

in its composition and title. More to the point, it resembled the medals commissioned by the Medicis and declared Joannou the heir to their tradition of artistic patronage. The piece also brought to mind another opportunity that Koons missed in organizing the exhibition: a chance to absolve the collector. The pieces in *Skin Fruit* will likely increase in value as a result of their exposure. A well-curated, perceptive and worthwhile exhibition would have gone a long way to clearing the moral murkiness that surrounded the exhibition from its announcement, rooted in Joannou's position as a New Museum trustee.

In curating *Skin Fruit*, Koons had an advantage that most curators working for public galleries never have: the familiarity with a collection that comes from being intimately involved with its assembly. Considering that the pieces in *Skin Fruit* had successfully passed through two levels of selection, it's even more baffling that Koons would offer such a swollen and aimless exhibition, a disappointing combination of too much pulp and not enough pith.

ART

Nollywood by Pieter Hugo
Yossi Milo Gallery, New York
February 25-April 17, 2010

Charlene Lau

South-African born photographer, Pieter Hugo's recent exhibition *Nollywood* captures the characters of the burgeoning Nigerian film industry. With over 1,000 low-budget, straight to video films per year for a largely domestic market, "Nollywood" is said to be the second largest film industry in the world after Bollywood and it is ahead in numbers but without the reach of the imperial giantess, Hollywood.

Hugo's stark part-fiction, part-documentary photographs are mildly Jeff Wallsian. Staged

yet portraying some kind of truth, the images speak of common Nollywood themes: the macabre and melodramatic, using traditional symbolic imagery and narratives involving romance, extortion, prostitution, witchcraft, or religion. Local actors from the film production centres of Enugu and Asaba in Southern Nigeria worked with Hugo in recreating scenes and characters distinctive to Nollywood films. The seemingly unaltered realities of both cities serve as backdrops: apartment stairwells, junkyards, streets, unappropriated territory. This is Nollywood, an industry unhinged from the cultural conditioning and economic practices of Westernization.

Without this background information, and even despite it, these photographs read as haunting, still, and mystical, with an element of comedic strangeness. Should I laugh, cry, or cower at the subjects' stares? Instant mini-narratives spring from behind each image, immediately arresting and wildly fantastical; these are not unlike uncanny circus sideshow portraits. Carefully composed tableaux hybridize aspects of the old Africa and contemporary experience. In *Gabazzini Zuo*, the actor stands with one foot resting on a bull carcass with its legs tied together and blood pooling under its recently opened neck. Clad in a business suit, he brandishes organs, perhaps those of the former bull slung over his shoulder. It is silently shocking and contemplative, set against an overcast backdrop with large piles of bones in the near distance. *Azuka Adindu* stations the actor in a stereotypical African landscape of trees and a nearly dried out riverbed. Nude and statuesque, he stands proudly, masked only in a Darth Vader headpiece. It is not clear whether or not the helmet carries any of its original meaning in Nigerian film imagery, or if it is simply a mask. Within the photo it seems stripped of association against the background and the extremely unavoidable demonstration of nudity.

The photographs evoke supernatural otherworldliness that is anachronistically set in the nostalgia of the turn of the twentieth century. They hark back to a cinematic old-timeyness: makeup, masks, props recalling the Golden Age

of Charlie Chaplin, Al Jolson, and the like. There are jabs at this colonial past in some of the photographs. In *John Dollar Emeka*, an actor dons a nineteenth century military uniform and nurses a broken arm in a sling. In another image, *Obechukwu Nwoye*, the actor sports a sailor's uniform and an outsized string of pearls, her face painted in whiteface make-up and eyes rimmed in fake blood. Slouching on a leather sofa and holding a smouldering cigarette, she gazes at the camera irreverently. These portraits capture the characters' numbness to these globalizing times, while proclaiming a unique history with which we are, as yet, unfamiliar. One of the drollest photographs, *Emeka Uzzi* portrays the poker-faced actor dressed in a hairy Yeti-like costume, sitting heavily with a bottle of Coca-Cola.

Just what happens when a distinctly American industry and cultural production is reconstituted by the Other? Hugo depicts this tension between old and new in his half-fictions, half-realities. In a repurposing of Hollywood, Nollywood subverts its colonial past and moves towards a new global expression of cultural hybridity.

PERFORMANCE

The Movement Project's
*How We Forgot Here: Some Lessons in
Navigating Political Turbulence*

by *Spy Dénommé-Welch*

For politicized artists experimenting with the tenuous and ever-fluctuating frontiers between art and life, real danger is always present, especially when the art event takes place outside the protected space of cultural institutions.

—Guillermo Gomez-Pena, *Dangerous Border Crossers*¹

All it took was twenty bucks and I was able to buy myself a one-way ticket with Eagle Airlines (“Canada’s Indigenous Airline”), which, in my

opinion, was a bargain too good to refuse. So I packed a handy carry-on bag and made sure not to bring any liquids or sharp objects—after all, airport security can be awfully tight these days, and for “Canada’s newest Indigenous-run Airline” there was no exception to be made. For that reason alone, I did not want to get held up at security over a tube of toothpaste and miss my flight to *How We Forgot Here*.

How We Forgot Here is the first piece of a series of movements being developed by The Movement Project—a collective that was formed in 2007 and features writer/composer Gein Wong, actor/dancer Marika Schwandt, filmmaker Malinda Francis, actor Eva Rose Tababondung, actor Ryan Symington, and musician/performer Rosina Kazi.

I chose to fly on Sunday afternoon of March 28, 2010, catching their final performance in flight. Having arrived twenty minutes early, I decided to check in with the friendly and professional front desk clerk, who stamped my passport/ticket, thus validating my ticket...or so I thought. In the reception area there were a few passengers ahead of me waiting to go through security, and I was the fourth person in line to be processed.

Just before two in the afternoon, the security gates opened, and Customs Officer Betty Brown began calling all the passengers up to the inspection counter. She proceeded to check the bags, pockets, and wallets of those ahead of me, which to most seasoned travelers is a protocol we have come to expect at airport security. However, to this unsuspecting group of passengers, the performance was already in full swing and we were suddenly made part of the act, forced to interact in a pseudo performance art space, or what Guillermo Gomez-Pena would describe as a “living diorama.”

Customs Officer Betty Brown rummaged through luggage like a hawk, purposefully looking for “suspicious” items such as water bottles and interrogating the three travelers ahead of me. She demanded to know if any of the contents contained lethal substances, and ordered the travelers to drink the liquid, stating: “If it’s not