

SMART Papers *Modernity & Aesthetics of the New Black Atlantic*  
*The State of L3*

*10/07 – 22/08/2010*



## *Modernity & Aesthetics of the New Black Atlantic*

In 1914 Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey (1887-1914) initiated the Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.) as a means of uniting all of Africa and its Diaspora into one grand racial hierarchy. The Black Star Line was the steamship company operated by the U.N.I.A. It was to be the vehicle for promoting worldwide commerce among black communities. In the 1920s and 1930s Garvey became unique in advancing a Pan-African philosophy to inspire a global movement focusing on Africa. 3

Apart from the more political idea of Pan Africanism throughout the State of L3 project, the concept of Afrofuturism also plays a key role. Thinkers and artists of this African diaspora subculture see technology and science-fiction as a means of exploring the black experience and finding new strategies for the future.

Antonio Jose Guzman, initiator of the The State of L3, found a different, more contemporary way to 'obey' his African DNA. With The State of L3 he searched three different continents for artists, collectives and youngsters with an African background. L3 stands for a network between three continents but also refers to the L3 DNA group very common under people with African ancestry. Through this collective platform Guzman tries to bring a 'new', virtual and transcultural state into existence.

Once potential collaborators are identified Guzman works collaboratively on presentations and exhibitions exploring cultural affiliation by mapping and documenting a joint ancestry. Through these projects The State of L3 is looking for a new shared (visual) language resulting in a highly eclectic aesthetics expressed in a variety of media. One of the re-occurring visual elements is the boat – referencing the migratory state of the imaginary of the project.

Guzman set up a website as a platform for exchange between the twenty members of the collective, as well as a series of exhibitions reflecting the process of becoming of The State of L3. 'Modernity & Aesthetics of the New Black Atlantic' is one such visual report. The title of the project is loosely based on Paul Gilroy's well-known book 'The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness' (1992). In this book Gilroy, a sociologist at Goldsmith's College in London, describes black identity in Europe and the New World as an ongoing process of travel and exchange across the Atlantic that tried to understand its position in relation to European modernity.

Often the search for African roots stems from feelings of disregard and oppression but Guzman and his flexible group of collaborators take a different starting point: a 'new' black atlantic. They do not ignore the burdened past – the project started for obvious reasons in Senegal, during 'Dak'Art', with a clear view on the infamous slave island Goree – but they mainly focus on what it is that interconnects them and on presenting themselves to 'the world' in an outmost confident manner. It is an attitude that allows a new turn to the Pan Africanism of illustrious predecessors like Marcus Garvey.

## *Ton van Beers, Antonio Jose Guzman*

*Dogon L3 Voyager for Interstellar Planetary Travel*, 2010

Part of the series: *Atlantic Federation State*

Installation including works by various artists:

Ton van Beers, *Dogon L3 Voyager*, wooden 'cinema' boat, 550 x 350 cm, 2010; Edduin Gonzalez, *Détachement*, 4 drawings, each 200 x 150 cm, 2009; Antonio Jose Guzman, *Dogon Soundscapes*, video projection, 10 min loop, 2010; *Gate of the Family*, colour inkjet print, 88 x 64 cm, 2010

4

Astronomy plays a key role in the mythologies of the West African Dogon tribes, who believe that their world originates from the stellar system of night's brightest star Sirius. Sirius is part of a binary system of two stars orbiting each other. It is said that the Dogon possessed this knowledge long before the second star was discovered by means of western optical devices, knowledge that, as the story goes, has arrived at the Dogon through extraterrestrial beings who function as spiritual guides to the tribes.

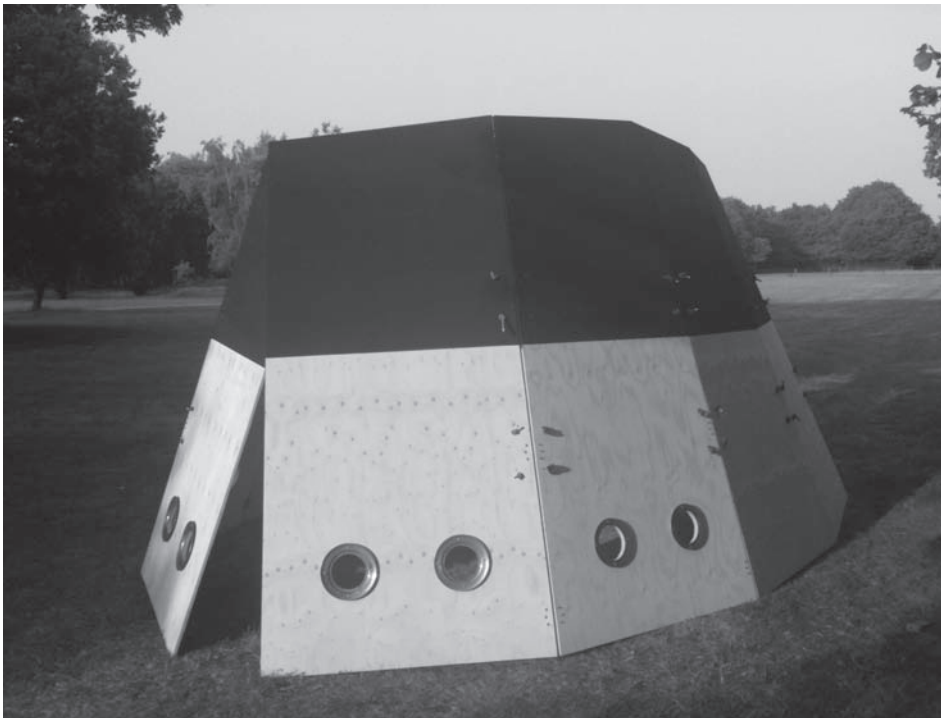
True or not, the Dogon's astronomical description of Sirius as a plural star system reflects the philosophical conception of being and existence that is present within their mythologies, which is taken into consideration by the 'Dogon L3 Voyager for Interstellar Planetary Travel'. The circular course of Sirius' two companions causes the two stars to be only visible when the distance between the two is at its largest. So, what happens when one thinks of being defined as something that is only present and visible at particular moments? And how can one establish an identity pending the circular movement of others?

Within the upside down cinema boat 'L3 Voyager', that looks like it has fallen from the sky, the State of L3 collective presents various films, a flow of fragmented images based on the artists' own 'mythology'. The works investigate the mechanisms of power and violence in an open confrontation between different worlds – worlds that are sometimes highly visible, and sometimes hidden in the light of the other. For instance a video is included with recordings of people visiting the 'Dogon L3 Voyager' during the Keti Koti festival, the annual celebration of the day of abolition of slavery in Surinam and the Dutch West Indies. Thus, different cultural contexts are opposed in the videoworks.

The New Black Atlantic, therefore, just like Sirius' binary system, is in this installation defined as interdependent on surrounding objects in space, only revealing its full identity at specific moments in time. In this way, metaphysical definitions are connected to current political realities as well as to the colonial past.

The Paris based Panamanian artist Edduin Gonzalez contributed with a work titled

'Détachement'. The work features myriad repetitions of the word 'détachement' and the sentence 'vivre avec ma mort', subtly written on semi-transparent Japanese paper. These lines refer to the inconvenient position of a migrant: to live in a strange country, one has to detach him or herself from his or her previous context without completely eliminating ones past, ones deaths. Exile might also be punishment.



*Abdoulaye Armin Kane, Antonio Jose Guzman,  
Felipe Peres Calheiros*

*Transatlantic Sacred Sites of the State, 2010*

Installation with videos by various artists and Pan African Auto Textile  
(by Tess the Taylor)

6

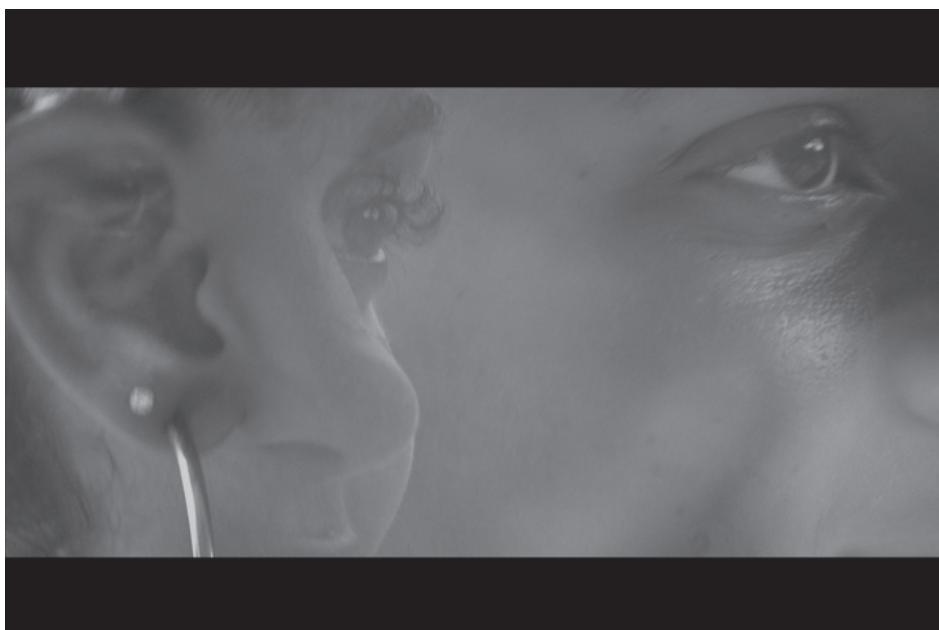
'Transatlantic Sacred Sites of the State' both questions and underlines the common ground of artists with an African background. The work reflects and depicts the struggle to find a shared visual language within a clichéd paradigm, as well as reveals unexpected connections. The shared feeling of a common past is a binding force in the works of L3 artists. This common past comes along with a use of particular images deriving from African iconography. This is maybe most obviously represented by what is the centre of the installation, a car covered with a cloth in Pan African colors. The design of the cloth includes circles that represent the union of the continents and their colonial past, as well as a red circle representing Sirius. Meanwhile, black identity is also highly present in and interdependent with western (urban) culture, expanding the scope of the used visual language and the converging of multiple backgrounds. If black identity, as Paul Gilroy has suggested, is indeed created and redefined through a triangular exchange of symbols and ideas between Africa, Europe and the Americas, then the various videos by L3 artists show a contemporary conception of Gilroy's thesis, merging past and present identities as well as different localities.

The videos represent the different states of the project by the State of L3. Starting with the visual language of a single artist, in the course of three years the State of L3 has grown into a collective of more than twenty collaborators from countries all over the world. Their various contributions interconnect different identities and modes of representation.

Although each video has its own audio track, a soundscape fills the entire space with various cultural and religious rituals. These sounds are supplemented with excerpts from the dialogues present in the videos. For example, a Senegalese poet welcomes someone back to Africa, while at the same time a Kuna woman describes her dedication to her Latin American hometown.



7



*Abdoulaye Armin Kane, Antonio Jose Guzman,  
Felipe Peres Calheiros*

*Transatlantic Sacred Sites of the State, 2010*

Installation with Pan African Auto Textile (by Tess the Taylor) and works by:

Kafui Awoonor, *Fort Elmina*, slide show, 2010; Raul Balai, *Dropping Greys*, video on monitor, 5:00 min loop, 2010; Felipe Peres Calheiros, *Até Onde a Vista Alcança*, video projection, 5:00 min, no sound, 2008; Felipe Peres Calheiros, Janaina Cavalcante & Karine Mirele & Thulio Nascimento, *Atlantico Atrevesado*, 5:00 min loop, 2010, and *Ancestral*, 5:00 min loop, 2010; Neil Fortune, *Mapping*, video on monitor, 5:00 min. loop, 2010; Antonio Jose Guzman, *Under the Earth*, soundscape, 2010; Antonio Jose Guzman, *Maroon Talking in Park*, video projection, 5:00 min, no sound, 2009; Antonio Jose Guzman, *The Day We Surrender to the Air*, video projection, 10:00 min. loop, sound, 2009; Giordana Jansen Perret-Gentil, *My Hair is Frizzy*, video on monitor, 5:00 min loop, 2010; Abdoulaye Armin Kane, *La Porte de Retour*, video on monitor, 5:00 min loop, 2010; Folly Teko, *Post-Africanism*, video on monitor, 5:00 min loop, 2010.

8

Various contributions of State of L3 artists are included in this installation, all dealing with the metaphysics of travel, longing, continuous movement and Diaspora, as for example in the video film 'Até Onde a Vista Alcança/As Far as the Eyes Can See' by Felipe Peres Calheiros, coordinator of The State of L3 in Brazil. This video was shot in the district of Recife, a former Dutch colonial settlement with a large black population. In the video Calheiros takes a couple of members of this poor, discriminated and isolated community out for a trip to the beach – a place that no-one of them has ever had the chance to visit, but that has always been part of their history. The encounter with the unknown sea generates images of sweet surprises, playfulness, but also contemplation: is there anything to be seen at the other side of the ocean?

Another view on the ocean as point of arrival and departure is presented in the video 'Gate of the Family', by Antonio Jose Guzman. The work shows an idyllic location at the isles of Panama where we see a boat appearing and disappearing behind the ruins of a little gate that is positioned in the water, a few meters from the seashore. What happens when the boat moves out of sight is not clear. Time lapses in different directions, and the boat slowly sails without an obvious destination.

The work 'Fort Elmina' by Kafui Awoonor evolves around historical remnants of the





colonial past and was shot in the Ghanese fort of Elmina. This fort, conquered by the Dutch from the Portuguese, served as a shipping point for African slaves. Awoonor's images depict the inner structure of the fort: empty hallways, staircases, dungeons, and other indefinable sites. No human traces can be discovered of the violated past, however, they can be felt. As silent testifiers, the empty spaces call upon the viewer to reflect on the issues of forced migration.

10

In the contribution of Neil Fortune, drawings of maps and routes form a visual report of the travels of black communities. Sometimes these images are real illustrations to the past, but at other moments Fortune uses an abstracted visual language resorting to reworked and recycled images that generate a blurred and uncanny atmosphere. Little elucidation is provided by a newspaper snippet: 'Afrika is hier/Here is Africa' it tells us, however, without any context.



*Ton van Beers, Neil Fortune,  
Antonio Jose Guzman*

*The Mysterious Universe of the Marabouts, 2010*

Part of the Series: *Atlantic Federation States*

Installation with works by:

Ton van Beers & Antonio Jose Guzman, *Interstellar Missioner*, wooden boat sculpture, 70x30x70 cm, 2010 (3D design by Jona de Bokx);

Neil Fortune, *Restriction nr.1*, textile sculpture, 300 x 200 cm, 2010

12

A Marabout is a West-African Islamic religious leader, teacher and traveler. Jules Verne wrote about the Marabouts in 'Five weeks in a Balloon' (1853), in which three scholars and friends travel (i.e. fly) across Africa. A Senegalese Marabout comes into play when the three protagonists discuss the political situation in the area where they want to land. According to them, the Marabout has been given the power to encourage racial and religious conflicts in the area between Islamic peoples and their French occupiers, resulting in an excess of violence that makes lions and hyenas friendly animals compared to the people of African descent.<sup>1</sup>

Besides this striking colonialist perspective, Vernes story provides the reader with an interesting perspective on two types of traveling and their relationship to power: the Marabout wanders through the landscapes of western Africa, searching for his religious kin and convincing them to unite because of a shared past and religion. The balloonists explore the landscape from a different perspective: as outsiders looking down from their flying vehicle, unable to discover connections with the people of the continent, but nevertheless able to overshadow them.

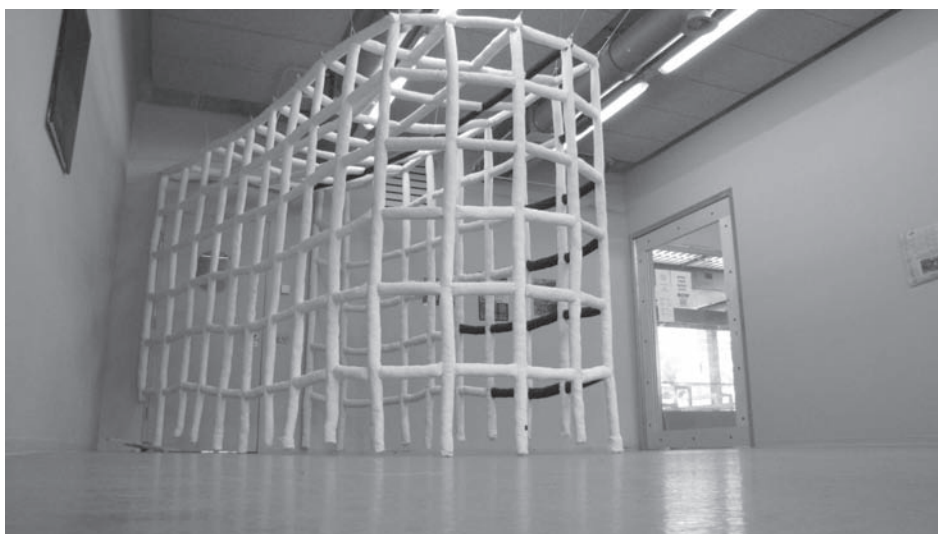
In the installation, both positions are present. One can only look at the 'Interstellar Missioner' from a bottom-up perspective, which makes it impossible to perceive the whole of it. The structure entitled 'Restriction nr. 1', literally restricts the viewer from perceiving the sculpture of the 'Interstellar Missioner' that gravitates above it. The cage-like or fishing net-like edifice emphasizes the viewers' personal position and presuppositions, as is the opposition between free travel in space and the place bound to life on the ground.

---

1 Verne, Jules. *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (eng. Transl. 1869).



13



## Biographies

**Siri Driessen** (b. 1985, Amsterdam) is currently following a master in Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam. She completed a BA in History (2009, UvA) and BA in Fine Arts (2008, ArtEZ Arnhem). Publications include: *Skript Historical Magazine*, Amsterdam, July 2010; *Interactivos? '10*, Madrid, upcoming. Exhibitions include: 14 *Nachtwerk*, SingerSweatShop, Rotterdam 2009; *How Can We Move?*; Paraplufabriek, Nijmegen, 2008; *AanZet!*, Kunstcentrum Diepenheim, 2008.

**Rob Perrée** (b. 1947, the Netherlands) lives and works in Amsterdam and New York. He is a freelance writer and exhibition curator, specialized in contemporary American, African American, African and Surinam art, and artists' books. His books include: *Hans Landsaat. De kracht van de beperking, werk op papier 1995-2005* (Derby Pier Amsterdam 2006); *'80 25 2005. Art from the 80's into the twenty first century* (Galerie Witteveen Amsterdam Stichting Kunstpublikaties '80 - heden 2006); *Richard Hefti. Rust in mijn kop. Tekeningen* (Derby Pier Amsterdam 2005); *Dialogue. About Nan Hoover* (Salon Verlag Cologne 2001); *Postcards from Black America. Hedendaagse Afrikaans Amerikaanse Kunst* (Con Rumore Amsterdam 1998). Perrée is on the editorial board of *Kunstbeeld Magazine*.

**The State of L3** is Antonio Jose Guzman (b. 1971, Panama), Abdulaye Armin Kane (b. 1965, Senegal) and Felipe Peres Calheiros (b. 1981, Brazil). **Antonio Jose Guzman** lives and works in Amsterdam. He is an audiovisual artist and documentary film maker. In 2006 he founded The State of L3. His screenings include: the Netherlands Film Festival, Utrecht; International Documentary Festival Amsterdam; Thessaloniki Film Festival, Greece; *Signes de Nuit* and *Maison de l'Amérique*, Paris; *Africa in the Picture*, Amsterdam. **Felipe Peres Calheiros** lives and works in Recife, Brazil. He is a documentary film maker who works with Maroon communities in Pernambuco. His screenings include: the 10th Festival de Video de Pernambuco and the Camera Mundo festival, Amsterdam. **Abdulaye Armin Kane** lives and works in the area of Medina, Dakar, Senegal. He is an artist who works with video, animations and wood. Recently his work has been shown at the ifa, Berlin.

State of L3 exhibitions include *Dak'Art, Biennale de l'Art Africain Contemporain*, Senegal 2010; *Mémoires de la Négritude*, Galerie 23, Amsterdam, 2010; *Historical Antecedents of the Afro Renaissance*, Galerie SANAA, Utrecht, 2010; *Parallel Doors of Perception* MUHKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2010; *Pan-African Transatlantic Federation*, Galeri Image, Århus, Denmark, 2010.

SMART Papers is published in conjunction with exhibitions organized by SMART Project Space. This edition accompanies the exhibition 'Modernity & Aesthetics of the New Black Atlantic'.

SMART Project Space is generously supported by:  
Mondriaan Foundation  
City of Amsterdam  
Bureau Broedplaatsen  
Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds  
Stichting DOEN  
The Netherlands Fund for Performing Arts  
The Netherlands Film Fund  
VSBfonds  
Youth in Action Programme  
Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture  
Sponsored by Flexa

'Modernity & Aesthetics of the New Black Atlantic' received additional support from The Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture; Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development; Mondriaan Foundation; VSB Fonds.

Texts:

Modernity & Aesthetics of the New Black Atlantic: Rob Perrée  
All other texts: Siri Driessen  
Editor in Chief: Thomas Peutz  
Editing: Hilde de Bruijn, Antonio Jose Guzman, Femke Oortwijn  
English editing: Una Henry  
Design: Sanne Beeren  
Layout & Print: Drukkerij Raddraaier B.V.

Image credits:

p. 5: Ton van Beers, *Dogon L3 Voyager*, wooden 'cinema' boat, installation view, Ketj Koti Festival Amsterdam, 2010.

p. 7: Abdoulaye Armin Kane, Antonio Jose Guzman, Felipe Peres Calheiros, *Transatlantic Sacred Sites of the State*, 2010. Installation view Dak'Art Biennale 2010.

p. 7: Felipe Peres Calheiros, Janaina Cavalcante & Karine Mirele & Thulio Nascimento, *Ancestral*, video still, 2010.

p. 9: Felipe Peres Calheiros, *Até Onde a Vista Alcança*, video still, 2008.

p. 11: Neil Fortune, *Mapping*, video still, 2010.

p. 11: Antonio Jose Guzman, *The Day We Surrender to the Air*, video still, 2009.

p. 13: Ton van Beers & Antonio Jose Guzman, *Interstellar Missioner*, wooden boat sculpture, 2010 (3D design by Jona de Bokx)

p. 13: Neil Fortune, *Restriction nr.1*, installation view, 2010

A special thanks to: Siri Driessen, Rob Perrée

SMART Papers is a publication of SMART Project Space Foundation  
Arie Biemondstraat 105-113  
NL-1054 PD Amsterdam  
Phone: +31 20 427 59 51  
E-mail: info@smartprojectspace.net  
Web: www.smartprojectspace.net

All rights reserved.

Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is strictly prohibited

ISSN 1381-5822

SMART Project Space Amsterdam

