some time been interested in these ideas. His work has more often than not investigated the ideas of a 'homeland' and the myths and, in his words, 'fabrications' that there exist in this search for it. However, in *The Original is Unfaithful to the Translation* he begins to stretch this idea a little further and begins to explore just how the fabrication itself becomes the (false) source of understanding.

It is perhaps not surprising that Halter (as Baudrillard did) takes as his point of departure the famous short story by Louis Borges, *On the Exactitude of Science*. This is a story distilled into a paragraph of, as Baudrillard put it, a time when 'the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up exactly covering the territory.' Here Halter takes the text, weaving it into a work that bears some physical resemblance, at least in size, to the map of the story.

This work begins an examination, continued through the exhibition, of the idea of empire and its close cousin colonialism, and how we encounter them. And as in Baudrillard's analysis of the story, Halter is interested in the idea that 'the territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – it is the map that engenders the territory.'

Halter's investigation of this idea has three particular points of focus: the vestiges of the colonial experience, the resulting implications of exile and our (in)ability to interpret this experience through the documents and Internet resources. In works like the UDI, *The Rudd Concession* and *L. Ron Hubbard's Tentative Constitution*, one encounters colonialism, seemingly as it was. But Halter's fine weaving of paper does two things: one, it demands that one moves in for a closer inspection and two it makes clear that these works are not the original – they are merely the proxy for reality, or again merely a fabrication.

At the root of these works is the idea that an inversion has taken place, what Baudrillard referred to as the 'Hypereal'. That is to say we have, through our attempts to interpret the world through text and mimesis, begun to use the interpretations as the reality. However Halter's work affirms that these objects are not what colonialism is and was, they are simply the residues of what it once produced. Instead as Halter's other works like *Google Compression Artifact* and *Plenty Sits Still, Hunger is a Wanderer... intimate*, one has to

quite literally 'zoom out for a broader look' – an implication being that colonialism's presence is not historic.

Although the work *V for Vendetta* works on several levels, the conceit that runs through it bares some similarities to the above. The mask, from the graphic novel of the same name, is supposedly that of the face of Guy Fawkes, one of the first 'terrorists' in history. In his work however Halter appropriates the 'original' mask transforming it into tropes from various African mask-making traditions. Here Halter plays with the idea of how activism has replicated itself and how the ideas of vendetta, in post-colonial Africa and indeed Europe, have replicated themselves.

What is more the work also references the use of the mask as the symbol of the Anonymous activist movement on the Internet. It questions just how activism currently functions, particularly amongst the middle classes. That is to say where activism 'plays at' looking like its original, where words and acts are performed and replicated to mirror those of the past but without the contextual significance. We live in a time where a person can be politically and socially active from the safety of a desktop, where interpretations of the world can be made from the Internet's simulacra without lived experience.

Several of Halter's new works, however, make this feeling a little more morally complicated. In *The Map is Not the Territory* he makes an overt appeal against the above approach. Here a refugee explains the dilemma: there is a reality out there. There is hunger, war, political division and the needs of the marginalized, which the world of maps, passports, borders and the Internet on certain terms act as an anodyne. Of course Halter again plays with this idea. This quote is after all taken from another source, and in this it retains the nameless-facelessness inauthentic world of the Hyperreal – an idea that has some connection to postmodern artistic appropriation.

In a sense the exhibition *The Original is Unfaithful to the Translation* goes back to the roots of Halter's work and the ideas that came from the small group of friends that he graduated with. Inheriting the tropes of 'Resistance Art' that had preceded them, Halter and his friends adapted Resistance Art's look, its political one-liners and its materiality into the 'Contemporary' look of the globalised art world. This exhibition is not only an exemplary example of this post-apartheid art movement and its concerns, but also one of its most interesting critiques.

Dan Halter's artistic practice is informed by his position as a Zimbabwean living in South Africa. Using materials ubiquitous to South Africa and Zimbabwe Halter employs the language of craft and curio as a visual strategy to articulate his concerns within a fine art context. Through this, as well as through photography and video, Halter addresses notions of a dislocated national identity and the politics of post-colonial Zimbabwe within a broader African context.

Dan Halter was born in Zimbabwe in 1977. In addition to five solo exhibitions, Halter has participated in numerous group shows including: US at the South African National Gallery, curated by Simon Njami, Zeitgenössische Fotokunst aus Südafrika at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (NBK), 2009 Havana Biennale and Earth Matters at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington DC. He has completed four international residencies, in Zürich, Rio de Janeiro, Scotland and Turin. 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. Dan Halter lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa.