



Learning from Artemisia

by Uriel Orlow

27/02/20 – 11/04/20

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In his multidisciplinary and process-oriented work, Uriel Orlow uses the world of botany as a lens through which he explores the socio-political, economic and spiritual ramifications of colonization and the postcolonial. Often departing from specific sites and micro-histories, Orlow uses different image-regimes and narrative modes to bring to the fore historical and contemporary blind spots of representation and transmission.

In *Learning from Artemisia* at La Loge, Orlow explores plant healing and global power relations through *Artemisia afra*, the African wormwood, an indigenous medicinal plant cultivated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, alongside other African countries, and used for the treatment of malaria. Despite its proven effectiveness and simplicity, the World Health Organization does not recommend the use of this plant material, in any form, including tea, for the treatment or the prevention of malaria. Meanwhile the pharmaceutical industry derives large revenues from using the active ingredient 'artemisinin' from the related annual wormwood plant to produce antimalarial medication. Combining films and documentation from his work with a women's cooperative in Lumata (south of Lubumbashi) with archival materials from the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren and a selection of related recent work, the artist traces the history of malaria to extractive capitalism, while highlighting the benefits of a collaborative economy.

The exhibition at La Loge opens with a painting executed by Musasa, a Lubumbashi artist and sign painter. The small painting served as a model for a commissioned fresco on one of the walls of Orlow's small *Artemisia* garden in the cultural centre Picha in Lubumbashi, making the cultivation and use of the plant more visible to the local community. The wall painting serves as an 'instruction manual' for the *artemisia* tea. The plant, named after the Greek goddess Artemis, not only treats malaria and other ailments, but its sustainable production can also have a positive impact on the local economy. Here, the painting appears as a preamble to the following works, which engage with knowledge sharing and learning from plants.

In the back of La Loge's temple space, visitors are invited to have a cup of *Artemisia afra* tea and to consult texts discussing the politics and benefits of this herbal infusion as well as the pharmaceutical legal history surrounding malaria. A looped 3-channel video installation brings together different approaches to the complicated relationship between plant healing and colonial extraction. We see the process of cultivation and production of *Artemisia afra* by a cooperative of women in a field near Lumata as well as the creation of the communal *Artemisia afra* garden at Picha for the Lubumbashi Biennale 2019, interspersed with archival images about the history of malaria prevention in the Congo. Meanwhile the Orchestre jeunes étoiles des astres, a group

of musicians from Lumata formed by the husbands of the women from the cooperative, sets the story of Artemisia afra to music. The band makes activist songs that engage with health education, including songs about HIV and Ebola. A letter from the artist accompanies the visual material, relaying his own experience in the Congo and exploring questions of extraction. A further selection of archival materials from the Royal Museum of Africa Tervuren are displayed in two large frames in the hallway of La Loge.

In the triangular corridor twelve prints are on view. They come from the herbarium of the Botanical Garden in Meise, which holds thousands of specimens of 'alien' plants discovered in the colonies. Orlow manipulated the prints to appear as x-ray negatives, summoning a spectral presence. In his work Orlow often attends to ghosts, revenants from a colonial past that keep haunting the present. These lingering, unresolved presences require voicing and making visible. As they are conjured up they also expose the history and the systems of their acquisition. The colonial collection and categorisation of specimens here is countered by becoming individual portraits.

Downstairs, the experimental documentary *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke* (Zulu, translatable as Mafavuke's Tribunal) is set at the edge of a nature reserve in Johannesburg. Here, Orlow addresses the issue of local knowledge systems, and the extent to which Western epistemology fails to comprehend and protect indigenous knowledge. The film employs didactic and pedagogical techniques from Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, a radical and experimental form of modernist theatre, and pre-enacts a people's tribunal where traditional healers, activists and lawyers come together to discuss the protection of indigenous knowledge in the face of bioprospecting and bio-piracy. The tribunal demands a different engagement with indigenous knowledge and benefit sharing when traditionally used medicinal plants are being turned into patented medications by the pharmaceutical industry, in what has become a new colonial frontier. The protagonists in the film slip into different roles and make use of real-world cases involving multinational pharmaceuticals scouting in indigenous communities for the next wonder drug. Ghosts of colonial explorers, botanists and judges observe the proceedings. Throughout the different acts issues of trust, ownership, locality, patenting and ancestry are raised, highlighting the tensions between Western and African conceptions of law.

Finally, the exhibition features a series of twelve prints titled *Muthi*. The term 'muthi' is used in many languages in southern Africa to describe traditional medicine. The word derives from the Zulu word for tree. Various natural products, sourced from trees and other plants, are prescribed and prepared as muthi by an inyanga, a herbal healer. Before the establishment of cosmopolitan medicine, traditional medicine was the dominant medical system for millions of people in southern Africa. The arrival of the Europeans was a turning point for this ancient tradition. Muthi and African healers were perceived as unscientific and ineffective, but their cultural dominance was still considered a threat to British colonial rule and Christian missionary endeavors, resulting in the legislation and curtailing of traditional practices. The series of portraits of plants used

in South African traditional medicine shows them as sold in bundles in contemporary markets.

Curated by Laura Herman

About the artist

Uriel Orlow lives and works between London and Lisbon. He studied at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design London, the Slade School of Art, University College London and the University of Geneva, completing a PhD in Fine Art in 2002.

Orlow's work is presented widely in galleries, museums, film festivals and international survey shows including 6th Lubumbashi Biennale (2019), Manifesta 12, Palermo (2018), 2nd Yinchuan Biennial (2018), 13th Sharjah Biennial 13 (2017), 7th Moscow Biennial (2017), EVA International, Limerick (2016), 2nd Aichi Triennale, Nagoya (2013), Bergen Assembly (2013), Manifesta 9 (2012), 54th Venice Biennale (2011). Recent solo exhibitions include Kunsthalle Mainz (2019); Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Paris (2018); Market Photo Workshop & Pool, Johannesburg (2018); Kunsthalle St Gallen (2018); PAV – Parco Arte Vivente (2017); Parc Saint Léger (2017), The Showroom, London (2016); Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2015); John Hansard Gallery, Southampton (2015); Depo, Istanbul (2015), Spike Island, Bristol (2013).

In 2018 Sternberg Press published the major monograph *Theatrum Botanicum* and in 2019 Shelter Press published the monograph *Soil Affinities*. Orlow is visiting professor at the Royal College of Art London and is currently Reader (associate professor and senior researcher) at University of Westminster, London and lecturer at ZHdK, the University of the Arts, Zurich.

List of works

Works and documents in the exhibition

Hallway

Learning from Artemisia, 2019

Painting, 30 x 40 cm, acrylic on cardboard

Courtesy of the artist and Mor Charpentier, Paris

Malaria, Congo and the Belgians, 2019

Selection of archival materials, two prints 70 x 100 cm, framed

Courtesy of the artist and of the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren

Clockwise from top left:

1a. Malaria, HP.2011.62.14-237, collection RMCA Tervuren; unknown designer, s.d. (All Rights reserved)

1b. Map of Elisabethville and surroundings (C.S.K.),

HO.1929.638.1, collection RMCA Tervuren ; Ph. Vandenbak, 1927

1c. AP.0.1.3443, collection RMCA Tervuren; 1936

2.a. Visualization on diagram of the struggle against malaria in Jadotville (representation of data from 1944 to 1951)

2.b. The anti-malarial fight in the Belgian Congo. An indigenous worker, equipped with a special sprayer, sprinkles petroleum with standing water from a swamp to destroy the larvae of mosquitoes that spread malaria. HP.1956.15.10216, RMCA Tervuren collection; photo E. Lebiéd (Inforcongo), 1946, RMCA Tervuren ©

2.c. M. Parent, Economic importance of the anti-malaria struggle, 1958

Corridor

Artemisia afra in Katanga, 2019

12 archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle photorag, 36 x 59 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Mor Charpentier, Paris

Temple

Learning from Artemisia, 2019-20

3-Channel HD Video with sound, colour

Courtesy of the artist and Mor Charpentier, Paris

Untitled, 2019

Stools and Tables with documentation and Artemisia afra tea

Courtesy of the artist and Mor Charpentier, Paris

Basement

Imbizo Ka Mafavuke (Mafavuke's Tribunal), 2017

Single channel video with sound, black and white/colour, 28'

Courtesy of the artist, Lux London and Mor Charpentier, Paris

Muthi, 2017

12 archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle photorag, 25 x 25 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Mor Charpentier, Paris

Thank you

Learning from Artemisia would not have been possible without the engaged collaboration with Uriel Orlow.

The production of this exhibition was made possible thanks to the professional and devoted work of Benjamin Jaubert, Rémi Lambert. Many thanks to Amaury Daurel putting his carpentry skills at the service of this exhibition. We are also grateful to Ludo Engels for his support and technical assistance during the installation of this project.

Pro Helvetia generously supported the project. Lastly, Vedett supports the opening evening of the exhibition.

Credits

Learning from Artemisia

Painting: Musasa

Orchestre jeunes étoiles des astres: Muteba Ardoz, Jean Tshitshi.
Cooperative Lumartemisia: Julie Manyonga, Charlotte Samba, Suzanne Ngandwe, Béatrice Kasongo, Kabibi Mumba, Mado Musonda, Joice Kimbala, Gracia Tshitshi, Lubala Kilufia, Jeanne Kibawa, Christine Inkaj, Lucie Kisimba, Sonny Maleka, Kahilu Mufuka, Pauline Kasongo, Eme Ngoyi, Kitenge Ebambi, Cathy Kinima, Marthe Tshilanda

Special thanks: Lumartemisia/CAE RDC, Royal Africa Museum Tervuren, Pro Helvetia – Swiss Arts Council, Sammy Baloji, Christine Bluard, Sandrine Colard de Bock, Joseph Gaylard, Mikhail Karikis, Ariane Leblanc, Sando Marteau, Lord Nassor, Domitien Ramazin Beyla, Gabriele Salmi, Alain Sengar, Bibiche Tankama, Dr Constant Tchandema, Bruno Tshilond, Maarten Vanden Eynde, Anne Welschen and the entire team of Picha

Imbizo Ka Mafavuke

Cast: Nhlanhla Mahlangu, Pule Welch, Anthony Coleman, Ayanda Seoka, Lindiwe Matshikiza, Samuel a Jose, Sipho Madonsela, Malebo Rakgogo, Siya Velali, Tshepo Mashaba, Joseph Ndlovu

Production Team: Samora Sekhukhune, Eva Rowson, Lerato Moteka, Vathu Manyakolle, Veli Nkosi, Manuel Lapière, Lesego Moumakwe, Oriel Mapisa, Austin Malema, Lucas Mosoeu, Neo Potsane, Brian Ledwaba, Musa Radebe, Sihle Notha, Puleng Kgabutlane, Lerato Morabe, Dlozi Phetha, Mosa Thabethe, Sabatha Maphiri, Tumi Shoba, Marc Crispill, Bham Ntabeni

Post-Production: Anuree De Silva, Jason R Moffat, João Orecchia
With the support of Wellcome Trust Arts Award, Film London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN), Arts Council England, Pro Helvetia – Swiss Arts Council

The team of La Loge

Director: Wim Waelput

Curator: Laura Herman

Curatorial intern: Jef Declercq

Visual identity: Antoine Begon, Boy Vereecken

Production: Amaury Daurel, Benjamin Daurel, Rémi Lambert

Photography: Lola Pertsowsky

Translation: Maarten Mertens and Maud Salembier

Opening hours

Thursday - Friday - Saturday

12:00 to 18:00

Free entrance

Visit our website for more details about our program and events.

La Loge

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La Loge is a privately initiated non-profit association founded by architect Philippe Rotthier. La Loge is supported by Philippe Rotthier Foundation, the Flemish Government, and First Sight, La Loge's community of engaged individuals and organisations.



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