

Artist: Scott Eric Williams

Submission: Kort en Vrede (2015)

Dimensions: 1.1 x 1.67metres

Media: Shoelaces woven onto canvas stretching frame, glue & nails.

“*Kort en Vrede*” draws on a multi-layered definition of contemporary Africanism through the dirty spectacles of a Capetonian South African. The work is inspired by migrations from within the African continent to South Africa and reflects on trade (in this instance particularly the trade methods used by Somali traders), knowledge and culture being brought into urban South African spaces like Bellville.

The work takes on a very street-savvy, urban, pop-art feel since the primary materials used to execute the work are a very particular type of shoelaces. This type of shoelaces called "Crazy laces", with their various shades of neon colours, reference 1980's urban Cape Flats culture. These were very popular amongst the youth on the Cape Flats who would weave them into the eyelets of their North Star Excitement sneakers instead of the standard, boring methods of lacing them up. Currently, crazy laces are not stocked in the popular retail stores. To this end the piece serves as an autobiography – It recalls actual memories of lived experience from Mitchells Plain in the 80's.

The title is also autobiographical since it refers to the street corner in Bellville which, on both loud weekend party nights and business weekdays serve as a vantage point, a base of operations, a nosey watchtower from which comings and goings are sometimes viewed.

Nowadays, these laces are found mainly in wholesale stores, the likes of which are run by Somali-business people. In that way they speak of African trade systems which exist as a byproduct of the African Diaspora. The weaving technique employed to create the artwork hints at a very primitive, rural definition of craft making. One fellow artist, Lesiba Mabitsela, even commented on the artwork - "It looks like a low key afro-futurist Kente Cloth"

According to statistics released by the Greater Tygerberg Partnership 51% of informal businesses in the Bellville CBD are owned by people of Somalian descent. A further 16% of informal businesses are run by Congolese, Nigerian, Malawian, Tanzanian and Zambian owners.

Bellville's dominant identity can no longer be considered to be a predominantly Afrikaans one...the Boerewors curtain...has fallen. #BOEREWORSCURTAINMUSTFALL? Prior to 1994 the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town was identified by a “blanket Afrikaans identity” which may have been constructed by people living in Cape Town's Southern Suburbs. Seemingly, the Northern Suburbs which was, at that stage, largely inaccessible to people of colour existed behind a “curtain”, obscured, hidden from view to anyone outside of its invisible geographic borders. As someone who lives in this area I can personally attest to a more Afropolitan identity percolating all the way from the Station as far as Kempenville, Oakdale – and further.

The work “*Kort en Vrede*” is a humble attempt at developing “*A new language of representation for the 21st Century South*” as referred to by Omar Badsha<sup>1</sup>. While it is extremely presumptuous and problematic to try and do this for an entire continent it is more realistic to address the changes which are apparent in one's own neighborhood.

And so there's an activity of zooming in here...like one would scroll with one's mouse on a Google map so that the context refers to an area with its own fingerprint.

I start at Africa, then criiiiick, crick, crick...scroll in..in towards...Sub-Saharan Africa.

Then...crick, crick, crrrrr....towards South Africa.  
And even further ....crrrrr....towards the Western Cape.  
Crrr....Cape Town.  
Crrrr...Bellville.  
Crrrk...Bellville CBD.  
There we are.

By referencing these aforementioned trade systems and types of knowledge I hope to question the exclusion of “alternative knowledge systems” or Afrocentric identities from Bellville’s lexicon. These “alternative knowledge systems” might seem alternative because they (a) didn’t exist somewhere before, (b) because the methods used to do business do not seem conventional / conform to the norms, (c) the way in which the communicate might seem foreign in context to visual languages , letters used in South African norms/ contexts<sup>ii</sup>.

The main questions that arise from this process are similar ideas to those proposed by Thenjiwe Nkosi in her presentation at the African Futures Festival, 28 – 31 October 2015:

*When does the knowledge cease to be 'alternative'?*

*The question of what is knowledge and how is it produced and redistributed thru society as a critical concern for those of us invested in rethinking the idea of Africa’s potential futures?*

*And also her idea that knowledge produced thru alternative sharing is important because it comes from the outside of the dominant centre<sup>iii</sup>*

But the colourful nature of the work also encapsulates a visceral aspect of city life. A conversation with Zanele Muholi in November 2016 disrobed the “Violence implied by laces, you wouldn’t leave laces around someone with mental illness because of its ‘suicide risk’. Laces taken away from you when you got to prison”...and my own addition that the prisonlike state of some Cape Flats neighborhoods serve the Apartheid governments intention to “give them enough rope to hang themselves” by forcefully dropping people of colour into spatially violent areas and structures.

I can’t tell whether my answers are right.

I don’t even know whether I’m on the right track.

But in the luminal space of creation, in this stream of consciousness musing I hope that somewhere I start a conversation that speaks to similar consciousnesses and adds to the exploration of what an African city looks like. ..Who lives there? .... How do we make it work eventually for all of us who receive post here?

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<sup>i</sup> Omar Badsha, Panel discussion for *Seedtime* retrospective exhibition. Iziko South African National Gallery. 6 June 2015.

<sup>ii</sup> Little Mogadishu: Somali Business in Bellville by Scott Williams:  
<http://www.chimurenganewsroom.org.za/?p=3738>

<sup>iii</sup> Thenjiwe Nkosi – Knowledge Production through Radical Sharing (African Futures Festival, 28 – 31 October 2015)