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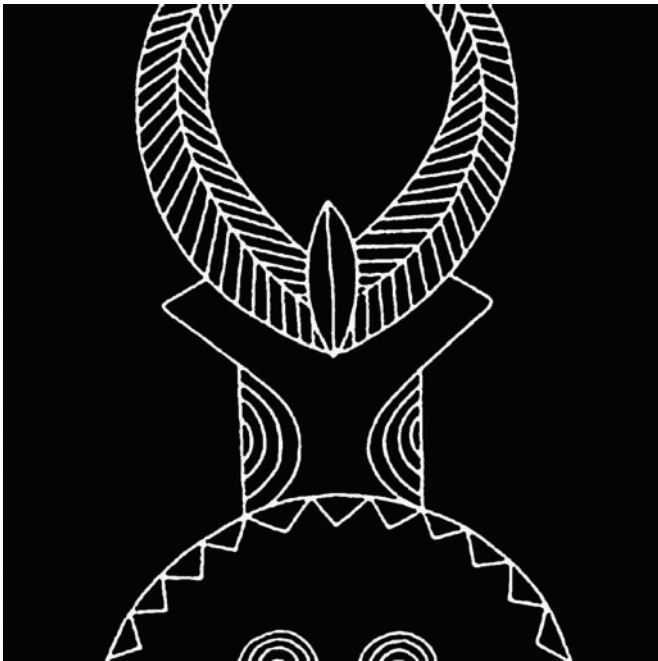
# *Ancestral Blues*

The Return to  
The State of L3

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# *Manifesto*

Whilst faithfully dividing and uniting paraspaces, through our contemporary every day narratives, our coded lives and life, our visual languages, creolized and hybridized through prisms of our own ancestral blues. Longing to make real an axiomatic placement of all our combined identities and experiences, seen and unseen, real and imagined.

Sufficient for commerce and a proper ruling on humanity. Return to The State of L3 is reconstructing a universe, creating new Trans-Oceanic experiences. The inner dialectics of diaspora identification that allows new energies to float, to coexist, bounded on the inner self to the outer world. To transform this world we live in, into the future state we all crave, reminding us of lands our antennae do not reach – yet.

*The State of L3*

*The State of L3* is an artistic symbiosis, a transformative gesture, a transatlantic journal, and an exchange of collective memories. Their artworks and aesthetics can provide resources with which to re-imagine the future through art. *The State of L3* aims to form a space – a state without boundaries – that exists regardless of its geographical whereabouts. This space may be constantly re-shaped and functions as a position from which art is created and intellectual measures are taken. Therefore, the artists utilize their backgrounds as a source of inspiration and knowledge, to form new images for universal communication.

Migration, or the condition of being a subject beyond borders, has always represented one of the most productive resources of aesthetic practices through the exchange of knowledge and culture; contributing to the constant enrichment and change of societies. Art, too, has inevitably been affected by decades of migration and globalization. In a world where globalization means rapid change, there is, perhaps now more than ever before, a need for universally human, timeless and placeless tales that can resonate with individuals regardless of age, gender, culture, religion and politics. The L3 in the title is twofold. It refers to both the common L3-DNA group of people with African ancestry and the connection between the three continents – Europe, Africa and Latin America – that constitute the artists' roots and cultural identities. In this exhibition, the artists do not necessarily share a common (DNA-) background, but more so look towards a common future.

Despite the diverging backgrounds of its artists, *The State of L3* collectively seeks a new shared language, a visual vocabulary that is expressed in a highly varying aesthetic drawing on a variety of media. At the same time, the artists individually develop their own ambitions within the project. In this way, *The State of L3* achieves a special portrait of an artistic symbiosis between different cultures with a shared commonality.

# *The State of L3 Contemporary Arts & Film Collective*

The art centres on the identity-seeking individual. The collective contributes to the ongoing debate on national and cultural identities which, considering the current global migration crisis, is an especially pressing topic. The collective rejects notions of fixed, or essential, identities and considers these instead as complex and constantly in the process of being (re)defined. As a radical measure, *The State of L3* looks to an array of cultural histories to collect modes of artistic expression that can come to reflect their own multifaceted cultural heritage. Specifically, *The State of L3* examines the link between heritage, immigration, transformation and visual culture.

*The State of L3* was established in 2006 by the Dutch-Panamanian filmmaker and artist Antonio Jose Guzman in collaboration with OLAA (Organisatie Latijns Amerika Activiteiten). With chapters in Amsterdam, Dakar and Recife, the geographical locations of the art collective embodies the historic triangular trading routes of former Dutch colonies, the triangle of transatlantic trade of the colonial rulers, and dispersion of African Diaspora. The State of L3 collective consists of three creative directors: Antonio Jose Guzman (Amsterdam), Abdulaye Armin kane (Dakar) and Felipe Peres Calheiros (Recife).

# Curatorial Statement

*Ancestral Blues. The Return to the State of L3* is an exhibition of the Amsterdam-based chapter of the art collective *The State of L3* that has been developed in collaboration with curator Vincent van Velsen. The exhibition explores the encounters and exchanges between different cultures. All artists in the collective are bound by an interest in the transformative power of the arts through intellectual and artistic cultural exchange and especially in how historical references and connections shape identities. The subject matter in the exhibition revolves around the experiences, senses and narratives gathered from the experiences of Amsterdam, which is where all the artists are based.

*Ancestral Blues*, the title of the exhibition, is based on the ancestral lines that have brought the different members of the collective to their current location. The concepts of roots and culture are mediated through histories, which are made explicit in many of the presented works. The blues in the title of the exhibition carries many connotations that reflect *The State of L3*, including the transformations brought about by transatlantic forced and voluntary migration. For example, Blues as a musical genre, is a fusion of traditional African and European folk music that, together with many other influences, allowed groups and individuals moments of freedom and self-expression. The trance-like rhythms of the Blues are defined by a highly melancholic ambiance that often deals with the troubles experienced by the African American people.

Like the Blues, the colour blue has been related to moments of subversion in both mythology and religion. For example, the 'blue hour', or twilight zone, is a period of about forty minutes, that occurs twice a day, in which the sun-

light is broken up to become a blue haze. These two points in time are moments in which dominant power structures can be challenged and transformed. *The State of L3*, like the blues, centres on cultural exchange. Both the art-collective and the exhibition are concerned with connecting cultures and experiences in an urban environment. These influences now come together in the exhibition space of Framer Framed in Amsterdam.

The idea of so-called 'para-spaces', the concept of simultaneous dimensions that are used by afro-futuristic writers, is embodied by the consecutive positioning of the art works: one first arrives at the exhibition by encountering *La Puerta* – the door – through which one literally enters the exhibition, but also metaphorically the artwork's conceptual space. Once in, one will experience several close encounters: such as the installations of *RaQuel van Haver*, *Femi Dawkins*, *Antonio Jose Guzman* and *Raul Balai*.

*Abre la puerta!* The introductory work to the exhibition, meticulously documents cultural interaction in an urban landscape. In the music video by *Femi Dawkins aka Jimmy Rage*, the animated figures metaphorically depict different characters that together enter the port towards the inner world of the main protagonist. Interacting cultures are personified in this piece. After their entry, they can be found again in his inner being where they dance together within a cityscape and float around in infinite space, groping the possibility of a Sun Ra reference to an existence in far away eternity.

The idea of exchange in the inner city is also a main theme in the practice of *RaQuel ten Haver*. The works, this time, are not shown as autonomous pieces in a white cube space. Instead, Ten Haver forces the visitor to directly confront the works from centre stage. The somewhat intimidating grand paintings with images of masked people relate in many ways to the demands of society, which forces one to fit in, often demanding us to wear a 'social mask'. The chosen masks also relate to the ancestral background of the people concerned. The paintings are all based on people who reside in the South-Eastern parts of Amsterdam. This uncompromising confrontation in *Gathering of them MaSsmen* is in many ways an overwhelming experience.

*Abstract of the Evidence*, by Femi Dawkins, interacts with historical facts. The artwork's arrangement recalls the Brookes print, a famous 18th-century drawing of a slave ship. Here, Dawkins has replaced the abstract figures present in the Brooke's version, with actual people and bodies; with faces which symbolizes the fact that slaves also had countenance, characters and souls. In this way, the former abstract notion of these human beings is replaced with actual people. The blueprint directly interacts with the waters outside the exhibition space as these are the very waters from which the VOC and WIC departed for their endeavours around the world. The other part of the work consists of an 'African' sculpture, without head or limbs. When one takes a closer look at this sculpture, a mirror provides an encounter with one's own face. The spears above then come into play, as through the mirror their position is inverted and thereby inserted into one's front and back. This double speering relates to the concept of double-consciousness in which one is constantly apparent of the judgement of others. At the same time, the spears could also be read as pencils, which then become metaphor for the writing that infused history with the marginalisation of certain groups in society. On a daily basis, history haunts them; constantly reminding them of the past, these writings also play a part in their present reality.

Sharp objects also return as reflections of identity where tattoos are concerned. Today tattoos have become quite common among the general public, yet tattoos used to mark societal outsiders and outcasts. This manner of scarification also relates to certain customs that are perceived as 'African' traditions. Despite all these diverging connotations, tattoos are practiced in many areas around the world and thereby can also be seen as mutual heritage.

*Fleur Ouwerkerk* deals with the subject and the way decorative elements can change perceptions. This means that, in her work, she interacts and plays with the possibility of acquiring new identities by using different forms of dress or decorative objects. These elements are either applied directly on the skin (tattoos), are worn (clothing), or are applied on printed photographs (drawing). The diverging references of these tattoos reflect the layered connotations of surface signifiers that reflect cultural backgrounds. In general, the works show the malleable





and transformative possibility of appearance by means of dress and drawing.

Transformation is also a main aspect in the works of **Amanda Koelman**. Her interest revolves around ways of making sense of the world in addition to spiritual meaning. The presented works bear a range of spiritual elements that are assimilated in a mismatch of visual references. The transition in life and death as well as resurrection is seen in the triptych **ANASYRMA** on display, which seems to have stepped out of its frame. The chosen medium connotes religious art and at the same time sculptural objects. In the western world today, new age spiritualism forms a way of buying into different spiritual heritages. Koelman's work could be seen as a critical representation of such practices. However, the artist conveys the matters in an honest and genuine manner; not in order to acquire commodities, or save to her soul, but to evoke spiritual meaning.

Such commoditised and industrialised practices can also be found back in the work of **Antonio Jose Guzman**. In his installation **Damascus: The End of Fortress Europe** he shows buckets that carry visual references to 'Africa' but have been designed and manufactured elsewhere. Global marketing mechanisms transform buckets into commodities, used and appropriated as cultural capital. Guzman also traces this idea of distant relatives in the possibility of choosing one's identity. For example, Guzman deals with the black diaspora, instead of his other, and equally present, personal ancestral lines of the European Jews or Panamanian natives. The still existing presence of Congolese cultural heritage and music in Panama is one of the main starting points for his research – and this presentation. The concept of connections can be literally found back in the threads that are connected with the nails and pictures of scarification (among other subjects). Both these elements are commonly related to the African fetish objects and in their own realm function as protective bodies. Guzman materialises connections through threads and uses religious, heathen and spiritual elements alike

In his installation **Five Bats** (五福) **Raul Balai** explores stereotypes concerning Chinese culture. In this culture protection comes from Fu, Lu and Shou. These 'three stars'

(Sanxing) are the personified ideas of Prosperity, Status and Longevity. Related, the Five Bats themselves – Luck, Longevity, Wealth, Health and Peace, Good Morals and Good Death – form the five pillars of a prosperous life. Following his personal ancestral blood-lines, Balai discovered that he was partially of Chinese descent. This fact made him reflect on an external entity that is subject to stereotypes on a more than regular basis. The installation displays the different images that are apparent in the Western concept of China: mathematicians, nerds, milk powder for babies, Ai Wei Wei and alleged consumption of cats. Insiders and outsiders of a culture perceive these images different, which was translated in the significant difference between the inside and outside of the installation. Here, Balai challenges conventional perceptions by visualising them; as he comments on the way this expresses how the inner and outer perception of a culture, country and people diverges.

The seemingly conflicting conceptual frameworks of cultures are important to *The State of L3*; and art in general. Nonetheless, in this exhibition, various worlds collide and coalesce. By tracing ancestry lines, relating to histories, constituting cultural exchange, addressing transformations, and looking at current realities, the exhibition *Ancestral Blues. The Return to the State of L3* aims to pave the way for a shared understanding and a common future.

*Vincent van Velsen*



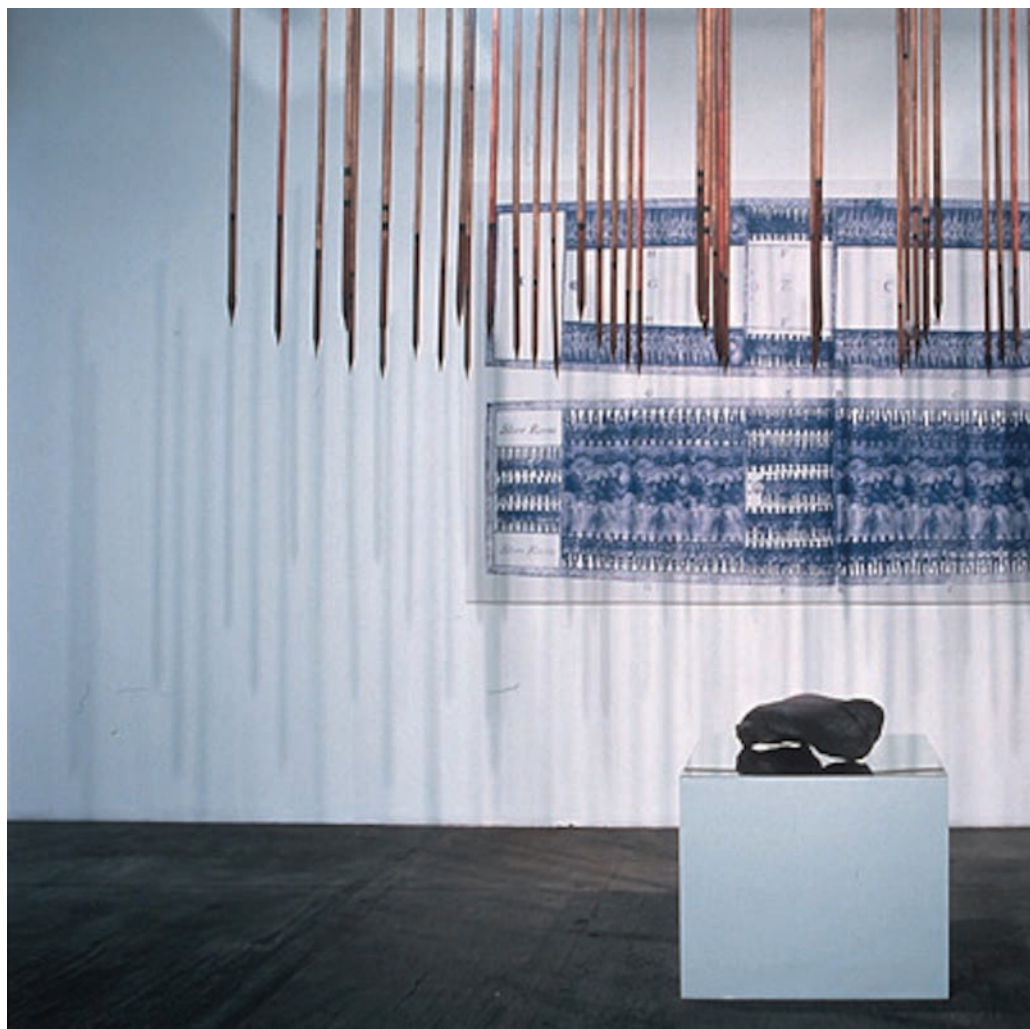


# *RaQuel van Haver*

RaQuel van Haver's paintings offer snapshots of daily life in her local neighbourhood in the South-East of Amsterdam. Her interest lies in ethnicity and identity, inspired by the presence of African, Western, Caribbean and Latin American cultures within her direct neighbourhood. The paintings are considered raw and masculine, or dark and ominous. Negotiations between the 'self' and 'other' appear as a recurring theme. Her work also deals with the pressures resulting from societal demands and unchallenged perceptions. Surface and subject are merged into heavily textured compositions using thick layers of oil paint on burlap, while combining charcoal, clay, gypsum, newspaper and ash. The narratives conveyed are recognisable, however at the same time succeed in creating a new inviting experience of unexpected encounters.

RaQuel van Haver (Bogotá, Colombia) lives and works in Amsterdam. In 2012 she graduated from the HKU, Fine Arts department, Utrecht. In 2012 and 2013 she was nominated for the Dutch Royal Award for Painting. She contributed to group exhibitions at CBK Amsterdam (2015), Sanquin Amsterdam (2015), Fiesta del Fuego, Santiago de Cuba, Cuba (2014) and Kers Gallery (2014); and had solo presentations at Jackbell Gallery, London, UK (2015), Sanquin, Amsterdam (2014) and Galerie 23, Amsterdam (2014).

[raquelvanhaver.withtank.com](http://raquelvanhaver.withtank.com)  
[www.jackbellgallery.com](http://www.jackbellgallery.com)



*Femi  
Dawkins*



Femi Dawkins aka Jimmy Rage is a multidisciplinary artist, whose work focuses on fractured narratives and autobiographical tales that cross borders, as well as on identity and the ways in which it is constituted. His migration from the Caribbean to the United States, and then to

Europe has led him to construct (several) new identities and to take on different personas in the process of finding meaning and understanding in these alterations. Within his contemporary art practice he employs both the audio- and visual arts to relate to hybrid culture and language. Dawkins draws inspiration from various places, which expose him to a variety of migrational diaspora and inner city interactions. Here, he constantly finds new ways to articulate, narrate and share his experiences.

Femi Dawkins (St. Catherine, Jamaica) has lived in the Caribbean, New York, San Francisco, London and Los Angeles. He now lives and works in Amsterdam. His work has appeared in Code, Elle, Africa Online, BLEND and The New York Times. He exhibited with Anthropologists in Art at WM Gallery, Amsterdam (2014 and 2011), Barnsdale Municipal Gallery, Los Angeles, USA (2009), Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam (2009), Huize Frankendael, Amsterdam (2009) and CC Pounder Gallery, Los Angeles, USA (2007). In 2012-2013 Dawkins wrote and starred in The Afro Galactic Dream Factory, an 'Afrotechno vocal symphony' that was staged in Cape Town, South Africa. Furthermore, he presented his practice at theaters, in public spaces, fashion shows and concerts halls. His EP, titled Ancestral Blues, featuring Avi Kishna and Hans Timmermans, will be coming out later this year.

# Fleur Ouwerkerk

Fleur Ouwerkerk explores the relationships between identity and appearance in her work. Her art is mainly mixed media-based and centers on human behaviour, ethnicity and eccentricity. The work ranges from photography and drawings to sculpture. The raw input is exposed to different forms of interventions and transitions that provide a new appearance for the depicted subject and, in the process, new forms of perceived existence. Hereby Ouwerkerk investigates the possibility of altering one's identity merely by changing one's appearance; and the possibility of stepping into another role as a different person. In it, she feels allied to a chameleon because of its abilities of transformation. The visual outcome of the manually induced transformations can be observed in her two-dimensional works that for the greatest part consist of (self-)portraits. Ouwerkerk is guided by lines in the existing imagery that thereby provide a fairly invisible, though pre-set framework as a starting point. The work hereby echoes facial and social architecture, analyses constructions and produces new perceptions. Identity here becomes forgeable, fluid and malleable.

Fleur Ouwerkerk (Nieuwegein, The Netherlands, 1986) currently lives and works in Amsterdam. She graduated from the HKU, Utrecht in 2011. Since then she exhibited at PGGM, Zeist (2015), Galerie Joghem, Sanquin Amsterdam (2012 and 2015), Galerie Pouloueff, Naarden (2014), Centraal Museum, Utrecht (2012), FOAMlab (2012), Galleri Image, Aarhus, Denmark (2011), Walls Gallery, Amsterdam (2011), and Roodkapje, Rotterdam (2011).

[www.fleuouwerkerk.com](http://www.fleuouwerkerk.com)







# Amanda Koelman

Amanda Koelman's work emanates from the belief that all humans strive to make sense of the universe around them. As throughout history and geography, people have created fairy tales, fables, fantastic stories, sagas, myths, and religions in order to conceive some sort of understanding of their surroundings. Koelman combines knowledge, ideas and elements from various times and different places in order to provide carnivalesque connections between stories, substances and the collective attribution of meaning. The used imagery and metaphors stem from different parts of the world and are combined by Koelman in a free and loose aesthetic that is nevertheless dense and layered. The work addresses a space beyond the material and rational world; where it enters the realm of hybrid myths and complex magic. The sensual, spontaneous, and emotional aspects of human nature are connected with the notions of birth and death; and everything in between.

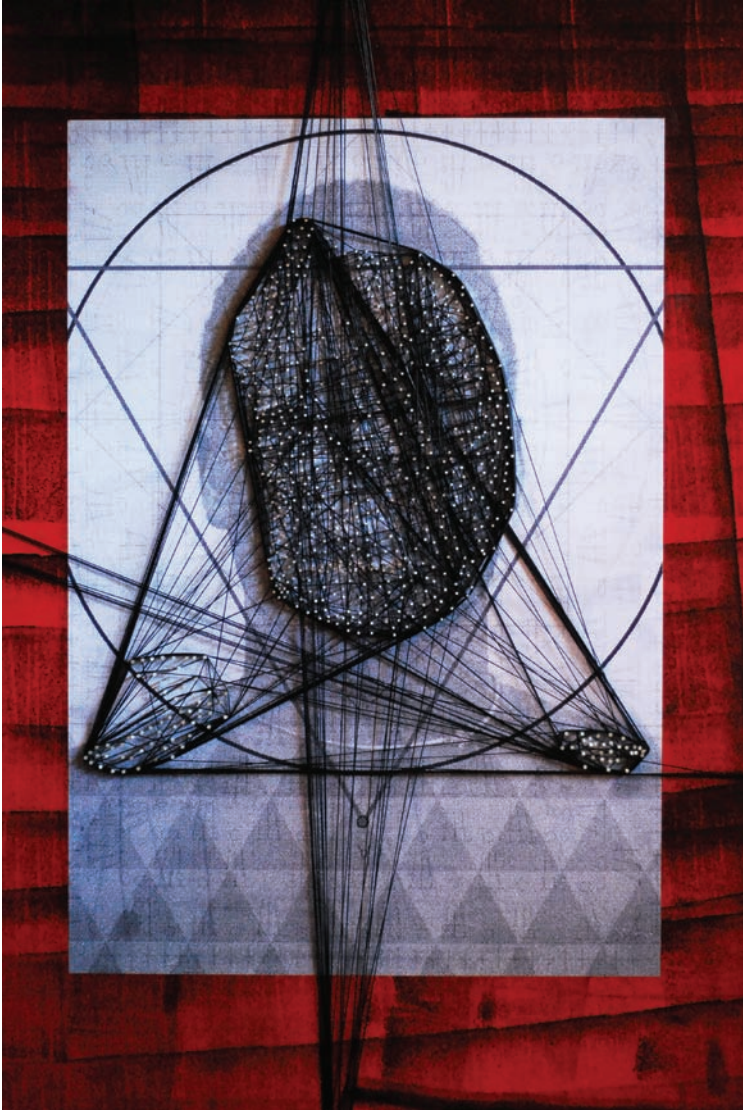
Amanda Koelman (Austerlitz, The Netherlands, 1985) currently lives and works between Amsterdam and Bergen. She graduated from CABK Zwolle and the Dutch Art Institute Arnhem. Her works have been presented at Galeria Bielska BWA, Poland (2013), Kaus Australis, Rotterdam (2011), M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium (2010), Olchon, Siberia, Russia (2010), Crete, Greece (2009) and Imago Dei Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal (2007). In 2010 Koelman made the publication 'Ach Ach en Owee' in collaboration with Spinvis.

[www.amandakoelman.nl](http://www.amandakoelman.nl)

# Antonio Jose Guzman

Antonio Jose Guzman is known for his installations, videos, photography and imagery inspired by scientific research, African traditions, utopias and cultural analysis. His projects allow us to cross different time zones, unexplored worlds and realms; bringing us into what Guzman calls 'time travel perceptions'. The aim of his work is to create narratives that relate to natural processes, bygone eras and an understanding of different diaspora throughout history. His projects explore the mechanisms of power, exchange and violence that are inherent to the ever-emerging interactions between different cultures. In his work he addresses the dichotomous relationships that exists within architecture, urbanism and sociocultural identity. In our globalized urban environments, people inhabit vernacular landscapes, which are subject to the effects of sociological structures, inequality and hierarchies within concepts such as class, ethnicity, religion, citizenship and urban territories. Guzman's current photo sculptures (Project Dukkha), which relate to the African Nkisi and data visualization, provide a possible grip on, and interpretations of, the past, and present us with possibilities for the future.

Antonio Jose Guzman (Panama City, Panama, 1971) lives and works between Amsterdam, Panama City and Dakar. His work has been shown at Havana Biennial, Cuba (2015), Omi International Arts Center, New York, USA (2014), GUP Gallery, Amsterdam (2013), Panama Biennial, Panama (2013), Rush Art Galleries, New York City, USA (2012), Galleri Image, Aarhus, Denmark (2011), Biennale Dak'Art, Senegal (2010), Smart Project Space, Amsterdam (2010), and M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium (2010). Guzman is the founder and creative coordinator of The State of L3 Contemporary Arts & Film Collective.



# Raul Balai

Raul Balai (aka El Bastardo) focuses on themes such as cultural clashes, hybridity, exchanges and transformations. He draws inspiration from popular culture and politics, as well as music and art. The visual vocabulary and conceptual framework that Balai applies are formed through the interplay of painting, graffiti, graphic design, illustration and photography. His upbringing in Amsterdam during the eighties and nineties meant that he was influenced heavily by the Hip Hop and House scene of the time. Before going to art academy (at the HKU, Utrecht) he carried out all sorts of odd jobs while painting and drawing at home; and doing graffiti on the streets. This background in graffiti and his education in graphic design can still be identified in Balai's current practice. Additionally, his multi-ethnic heritage is translated into challenging conventional stereotypes. He pokes fun at the burden of history, plays with prejudices and defies bigotry, all with a nod and a wink.

Raul Balai (Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1980) lives and works in Amsterdam. In recent years he has exhibited at the De Schouwburg, Rotterdam (2013), The Amsterdam Museum (2013) and Carrefour des Arts, Larache, Morocco (2013), Biennale Dak'Art, Senegal (2010), M HKA Antwerp (2010), Gallery 23, Amsterdam (2010), Smart Project Space, Amsterdam (2010). Balai is co-owner of the creative agency Het IJzeren Gordijn (The Iron Curtain).

[www.raulbalai.com](http://www.raulbalai.com)



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