



Temporary exhibition
Floor -1

Pieter Hugo
Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea
05/07 — 07/10/2018

An exhibition of the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg

PIETER HUGO
BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

After the first comprehensive presentation consisting of fifteen series, produced between 2003 and 2016, at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, the show was presented at Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, in Dortmund, and has now found its third venue at Museu Coleção Berardo, in Lisbon.

What divides us and what unites us? How do people live with the shadows of cultural repression or political dominance? The South African photographer Pieter Hugo (b. 1976, Johannesburg) explores these questions in his portraits, still-lives, and landscapes.

Raised in post-colonial South Africa, where he witnessed the official end of apartheid in 1994, Hugo has a keen sense for social dissonances. He perceptively makes his way through all social classes with his camera, and not only in his native country but also in places like Rwanda, Nigeria, Ghana, the United States and China. His photographs record the visible and hidden traces and scars of lived biographies and experienced national history. He is particularly interested in societal subcultures, the gulf between the ideal and reality. His pictures feature the homeless; albinos; AIDS sufferers; men who tame hyenas, snakes, and monkeys; people who gather electrical scrap metal in apocalyptic scenarios; costumed Nollywood actors in striking poses, in addition to his own family and friends.

His photographs are non-hierarchical; everyone is treated with the same amount of respect. More artist than anthropologist or documentarian, Hugo captures the "moment of voluntary vulnerability" (Pieter Hugo) with a pronouncedly detached, but at the same time also empathetic, concise visual language, creating in this way true to life portraits of powerful directness. In many cases, this humanity stands in sharp contrast to the hardships of the social reality engulfing the subjects of his pictures. Entirely in this sense, Pieter Hugo's photographic still-lives and landscapes occasionally seem like social commentaries or metaphors, complementing his sociocultural portraits.

1994
Rwanda & South Africa
2014–2016

1994 was a significant year for me. I finished school and left home. Nelson Mandela was elected president in South Africa's first democratic election, after decades of apartheid.

It was also the year of the Rwandan genocide, an event which shook me. Ten years later I was to photograph its aftermath extensively, and puzzle over its legacy.

When I returned to Rwanda on assignment in 2014, my own children were one and four years old. They had changed my way of looking at things. Whereas on previous visits to Rwanda I'd barely seen any children, this time I noticed them everywhere.

The Rwandan children raised the same questions in me as my own children. Do they carry the same baggage as their parents? Will they be as burdened by history? I find their engagement with the world to be refreshing as it seems free of Rwanda & South Africa the past. At the same time, I'm aware of the impressionable nature of their minds.

Pieter Hugo, 2016



Portrait #1
Rwanda, 2014

Permanent Error
Ghana
2009–2010

This essay was photographed on a densely populated triangle of land in the Ghanaian capital of Accra. Bounded by the Abossey Okai Road and Odaw River, a polluted waterway that flows into the Korle Lagoon, Agbogbloshie is the second largest e-waste processing area in West Africa. It abuts Old Fadama, an impoverished settlement that offers northern migrants to the city the cheapest rents and a convenient base close to the central markets,

a major employer. Home to an estimated 80,000 inhabitants, this mixed-used area on a former wetland consists not only of formal and informal residences for disenfranchised migrants to the city but a commercial bus depot and a vast and differentiated marketplace that includes specialized e-waste markets. An irregular activity until a few years ago, large volumes of end-of-life computers and televisions are now handled by Ghana's port daily. Shipped under pretext of being reusable electronic goods, items that are not saleable end up at Agbogbloshie, nicknamed by locals as "Sodom and Gomorrah".

It is here that circuits, transistors, capacitors and semiconductors are reduced to their base metals. There is, one has to admit, something beautifully alchemical about what's happening there: these devices that are the pinnacle of cultural achievement get transformed back into their base elements.

Of course, this is the sympathetic reading of an artist. The political ecologist Paul Robbins has described the dump as "a bizarre engine that maintains a self-replicating worldwide system of over-production". I think it is fair to say that Agbogbloshie is a dark and dirty monument to the digital age, to our faith in technology and its built-in obsolescence. This idea of surplus and waste, which is key to our digital experience, is not one that many people seem comfortable addressing. Being in an environment like this, where geopolitical imbalances are being exploited to effectively dump waste on poor countries, it is hard not to take a political position. And so I have let my photographs be used by advocacy groups. I first encountered the dump in a photograph published by *National Geographic*. This is a recurrent theme in my photography, how photographs prompt me to make my own photographs. The work was produced during two trips of two weeks each. I tend to photograph over two-week stretches. I find this is a period in which I can keep my eye fresh. After that you become too accustomed to a place. It was something I realized in Rwanda, how quickly one becomes desensitized and acclimatized to completely unacceptable situations, how the mind is capable of this.

Pieter Hugo, 2016



David Akore
Agbogbloshie Market, Accra, Ghana, 2010

Messina/Musina **South Africa** **2006**

Musina is South Africa's northernmost town. Founded by white settlers as a copper-mining town in 1904, it is located near the Limpopo River on the border of Zimbabwe. The town was originally known as Messina, a colonial misspelling of the name of the Musina people who settled in the region centuries ago following their discovery of copper deposits. In 2002, the town's name was changed to Musina, part of an ongoing and sometimes acrimonious process of name changes taking place across South Africa. I find this process of redress interesting: if you see history rewritten twice, as has happened in Musina, you become distrustful of the competing narratives, both the old and the new.

I first visited Musina with a journalist who was writing about people fleeing the dire situation in Zimbabwe and entering South Africa illegally. He knew of gangs who were smuggling people across the Limpopo River. But he forgot his passport, so we ended up staying in Musina. It allowed me to do some basic investigative research. Musina is a market town on a national highway that connects South Africa to Zimbabwe, and beyond that Zambia. It is home to a large military base and nearby diamond mine, and there is also a robust hunting industry that occurs on the surrounding game farms. The town, which has prospered off the back of Zimbabwe's post-2000 economic collapse, is prone to boom-and-bust cycles. Its shifting population—a mix of truck drivers, miners, soldiers, prostitutes, cigarette smugglers, farm labourers, hunters,

social welfare workers, AIDS caregivers, day traders from Zimbabwe, and residents—reflects this.

After returning to Cape Town, Musina stuck in my mind. Perhaps it was its remoteness. I had previously worked in the region, but never as far north as Musina. If you draw a line from Cape Town, where I live, Musina is as far as you can go and still be in South Africa. I think that a lot of my work interrogates the idea of the outsider and the margins. I am not alone in this preoccupation. I am aware that the remote border town is a popular trope in South African arts and letters. It is a place where social issues that persist throughout the country are starkly miniaturized and, possibly, easier to depict.

Shortly after visiting Musina I was given the Standard Bank Young Artist Award, which includes a small grant to produce a new body of work. I used the money to return to Musina, where I spent several months photographing in and around the town. It wasn't always easy to access the various users of this embattled frontier town. Unlike on other projects, I have retained no contacts from my time in Musina. Many of the people I photographed have moved. This, I suppose, is true to the town's essential character.

My essay comprises family portraits, landscapes and still-lives. This was largely determined by the equipment I was using at the time: a tripod-mounted, large-format camera. Previously, I had worked with a range of cameras in different formats. Working with a large-format camera unavoidably slows things down. You can't rush or photograph spontaneously. My process, though, was largely intuitive. I developed a vocabulary, a way of seeing if you will, that played an important role in the development of another South African project, *Kin*, which started around the same time as *Messina/Musina*.

Pieter Hugo, 2016



Pieter and Maryna Vermeulen with Timana Phosiwa
2006

Looking Aside South Africa 2003–2006

In the early 2000s, while living in Italy, I started photographing people with albinism in various parts of the world. I was travelling as an assignment photographer and used the opportunity to explore my own interests while meeting professional obligations. My earliest portraits featured people naturalistically posed in ambient environments. As the project developed, I opted to narrow the focus to South Africa, as well as limit myself to producing only head-and-shoulders portraits taken with the aid of studio lights against a neutral backdrop. A lot of the people I photographed had poor eyesight—it is one of the side effects of albinism—and worked in institutions for the visually impaired. This led me to extend the scope of my project to include people who were blind or partially sighted. The same feelings of discomfort I encountered photographing people with albinism arose when I photographed people with poor or no eyesight. The discomfort at encountering an unreciprocated gaze is, I think, self-imposed. It is not something the subjects feel.

While working on this body of work, I visited my grandmother in a frail-care centre. I recognized the same sense of discomfort around the elderly. My grandmother

appears in this portrait series, as do I. It was the first of many self-portraits I have taken for display. I am both the maker and a kind of marginal protagonist in my series about marginalized people.

In this early body of work, I explicitly took a confrontational stance, an attitude that is rehearsed in a lot of my subsequent work. It is an unflinching series. I want the subjects to match the intensity of my own gaze. I have often thought about the strict frame I settled on for this portrait series. I think it was informed by two trajectories of photography that emerged from apartheid South Africa. Photojournalism set out to inform the world about conditions in the country. Stylistically, it was indebted to the humanist traditions of twentieth-century American photography. I have never been comfortable with its lyrical vocabulary. At the same time, photography was being used by the state as a tool of classification and separation. All South Africans were required to carry a photo ID. My series turns this loaded compositional style on its head to document people marginalized by the glib visual propaganda of the "new", liberated South Africa. Pieter Hugo, 2016



Steven Mohapi
Johannesburg, 2003

Rwanda, 2004: Vestiges of a Genocide

Rwanda

2004

In January 2004 I was struck by an article about the Rwandan genocide, featured on the cover of a financial magazine. The author pleaded for swift resolution to the trials of the perpetrators. He illustrated Rwanda's development since 1994 with various statistics regarding growth and development. The photograph accompanying the story was of the altar at Ntarama church. There was a human skull on it.

I was completely stunned. The photograph was captioned 2004, ten years after the genocide. According to the journalist there was still detritus from the genocide everywhere. This sparked a series of questions. Why had nobody cleaned it up yet? Why were there no international commemorations? How does one regard landscapes where this type of atrocity has occurred? How does one interpret the events that took place in Rwanda in 1994? How does a divided society which has gone through something as terrible as this manage to coexist?

I remember watching news clips of the genocide in 1994. Images of refugees fleeing en masse, rivers full of corpses, streets littered with bodies, were beamed into our living rooms. Tutsi, Hutu—these terms meant nothing to me at the time. "Tribal" was the word used to describe the reasons for the genocide—as if this justified it. The word also implied to me a barbaric and base mentality, the behaviour of savages, something uniquely African in Western eyes, that would never happen in Europe. But of course, a mere fifty years previously, this did happen in Europe. How would we have reacted if the death camps and mass graves of Auschwitz had been left open for ten years? If nobody buried those slaughtered at Normandy?

These thoughts kept coming back to me, and I had an overriding desire to go to Rwanda and see for myself the mass graves and sites of the genocide, this fraught landscape. I wanted to try and understand the history and topography of these events—still so fresh, even after ten years.

In 2004, most of the photojournalists I knew were heading to South Africa to cover that country's decade of democracy celebrations. Following a succession of terrible events—widespread famine, Somalia's endless civil war, the scourge of AIDS and finally the genocide in Rwanda, which led to the war in former Zaire—people were desperate to tell positive stories from Africa. Publications and academics demanded it, claiming that it was irresponsible to continue depicting Africa as a continent tethered to war, famine and disaster. Yet, not engaging with the complexities of Rwanda seemed thoughtless to me.

As I still worked primarily as a photojournalist at the time, I tried petitioning every foreign publication I knew to send me to Rwanda. None obliged, so I decided to go on my own and stayed there for a few months photographing and contemplating these sites.

Rwanda did eventually rebury its dead ceremoniously in 2004. After President Paul Kagame stated that France “knowingly trained and armed the government soldiers and militias who were going to commit genocide and they knew they were going to commit genocide”, the French junior foreign minister, Renaud Muselier, cut his trip short. These photographs offer a glimpse of what I saw there before the reburials took place, and a very limited forensic view of a few of the genocide sites. At many of the places there is nothing happening and historical knowledge is needed to support the images; through the stillness the atrocity continues to resonate. At some of the sites human remains and the personal effects of the dead are still present. I hope these images in some small way bear testament to the personal anguish of these individuals.

Pieter Hugo, 2011



Clothing removed from genocide victims at Murambi Technical School where approximately 50,000 people were murdered by Hutu militias in the classrooms
Murambi, Rwanda, 2004

Flat Noodle Soup Talk

China

2015–2016

These photographs were taken in Beijing during a monthlong residency. Prior to visiting China, I had no real sense of this vast country. China had never formed part of my long-term plans or interests. When I was invited to participate in the residency, I decided to go almost as a challenge to my lack of intrigue. I treated it as an experiment. I loved Beijing: its people, its cuisine, its scale. It is huge and frenetic in a way I have never encountered

before. Its massive crowds have a way of amplifying one's sense of being an outsider—making it the most existential place I have ever experienced, especially since no one speaks English.

I started the project by discreetly spreading the news that I wanted to make family portraits. Through this process I met someone who became my access point into Beijing's younger, brasher side. My photographs focused on the contrasts or juxtapositions that animate present-day China. They include portraits of an older generation of people who grew up under the revolution and made incredible sacrifices for the country, alongside portraits of a younger generation—most of them art students—who have grown up in a post-revolutionary consumer society which is highly constrained and mediated by the state. Consumerism has become a religion for the youth, as well as a way of directing their alienation. In a way, Beijing now is similar to what I imagine the USA must have been like before AIDS in the early 1970s. I was struck by the remarkable decadence compared to what I am used to. The project includes a variety of still-lives. There is something melancholic about them, partly because they suggest the seventeenth-century Dutch genre of the vanitas painting. There are also elements of small-scale urban decay. They allude to the fractures and social façade of a country that is slowly emerging into political and social openness. Beijing reminded me of Musina, not in any physical way, but because of the superimposition of two competing or contested realities onto a single space. I see it as on a par with all my other projects. Here, in Africa and elsewhere, I want to photograph evidence of the fragility and vulnerability of the inhabitants.

Pieter Hugo, 2016



Mr and Mrs Guo
Beijing, 2015–2016

Barristers & Solicitors of the Supreme Court of Ghana Judges of Botswana

Ghana/Botswana

2005

Early in my career I decided to work on self-directed projects. Some, like *The Hyena & Other Men*, resulted in large bodies of work, but just as often I would produce small series of tightly focused portraits. This work combines two portrait projects: judges from Botswana's judicial system, and barristers and solicitors of the Supreme Court of Ghana.

Botswana, which gained independence from Britain in 1966, has a dual legal system, a combination of Roman Dutch Law and customary law. Up until 1992, judges of the High Court in Botswana were expatriate judges who were appointed on short-term contracts. Ghana, which was also a British colonial territory, gained its independence a decade earlier, in 1957. Its formal legal system is largely based on English common law. Both countries evidence a strong attachment to English legal ceremony and pageantry, notably through the continued use of wigs and gowns.

At the time I was interested in ideas of tradition and spectacle. I photographed Boy Scouts in Liberia and soccer fans and traditional healers in South Africa and have always found it interesting how uniforms shift identities.

Pieter Hugo, 2016



The Honourable Justice Moathodi Marumo
2005

The Journey

2014

I am 40,000 feet above the Atlantic Ocean—mid-air, between Johannesburg and Atlanta. It is a sixteen-hour flight. I cannot sleep. It seems as if everybody else in economy class is in some deep, troubled somnambulist state. Most have masks over their eyes and are shielded from any luminous intrusion.

I go for a walk to stretch my legs. Nine hours of flying left. I have almost reached the halfway mark of my journey. Will the second half go faster? Unlikely.

I am bored. I take my pocket camera with me. There is an infrared function on the camera. I make a few portraits of some of the sleeping passengers. Because the camera is photographing the infrared spectrum, no flash is needed. The subjects don't know I am photographing them.

I go back to my seat and review the pictures. They remind me of the images that came from Iraq during the US invasion. They remind me of what soldiers see through their night vision goggles. It occurs to me that the pictures of the first invasion of the Iraq War changed the way we see the world. Previously I associated infrared photography with wildlife pictures, leopards caught feeding at night. Now I associate them with conflict. I start pondering the strange relationship photography has with surveillance and the military industrial complex.

What time is it? Is it South African time? Is it US time? On the aerial map on my in-flight entertainment system there seems to be no land beneath us. No islands. No human presence. Who governs this space between where a journey begins and ends, this limbo between departing and arriving?

I think of Walker Evans's subway portraits and it occurs to me that the world is a very different place now to when he made those pictures. Our notion of public and private has drastically shifted. I wonder if anyone accused him of voyeurism in 1938. I wonder how the people I photograph will feel about these pictures. In this age we demand that celebrity be placed within the public gaze but have a conflicting ethos for our own representations.

I once read that a Londoner was caught on CCTV an average of 300 times a day. We are constantly being photographed without being aware of it. I look at my watch. Only eight hours and seventeen minutes left till Atlanta.

Pieter Hugo, 2014



The Journey (panel 1)
2014

Wild Honey Collectors

Ghana
2005

This series was made during a period when I was experimenting with different scenographies, as well as investigating aspects of labour across Africa. I saw an image of a honey collector taken by a Ghanaian photographer in a news magazine. It intrigued me. With the assistance of a local journalist I made contact with this group of honey collectors living in Techiman Municipal District, which is part of the fertile Brong-Ahafo Region. It is a full day's drive north from Accra into central Ghana, to a region famed for its cocoa production and agriculture generally.

Africanized honeybees are crucial to the pollination process. Their honey is also highly prized; it is estimated that up to 60 percent of honey on the Ghanaian market is harvested from wild bee colonies. But it's a dangerous job. In June 2016 a bus in Ghana was attacked by a swarm of bees.

This might explain the elaborate makeshift protection worn by the collectors I photographed. Honey is harvested by burning the tree nests. As a result, the honey often has soot in it and can only be sold at local markets for low prices. It is a very destructive form of labour, but it is their only means of earning a living.

Pieter Hugo, 2016



Martin Kofi, Wild Honey Collector
Techiman District, Ghana, 2005

Kin

South Africa
2006–2013

South Africa is such a fractured, schizophrenic, wounded and problematic place. It is a very violent society; the scars of colonialism and apartheid still run deep. Issues of race and cultural custodianship permeate every aspect of society, and the legacy of forced racial segregation casts a long shadow. How does one live in this society? How does one take responsibility for history, and to what extent should one try? How do you raise a family in such a conflicted society? Before getting married and having children, these questions did not trouble me; now, they are more confusing.

About eight years ago, I started photographing the notion of "home," whatever that might mean, as both intimate and public place. To look at home critically is to look at one's self and one's fellow man. It is to feel the weight of history and to consider the space one occupies in it. It is to consider one's relationship with "kin"—to look at the tenuous ties that bind us to, and repel us from, each other. Home is where belonging and alienation coexist. Does this belonging liberate or confine us? Does it tie us to the terrible weight of history or free us from it? I have deeply mixed feelings about being here. Eight years on, I do not feel any more resolved about these issues. If anything, I am more confused and more at odds with my "home".

Pieter Hugo, 2014



With my son, Jakob Hugo
Nature's Valley, 2014

Californian Wildflowers

USA

2014–2015

This portrait series was taken in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco and Skid Row in Los Angeles where I photographed a wide spectrum of homeless people. There are big differences, culturally and socially, between San Francisco and Los Angeles. In Southern California homelessness is criminalized; Skid Row is aggressive, the police are gung-ho and it is all about race. By contrast, in Northern California the police are tolerant and sympathetic, and you do not feel threatened on the street. I first visited San Francisco two decades ago; it is the only place I have been mugged. Even now, the city still has vestiges of the freak scene of the 1960s. But the economic impact of Silicon Valley and the digital economy is palpable. The city is facing an identity crisis. The Tenderloin is exempt from some of it because the majority of its buildings are owned by non-profit organizations with no interest in benefiting financially from gentrification. It feels like an anarchic community in the midst of a crazy boom.

Homelessness is one word that covers a range of different situations. I met people with mental disorders, addicts, victims of the 2008 recession, war veterans, men and women who had made bad lifestyle choices, as well as people who for whatever reason liked living rough. Notwithstanding their terrible circumstances, which are real and inescapable, there is something quite ecstatic in the poses and gestures of the people I photographed. A lawlessness too. It required a very different way of working to what I have become accustomed to. For starters, no tripod and no lights. Normally, I ask for permission to take someone's portrait: here, it was not always possible as people were often out of it. The series

includes a number of diptychs. At the time I was reading a short story by James Salter in which he describes seeing his wife as all the non-idealized pictures he had taken of her and thrown away. I liked this idea. I think I was trying to get away from the photograph as monument with this series, allowing more accidents to happen in my portraits. I am not unfamiliar with homelessness. The streets around my studio in Cape Town are home to a large population of unhoused poor. Their number probably exceeds that in California. I have made portraits of homeless people in South Africa. It is a fraught genre, so often linked to a moralizing stance. I understand the imperative to witness, especially in South Africa, but I am not interested in having my own photography become a vehicle for a moral crusade against poverty, capitalism or the uncaring state. I tried to remain true to this instinct in my work in California.

Pieter Hugo, 2016



Untitled
Los Angeles, 2015

Nollywood

Nigeria

2008–2009

I became aware of Nigeria's remarkable film industry while working on *The Hyena & Other Men* series. Everywhere I travelled, out of the corner of my eye, I would catch people watching these locally made films, in bars, hotel lobbies, anywhere there was a TV. The production values at the time were really poor, especially the sound quality, which may be why the films really irritated me at first. But then, at some point, I became more interested in the industry itself, which is the third largest in the world after the United States and India. It wasn't the economics of releasing between 500 and 1,000 movies each year that interested me so much as the cultural issues coded into a cinema made by local producers for local audiences.

Here you have a local entertainment industry that enables massive self-representation through popular culture. I don't want to overstate things: the Nigerian film industry dutifully produces a mix of banal, weird, interesting and occasionally profound films. What intrigued me was the authenticity at play, and, if you think through it some more, how this exercise of authenticity challenges western preconceptions of Africa.

With these big ideas in mind I started off by photographing on film sets. It was an unproductive avenue. I wasn't interested in making a documentary project showing the puppet strings—the film cameras, booms, microphones and countless operators behind the scenes. I was more interested in the cinematic ideas and stereotypes that were being fabricated for mass consumption. One evening I met a make-up artist who showed me his portfolio: photographs of actors in make-up. He worked in Enugu, which is much easier to work in than Lagos, and had many connections. We struck a deal whereby he would help me on my portrait series; the collaboration would be a showcase of his skills with make-up and wardrobe as much as mine with a camera.

The portraits were produced over four trips. The individual shoots were not formal events on a movie set—I prefer to think of them as theatrical happenings that came together quite informally at times. Of course, I directed the final compositions—they were not spontaneous occurrences as such. I think it is important to recognize that my photographs offer a selective engagement with the ideas and visual culture of Nollywood. I chose not to engage the soap opera genre, which is big in Nigeria and typically set in upper-class houses. I had no interest in that. My taste is more towards the macabre; I loved horror movies as a child. There is still an element of that in the subterranean parts of my mind.

The arc of the project involved imagining a series of portrait subjects, making them up with actors, and then documenting these fictional subjects. In my development as an artist, this project was the first time I really questioned the veracity of the portrait. I became aware of how one can play with portraiture, that it can be much more than just the superficial depiction of a subject. Working on this series, and later reading responses to it, I became more acutely aware of what the viewer brings to the image, which often exceeds what is depicted.

Pieter Hugo, 2016



Obechukwu Nwoye
Enugu, Nigeria, 2008

The Hyena & Other Men

Nigeria

2005–2007

These photographs came about after a friend emailed me an image taken on a cell phone through a car window in Lagos, Nigeria, which depicted a group of men walking down the street with a hyena in chains. A few days later I saw the image reproduced in a South African newspaper with the caption "The Streets of Lagos". Nigerian newspapers reported that these men were bank robbers, bodyguards, drug dealers, debt collectors. Through a journalist friend I eventually tracked down a Nigerian reporter, Adetokunbo Abiola, who said that he knew the "Gadawan Kura" as they are known in Hausa. A few weeks later I was on a plane to Lagos. Abiola met me at the airport and together we took a bus to Benin City where the "hyena men" had agreed to meet us. However, when we got there they had already departed for Abuja. In Abuja we found them living on the periphery of the city in a shantytown—a group of men, a little girl, three hyenas, four monkeys and a few rock pythons. It turned out that they were a group of itinerant minstrels, performers who used the animals to entertain crowds and sell traditional medicines. The animal handlers were all related to each other and were practising a tradition passed down from generation to generation. I spent eight days travelling with them.

The spectacle caused by this group walking down busy market streets was overwhelming. I tried photographing this but failed, perhaps because I wasn't interested in their performances. I realized that what I found fascinating

was the hybridization of the urban and the wild, and the paradoxical relationship that the handlers have with their animals—sometimes doting and affectionate, sometimes brutal and cruel. I started looking for situations where these contrasting elements became apparent. I decided to concentrate on portraits. I would go for a walk with one of the performers, often just in the city streets, and, if opportunity presented itself, take a photograph. We travelled around from city to city, often chartering public mini-buses.

I agreed to travel with the animal wranglers to Kanu in the northern part of the country. One of them set out to negotiate a fare with a taxi driver; everyone else, including myself and the hyenas, monkeys and rock pythons, hid in the bushes. When their companion signalled that he had agreed on a fare, the motley troupe of humans and animals leapt out from behind the bushes and jumped into the vehicle. The taxi driver was completely horrified. I sat upfront with a monkey and the driver. He drove like an absolute maniac. At one stage the monkey was terrified by his driving. It grabbed hold of my leg and stared into my eyes. I could see its fear.

Two years later I decided to go back to Nigeria.

The project felt unresolved and I was ready to engage with the group again. I look back at the notebooks I had kept while with them. The words “dominance”, “co-dependence” and “submission” kept appearing. These pictures depict much more than an exotic group of travelling performers in West Africa. The motifs that linger are the fraught relationships we have with ourselves, with animals and with nature.

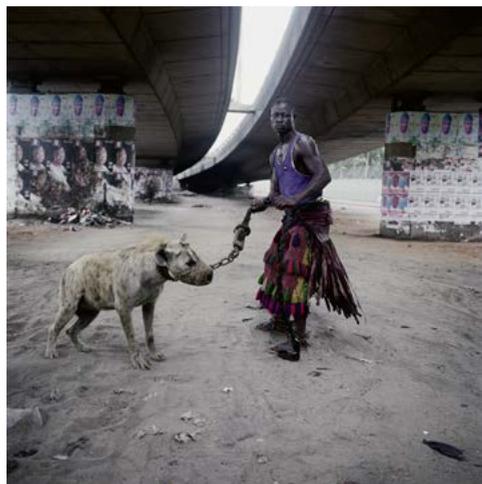
The second trip was very different. By this stage there was a stronger personal relationship between myself and the group. We had remained in contact and they were keen to be photographed again. The images from this journey are less formal and more intimate.

The first series of pictures had caused varying reactions from people—inquisitiveness, disbelief and repulsion. People were fascinated by them, just as I had been by that first cell phone photograph. A director of a large security company in the USA contacted me, asking how to get in touch with the “hyena group”. He saw marketing potential: surely these men must use some type of herb to protect themselves against hyenas, baboons, dogs and snakes? He thought that security guards, soldiers and his own pocket could benefit from this medicine.

Many animal-rights groups also contacted me, wanting to intervene (however, the keepers have permits from the Nigerian government). When I asked Nigerians, “How do you feel about the way they treat animals?”, the question confused people. Their responses always involved issues of economic survival. Seldom did anyone express strong concern for the well-being of the creatures. Europeans invariably only ask about the welfare of the animals, but

this question misses the point. Instead, perhaps, we could ask why these performers need to catch wild animals to make a living. Or why they are economically marginalized. Or why Nigeria, the world's sixth largest exporter of oil, is in such a state of disarray.

Pieter Hugo, 2007



Abdullahi Mohammed with Mainasara
Lagos, Nigeria, 2007

There's a Place in Hell for Me and My Friends South Africa 2011–2012

Greetings dear Friend and Photographic Subject, Herewith an edit of my new portrait series. The subjects are all friends of mine who are either from South Africa or have made this country their home. I plan to publish the collection as a book in the next few weeks.

If you feel uncomfortable with me exhibiting or publishing your image—now would be a good time to say so.

A brief description of what I have done to the images: The colour process used in making these pictures involves turning the digital colour image to black and white, while keeping the colour channels active. In this manner one can manipulate the colour channels and bring certain colours to prominence as greyscales. The red and yellow colour channels were darkened to the point where nearly all information for these colours was rendered as blacks and dark grey. The pigment responsible for skin colour and appearance, melanin, which appears in two forms—pheomelanin (red) and eumelanin (very dark brown)—is brought to prominence in this colour process. As a result of exposure to UV rays the skin produces melanin to protect nuclear DNA from mutations caused by

the sun's ionizing radiation. The damage to people's skin caused by exposure to UV is thus shown up in their skin, along with capillaries and small blood vessels visible just under the skin.

Let me know your thoughts.

All my best,
Pieter Hugo

Pieter Hugo, 2012



Ashleigh McLean
2011

Cover:
"Zeng Mei Hui Zi", Beijing, 2015–2016
From the series *Flat Noodle Soup Talk*

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Texts by Ralf Beil, Uta Ruhkamp, and Pieter Hugo.

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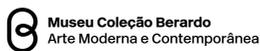
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