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# Kendell Geers

## Texts and Press

## Kendell Geers

rodolphe janssen

By Jos Van den Bergh

# ARTFORUM

Sept 2023

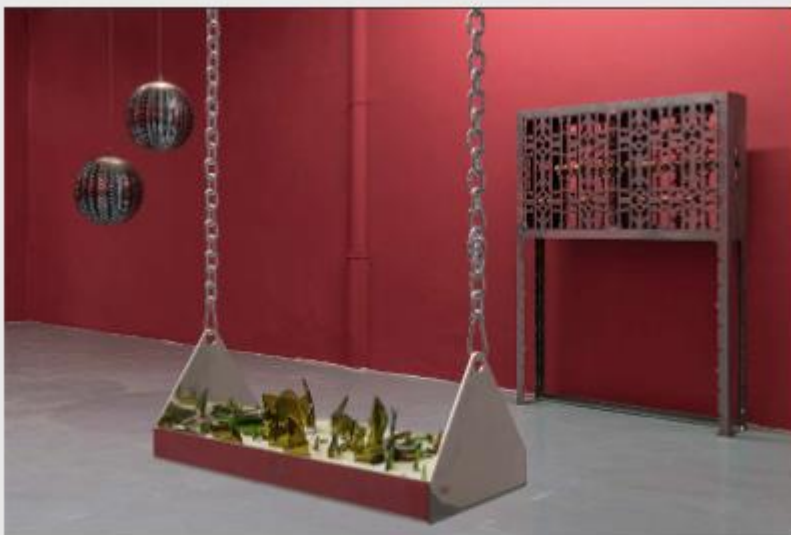
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Kendell Geers, *Flesh of the Spirit 19*, 2016, bronze, 57 1/2 x 17 3/8 x 13 3/8". From the series "Flesh of the Spirit," 2010–.

One of Kendell Geers's most iconic works is his *Self-Portrait*, 1995: half of a broken Heineken beer bottle, ready to be used as a weapon, bearing a label reading IMPORTED FROM HOLLAND. As the work of a white male South African descendant of Dutch colonizers, this simple object encapsulates two of the major and returning themes of Geers's art: violence and identity. In this recent pair of exhibitions in Brussels, both titled "AfroPunk," he showed his own work alongside traditional African art to create compelling variations on his recurring concerns.

## Descubriendo online la obra de Kendell Geers



Bajo el título Take Away la galería ADN está publicando contenidos sobre artistas muy interesantes. En el Take away #4 nos invitan a descubrir la obra de Kendell Geers y el último proyecto que presentó en la galería en 2019 bajo el título #iPROtesttHEReforeIam.

El título de la exposición toma como punto de partida la célebre cita de **René Descartes** en 1637 "I Think Therefore I am" ("Pienso, luego existo"). Reestructurada bajo el signo contemporáneo, la lógica cartesiana que una vez gobernó el mundo es trasladada a la situación actual caracterizada por la aparición constante de noticias falsas. Hoy en día, los políticos en todo el mundo se ofrecen al mejor postor, vendiendo sus ideales para alcanzar soluciones instantáneas mientras nos enfrentamos a crisis que requieren soluciones a largo plazo. El ejemplo más evidente es la crisis climática global: si no conseguimos bajar 1,5 grados Celsius la temperatura del planeta en los próximos 12

años el cambio climático habrá acelerado hasta un punto de no retorno.



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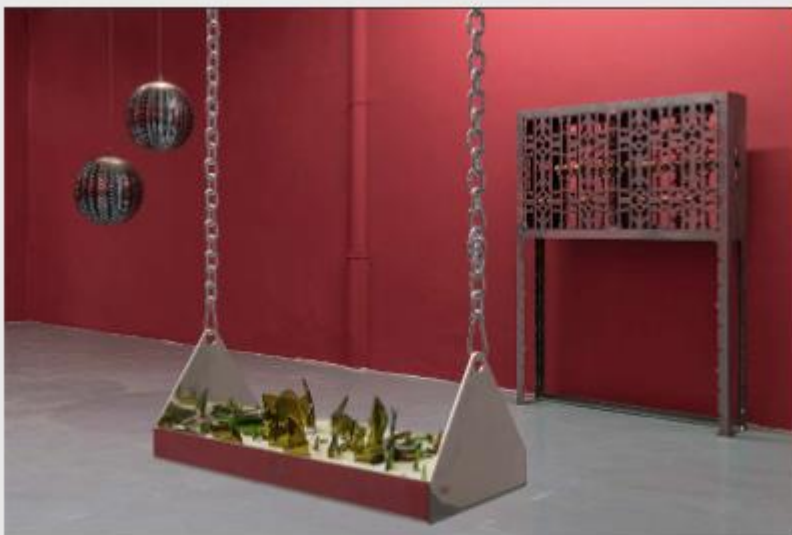
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## Kendell Geers #iPROtesttHEReforelam



ADN Galeria inaugura la tercera exposición individual del artista Kendell Geers. La exposición se centra en las consecuencias del calentamiento global y las fake news.

Imagen superior: Kendell Geers, Confession of the Flesh 7694, 2019

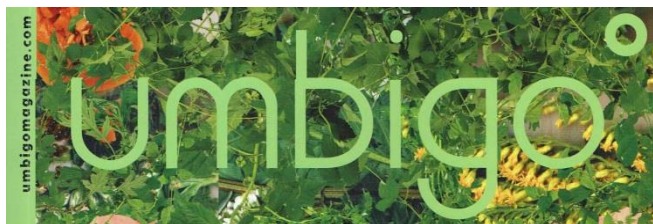
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Actualmente, políticos en todo el mundo capitulan en favor del mejor postor, vendiendo sus almas en pos de soluciones instantáneas. Si no conseguimos bajar 1,5 grados Celsius la temperatura del planeta en los próximos 12 años el cambio climático habrá acelerado hasta un punto de no retorno.

Lanzando Descartes a los perros, **Kendell Geers** proclama que ahora no es momento de pensar – es momento de ProTestar. Con el título de la exposición, "I PROTEST THEREFOR I AM" ("Protesto, luego existo"), el artista hace una llamada a las armas.

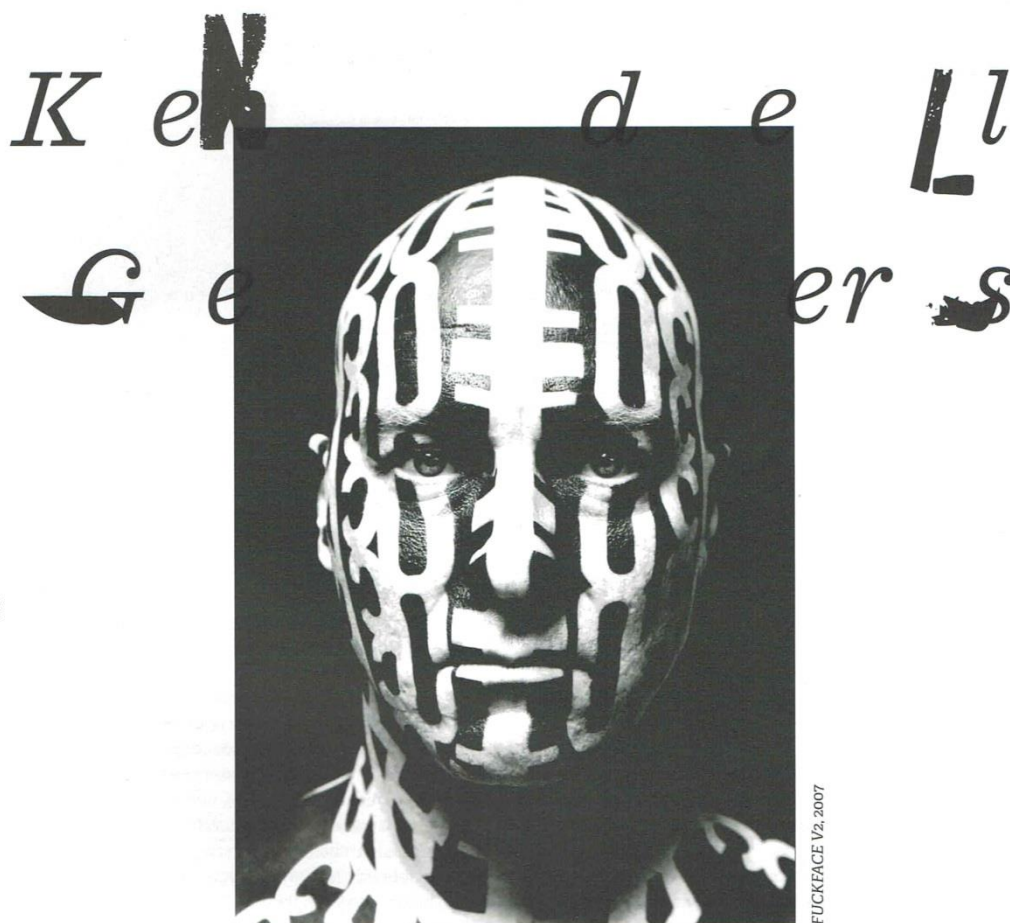
Embaucador y fabulador, artista y mago, **Kendell Geers** sitúa un hashtag y hace rodar su lengua sobre las letras, enlazándolas en una única palabra inventada #iPROtesttHEReforelam. Las letras mayúsculas se transforman en señales que marcan las contradicciones que implica presentar una exposición de protesta en una galería de arte comercial.





## Dossier Brussels

> text: ELSA GARCIA

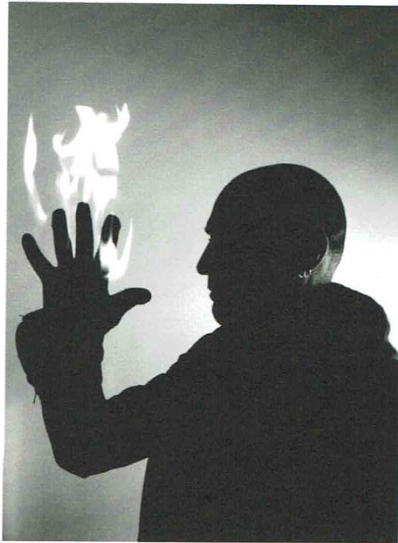


- p64 -

*"The readymade has become the disease of contemporary art [...]"*

Born in South Africa in 1968 and living and working in Brussels, Kendell Geers discusses the function of magic, myth, and memory in a work that disrupts social norms and codes and deconstructs the dominant understandings of history, culture and identity. Through his artistic practice, Kendell Geers selects day-to-day objects for their symbolic value rather than for aesthetic reasons, developing a visual vocabulary that aims to confront the viewer, thus challenging our perceptions.

Kendell Geers recently curated *IncarNations - African Art as Philosophy* - an exhibition at BOZAR, Brussels - created by the artist in collaboration with the collector Sindika Dokolo, where the works of African artists enter into a dialogue with those of the diaspora. The entire exhibition itself is a work of art punctuated by statues, masks and mirrors that "are there to remind us there's more than you can see". The whole exhibition is a talisman and begins a process of registration, where we go through a change of consciousness.



(Above)  
Azimut, 2012

(On the right)  
*Akropolis Redux (The director's Cut)*, 2004.  
Situation, Fencing and steel shelves



- P65 -

Recently you curated two exhibitions, *IncarNations* at BOZAR and *MERDELAMERDELAMERDELAMERDELAMERDELAMER* at Mario Mauroner Contemporary Art, Vienna. As an artist how do you think and reflect on curatorial practice?

I will never understand the logic whereby artists should stay in their corner as producers of market driven commodities. I am not a curator, nor do I have a curatorial practice, but I deep calling to make the kinds of exhibitions that I wish I could see. My approach is that of a host, inviting my friends and kindred spirits to share in a holistic experience of art.

**You continually explore and critique the world we live in by warning against alienation. Do you think that the contemporary art world is alienated? How is it responding to today's most pressing questions?**

Karl Marx wrote about the despiritualising dangers of alienation. The desensitisation and separation of the individual from the holistic context of community is precisely why the artist in me protests by way of a *gesamtkunstwerk* curatorial practice. The Art Market and I do not share the same values. The most pressing question today is how we are going to survive as a species by changing

our habits. It begins with respectfully understanding that the air we just breathed in has just been breathed out by someone else -human, animal or plant - and that the borders between the individual and the world we live in are an illusion because oxygen is everybody's problem. I would even go so far as to say that in every big city in the world, the water in your tap has been through more than six other people's bodies already, and we are all in the same shit so let's start talking about the interconnectedness of our bodies. The street food you eat was cooked by someone else's hands after it had been delivered by another's who took it from yet another whose green fingers seeded, sewed, nurtured and harvested their crop with love. Every time you eat and drink to live and grow with enough energy to love, think, feel and fuck, you are filling your synaesthetic senses with the emotions of every body in the chain of love and matrix of spirit we call reality.

**As you said - when you go to the studio you put yourself at risk, you enter in an altered state of consciousness. Regarding the idea that art challenges society, tell me about your routine as an artist and the ways in which your artwork questions power and challenges the way we position ourselves in the world?**







*Hanging Piece, 1993.*  
Bricks, Rope

- P166 -

Art does not begin in the studio, nor does it end in the gallery. Art is a living spirit that needs to be fed. More than a century ago Rimbaud explained it better than I could when he said, "Now, I am debauching myself as much as possible. Why? I want to be a poet, and I am working to make myself a seer: you will not understand this, and I don't know how to explain it to you. It is a question of reaching the unknown through a total derangement of all the senses... All forms of love, suffering, madness: he searches himself; he consumes all the poisons in himself, to keep only their quintessence. Unspeakable torture, where he needs all his faith, every superhuman strength, during which he becomes the great patient, the great criminal, the great accursed - and the supreme Knower, among men! - Because he arrives at the unknown! Because he has cultivated his soul, already rich, more than others! He arrives at the unknown, and when, maddened, he ends up by losing the knowledge of his visions: he has still seen them! Let him die, charging among those unutterable, unnameable things: other fearful workers will come: they'll start from the horizons where the first have fallen! ...

So the poet is truly the thief of fire, then".

**Your work combines the private and the political, the poetic and the melancholic, violence and eroticism. How did you come up with the idea of the manifesto *Make art, like love*?**

Back in 2011 I found myself in the throes of a deep depression brought about by the injustice of an art system

that values an artist only by their market ranking. On the one hand I was working on a retrospective in which the museum director excluded me from being involved in any way whatsoever with my own exhibition. He belonged to that sect that worshipped the cult of the curator and I understood that the exhibition would not embody my voice, my vision, my language, not even my concept of art. At the same time other artists, some even from the same gallery and group exhibitions as me, were freely lifting from my language without any due respect. I decided that if it was that easy to lift, then maybe the problem is not just my language, but the entire contemporary art system, so I had to reset. The best way to start again is to go back to the very beginning, so I wrote a manifesto to myself to try to answer the question: "What Do You Believe In?"

(On the right)  
*The Terrorist's Apprentice, 2003*  
C-Print



Originally from Johannesburg, South Africa, your personal story is that of an Afrikaner who is "too white in Africa and too black in Europe". This sentence appears to have marked your work. You rejected the colonial past of your family at 15 and became an anti-apartheid activist. In your work, you intend to bring to light the unknown, the forgotten history, but how do you pose these questions to the viewer through your work?

Where does Africa end and Europe begin? It is a Eurocentric conceit to think of Ancient Egypt as part of European history – the influence of that great African civilisation spread as far South as it did North and East. I would never speak of myself as too white or too black as you can see in my *Fuckface* self-portrait because I am extremely Black and White. Instead I prefer to entrust the viewer with the task of deciding who is African, what is European and how we construct those differences. Consider for instance the problem of white privilege that hangs over European identity like a headache after a late-night party and simply taking a 'white guilt' tablet of aspiration is not going to make any damn difference. In the aftermath of colonialism and its protégée Apartheid, the construction of whiteness, not to mention maleness, demands a very serious interrogation of self and history (his-story). Apartheid taught me how to question authority, subvert power structures and fight against oppression. From that experience I carved an eccentric language that invites the viewer to consider their roles in determining right from wrong, black from white and how their own privilege might colour their perception.

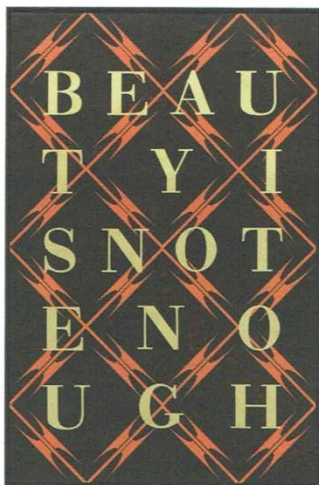
The ready-made and your biography have a crucial role in your art, and you choose everyday objects for their symbolic value such as barbed wire, neon lights, or glass shards as seen in *Self Portrait* (1995) with the broken bottleneck of a Heineken beer. Is this work a statement on your liberation from colonial rule?

The white cube is white for a good reason and like any quarantine chamber reeks of death. The readymade has become the disease of contemporary art and a snake-oil for false (dis)content. The only way for the readymade to still have a voice that challenges, is through danger. It's not the medium that makes my objects disruptive so much as the fact that they remain charged and potentially dangerous. Our bodies have learned to survive and fight against a viral attack by raising the body temperature to a fever with the hope that the unwelcome guest will die before the host. I believe in the spiritual power of art to raise the moral temperature of perception into a feverish state of contradiction whereby it is able to manifest itself as a healing baptism by fire. I understand these processes very well because I literally had to give birth to myself as an artist. Imagine if everything you know, everything you

have been taught, your very morality, education, sacred values, ideas of good, evil, aesthetics and even ethics is a lie? Imagine if everything taught to you by your father, mother, church, state, teacher, police, government, judge and jury is a crime against humanity and your only way to survive is to burn yourself to a cinder in order to embody the phoenix by teaching yourself a new language, a new morality, a new canon of aesthetics and code of ethics? It was through the interrogation of my childhood that I understood Apartheid was in fact only one facet of the greater unacknowledged crime against humanity called Colonialism. By the same logic of interrogation, I later understood that, in fact, colonialism was in turn constructed with the exact same values, morals, aesthetics and philosophies as Modernism and in that way a challenge to one is a challenge to the other.

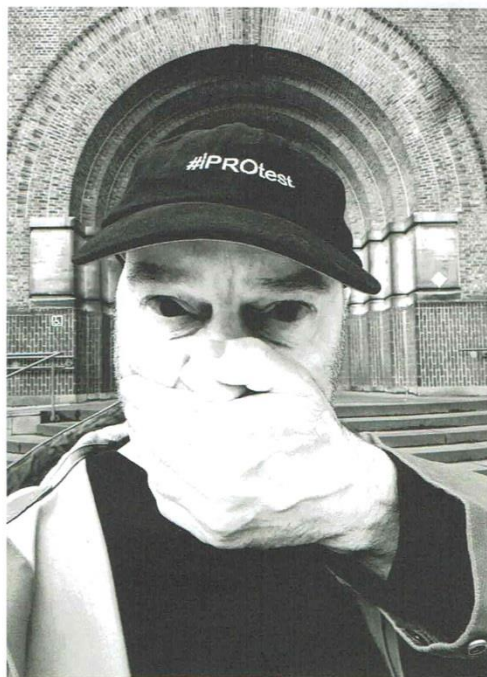


Title *Withheld (Vitrine)*, 1993  
Situation/Performance



(Above)  
#New Speak (*Beauty is not Enough*), 2019  
Acrylic on canvas

(On the right)  
#iPROtesttHERforeIam, 2019



In 1993 you decided to change your date of birth to May 1968 as a way of referencing both the May 1968 student protests, and the fact that 1993 was the first year that South Africa had participated in the Venice Biennale since 1968. In this same year (1993), you urinated in Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*. What led you to this action and why in the same year? Is there a relation?

In 1993 I gave birth to myself and my baptismal font was the urinal that birthed the White Cube Gallery system. Whilst history books declare that Marcel Duchamp created the *Fountain* in 1917, they omit the very important fact and detail that the readymade concept did not take root and his found objects were almost lost in the trashcan of history. It was only in 1953 that the readymade was finally noticed when Duchamp transformed Sidney Janis Gallery into the first white cube gallery for an exhibition he curated called *DADA 1916 - 1923*. Duchamp needed to purge the gallery of all non-art in order to make the readymades visible, so he removed all colour, wallpaper, architectural trimmings and so forth. The readymade can only survive within its quarantine isolation chamber otherwise the virus has to compete with much more powerful spirits. With time, what began with a purging of architectural dissonance set off a chain reaction whereby the works of art themselves also surrendered to the same purging and

they too were simplified to the point where conceptual art today no longer needs a thought to stand on. Even content has been purged and all that remains is the artist's brand and consequent market value.

Is the gallery/museum space still a sacred space?

Absolutely.

What are you working on now for your next exhibitions?

The complete and total derangement of all my senses. //

**[BIO]** Through his art Kendell Geers spans a variety of media including installation, sculpture, drawing, video, performance, and photography. He has shown globally in more than 400 exhibitions: Documenta, Havana Biennial, Istanbul Biennial, Kwang Ju Biennial, Taipei Biennial, Gwangju Biennale, Lyon Biennial, Glasstress at the Venice Biennale, as well as presented solo exhibitions in the CCA Cincinnati, Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst Gent, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Palais de Tokyo and Haus der Kunst in Munich, to name a few. Geers' works are included in prominent collections internationally, including Centre Pompidou, Paris; ArtPace, Texas; Magasin III, Stockholm and Konsthall, Stockholm.



3 Abril 2019

EXPOSICIONS BARCELONA

### KENDELL GEERS PRESENTA EL SEU ÚLTIM PROJECTE A ADN GALERIA

bonart

ADN Galeria, carrer Enric Granados 49 de Barcelona, inaugura el 6 d'abril a les 12.00h la tercera exposició individual de l'artista Kendell Geers, artista reconegut per tractar l'espiritualitat i la política de forma simultània a partir d'un discurs crític contra els estereotips.

El 1993 l'artista va canviar la seva data de naixement a maig de 1968, situant el seu renaixement com a part d'una revolució social a escala global. El 6 d'abril, dia de la inauguració, l'artista farà una presentació del seu treball. La exposició pren com a punt de partida, la cita homònima de René Descartes en 1637 "I Think Therefore I am" ("Penso, per tant existeixo"). Reestructurada sota el signe contemporani, la lògica cartesiana que un cop va governar el món és traslladada al terreny d'un Neollenguatge caracteritzat per l'aparició constant de notícies falses. Actualment, polítics arreu del món capitulen en favor del millor postor, venent les seves ànimes darrere de solucions instantànies. Si no aconseguim baixar 1,5 graus Celsius la temperatura del planeta en els propers 12 anys el canvi climàtic hi haurà accelerat fins a un punt de no retorn. Lanzando Descartes als gossos, Geers proclama que ara no és moment de pensar -és moment de protestar-. Amb el títol de l'exposició, #IPROtesttHEReforeIam ("Protesto, per tant existeixo"), l'artista fa una crida a les armes. Embaucador i fabulador, artista i mag, Kendell Geers plaça un hashtag i fa rodar la seva llengua sobre les lletres, enllaçant en la única paraula inventada #IPROtesttHEReforeIam. Les lletres majúscules es transformen en senyals que marquen les contradiccions que implica presentar una exposició de protesta en una galeria d'art comercial.

Hashtags, paraules, lletres, memes i eslògans ocupen les seccions infinites dels mitjans socials, reduïts a significats buits que es camuflen en tots nosaltres i que ens fan partícips d'una revolució estacional. La minúscula "i" ("jo"), que fa referència a l'individual, ha estat extreta al consumidor de la seva butxaca a través de la seva conversió en marca corporativa. "I (jo) sóc perquè iPhone (yoPhone) i I (jo) penso després iPad (yoPad) i I (jo) tinc la meua GoPro para mostrar-me amb el meu selfie!". Ara tots som addictes als dispositius tecnològics amb la seva promesa de satisfacció instantània a partir de l'auto difusió del nostre ego a milions de assedegats medíocres. Mai quedarem satisfets perquè el virus del llenguatge és una mentida addictiva i la màquina és un distribuïdor d'escombraries. William Burroughs explicó, "El traficant no ven el seu producte al consumidor, ven al consumidor al seu producte. No millora i simplifica la seva mercaderia. Degrada i simplifica al client".

A la imatge, obra de Kendell Geers.



Etiquetes: [ADN Galeria](#) · [Kendell Geers](#)





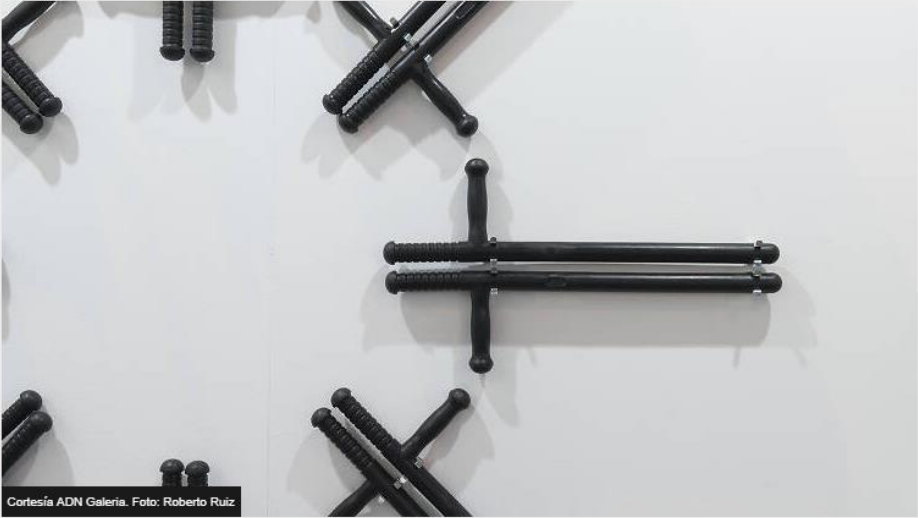
**TimeOut** **BARCELONA** ▾ **CATALÀ** **ENGLISH** **ESPAÑOL**

**QUÈ FER** **AMB NENS** **RESTAURANTS** **BARS** **TEATRE I DANSA** **CINE** **ART I MUSEUS** **CONCERTS** **BO**

Global ▸ Espanya ▸ Barcelona ▸ Kendell Geers. #iPROtesttHEReforelam

## Kendell Geers. #iPROtesttHEReforelam

Art  ADN, Eixample  Fins al Dissabte 18 maig 2019 **GRATIS**



Cortesia ADN Galeria. Foto: Roberto Ruiz

**TIME OUT DIU****DETALLS****DATES I HORES****ELS USUARIS DIUEN**

Tercera exposició individual ADN Galeria de l'artista sud-africà Kendell Geers on pren com a punt de partida la cita homònima de René Descartes en 1637 'I Think Therefore I am' ('Penso, per tant existeixo'). Reestructurada sota el signe contemporani, la lògica cartesiana que tal vegada va governar el món es trasllada al terreny d'un neollenguatge caracteritzat per l'aparició constant de notícies falses.

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# Wall Street International

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2019

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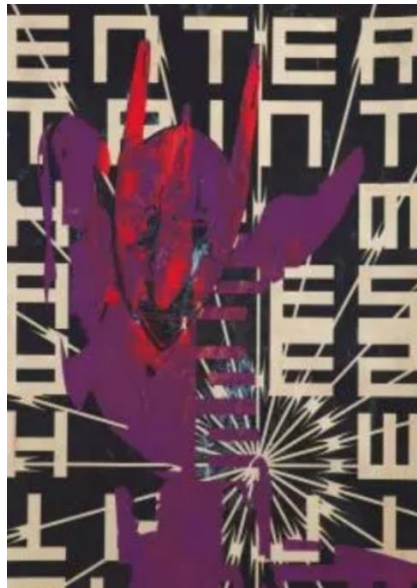
WART

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## Kendell Geers

6 Apr — 19 May 2019 at ADN Gallery in Barcelona, Spain

27 MARCH 2019



ADN Galeria in Barcelona inaugurates the third solo exhibition at the gallery of Kendell Geers. Already back in 1993 the artist changed his date of birth to May 1968, giving birth to himself as part of a worldwide social revolution. On April 6th, day of the opening, the artist himself will explain his work to the public.

The exhibition takes, as its starting point, the eponymous 1637 quote by René Descartes “I Think Therefore I am,” recast into the logic of the contemporary moment. The Cartesian logic that once ruled the world has however since fallen to the wasteland of newspeak, now dubbed fake news. Around the world politicians are capitulating in favor of the highest bidder, selling their souls for a quick fix. If we do not lower the temperature of the planet by 1,5 degrees Celsius in the next 12 years, climate change will accelerate beyond the point of no return. Throwing Descartes to the hounds, Geers says Now is not the time to think – it’s time to ProTest. His third solo exhibition at ADN Galeria is aptly called “I PROTEST THEREFOR I AM” and it’s an artist’s call to arms. A trickster and storyteller, artist and magician, Kendell Geers throws in a hashtag and rolls his tongue over the letters, smoothing them into a single invented word #iPROtesttHEREforeIam. The capital letters transform into signposts towards the contradictions of a protest exhibition in a commercial art gallery.



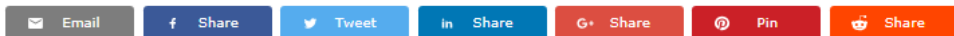
Hashtags, words, letters, memes and slogans fill the endless columns of Social Media, reduced to empty signifiers as everybody wears camouflage and everybody is a seasonal revolution. The small letter "i" that once referred to the individual, who thinks there she is, has been stolen from the consumer's hip pocket and branded as a corporate trademark. "I am because iPhone and I think therefore iPad and I have my GoPro to prove it to my selfie!". We are all now addicted to technological devices with their promise of instant satisfaction through self broadcasting our egos to millions of hungry social mediacrats. We can never be sated however because the virus of language is an addictive lie and the machine is nothing more than a junk dealer. William Burroughs explained, "The junk merchant doesn't sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client".

Kendell Geers proTESTS our sense of reading, understanding, semantics and symbols, freely plucking the fruits from the forest of every ripening protests. His manifesto reads "Art Changes the World - ONE PERCEPTION AT A TIME" and that is exactly what the exhibition will do to the viewer who takes the time to give space.

Describing himself as an 'AniMystikAKtivist', he takes a syncretic approach to art that weaves together diverse Afro-European traditions, including animism, alchemy, mysticism, ritual and a socio-political activism, and is laced with black humor, irony and cultural contradiction.

In the spirit of the archetypal trickster, Geers uses his experiences as a white African like a skeleton key to unlock our understanding of history, culture and identity. His work locates itself between tradition and the contemporary, a white African as deeply influenced by the powerful legacy of traditional African art as he is by the European avant-garde movements, from Dada and Surrealism to punk and the Situationist International.

Spiritually charged, politically poignant and socially engaged, the work of Kendell Geers cannot be categorized as either European or African, but is rather a prolonged metaphysical dialogue between cultures, archetypal signs and sacred symbols. Kendell Geers appeared on the international art scene at the end of the 1980s and since then his work has been presented at biennials and institutions from around the world. He was one of the artists who represented South Africa at the Venice Biennial in 1993, the first multiracial and multicultural international exhibition to mark the end of the Apartheid era. He presented his work in both Okwui Enwezor's Documenta 11 as well as the most recent Documenta 14. He has presented work on the Taipei, Havana, Venice, Johannesburg, Kwang Ju, Sao Paolo, Shanghai, Istanbul and many other Biennials around the world.



## ADN Gallery

Was founded as a hybrid platform between commercial mediation and cultural contribution aiming at promoting current artistic ideas and trends. The program focuses on content-based productions that work as a semantic reflection of the contextual dynamics in which they emerge.

[Gallery profile](#)

Location  
Barcelona, Spain

Founded in  
2003



1. Kendell Geers. Courtesy of ADN Gallery  
2. Kendell Geers. Courtesy of ADN Gallery  
3. Kendell Geers. Courtesy of ADN Gallery

## *The word is art*

Michael Petry

Thames & Hudson: London, 2018



Kendell Geers's *The Treason of Images* (WTC2) (above) is a contemporary take on Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (see p. 11), asking us to assess what is an image. Images are not the things depicted (a pipe or the World Trade Center), but a sign or signifier of meaning, often contested. Some people believe the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were not what they seemed, but rather a CIA conspiracy. Geers explains: 'What made the reactions to 11 September so interesting for me was that, for the first time in New York, people were suddenly confronted with the reality of death. The image of the collapsing towers became the contemporary version of the skull in 17th-century painting, a memento mori.'

Christian Marclay's *Rriipp* (opposite) is an example of onomatopoeia (the word depicted sounds like the noise associated with it), and is a graphic exploration of how image and sound function. It is reminiscent of the artist's *Surround Sounds* installation (pp. 144–46), in which similar words were animated and projected on the gallery walls. *Rriipp* looks as if it has been ripped from a comic book, so that its visual presence is matched by an aural one that is constructed by the viewer when they read the text. The print has itself been ripped, further compounding expectations about the sound. Marclay asks: can we hear the sound of the action?

ABOVE • Kendell Geers  
*The Treason of Images (WTC2)*, 2001  
Inkjet on canvas  
96 × 116 cm (37¾ × 45¾ in.)

OPPOSITE • Christian Marclay  
*Rriipp*, 2015  
4-colour print on Hahnemühle  
Etching White paper  
Original paper size: 78 × 53.5 cm  
(30¾ × 21 in.); height dimension  
of each edition is variable, as each  
is hand-torn by the artist  
Varied edition: edition of 60  
and 20 artist's prints





The British artist Martin Creed is known for his conceptual works, all of which are numbered. *Work No. 1092, MOTHERS* (above) features the word in white neon and steel, standing at 5 metres (over 16 ft) high. It slowly rotates, and the viewer is invited to stand beneath it; the idea of the mother is literally placed on a pedestal. Originally shown in London, the piece has since been exhibited several times, including at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 2012. Creed explains: 'I think the most powerful and difficult relationship in the whole world is between a mother and a child. That is the one where the baby is literally part of the mother and is not separate, and then you have to come out and be separate...I think to actually be a mother is very difficult and to have a mother is difficult.' The work is highly personal yet speaks to a global audience.

Kendell Geers, a South African artist, uses a wide variety of media in his text-based works, from paint for wall-based installations to neon. *S:LAUGHTER* (opposite) is a play on words and the ways in which meaning can quickly change. The large neon 'S' turns on and off, so that the viewer reads either 'SLAUGHTER' or 'LAUGHTER' – words that are emotionally worlds apart. Discomfort and disruption of meaning are at the core of the piece, as Geers asks the viewer to try to merge the words into one work. It has been shown in various locations, including outside the Nobel Peace Center, Oslo, and the Contemporary Art Museum St Louis, Missouri.

ABOVE • Martin Creed  
*Work No. 1092, MOTHERS*, 2011  
White neon and steel  
5 × 12.5 × 0.2 m  
(16 ft 4½ in. × 41 ft ¼ in. × 7⅞ in.)

OPPOSITE • Kendell Geers  
*S:LAUGHTER*, 2003  
Neon • 10 × 2 m (32 ft 9¾ × 78¾ in.)



Kendell Geers's painting *Tainted Love XIII* (2012) features the Afrikaans word 'VOETSTOOTS'. It can be translated as 'offhand' or 'straight away'. But perhaps its secondary meaning, which is 'without picking or choosing' or 'with all defects', best suggests what Geers is hinting at here. The word sits on top of a wild splash of acrylic paint and oxidized copper, recalling Andy Warhol's 'Piss' (or Oxidation) paintings. The explosion of feeling and emotions that love, tainted or not, engenders is visually explored in the work, and made more complex by the addition of the bold text.

ABOVE • Kendell Geers  
*Tainted Love XIII*, 2012  
Acrylic and copper oxidized on canvas  
100 × 120 cm (39½ × 47¼ in.)

# Kendell Geers Goes Afropunk

TLmag 29 extended

Special Guests Oct 7, 2018

**The South-African born, Belgium-based artist presented "A dialogue with history and tradition"**

**Text by Rab Messina**

How did African art made by the hands of the Lega, the Songye and the Grebo inspire European avant-garde representatives like Picasso, Malevich and Matisse? That's the exploration behind AfroPunk, Kendell Geers' joint exhibition hosted at Didier Claes's and Rodolphe Janssen's spaces for the Brussels Gallery Weekend this past September 2017. The South-African born, Belgium-based artist presented a conversation between the source and the contemporary, with sculptures, drawings and paintings that blur the lines between traditional techniques and their more recent counterparts —like collage and 3D printing.

**TLmag: What does the "punk" refer to in this context, beyond the use of scissors?**

Kendell Geers: I love words that have contradictory meanings, depending on their context. Punk can be considered positive or negative, depending on who is saying it and in relation to what. I love the fact that it derives from the word spunk, meaning life force, a virile embrace of experience. Of course, the exhibition card refers to the classic Sex Pistols' God Save the Queen design by Jamie Reid. In this instance, though, the Queen happens to be the 16th century Benin Queen Mother lyoba, a great warrior and sorceress. There are two famous ivory masks depicting lyoba, one on the British Museum and the other in the Metropolitan Museum, both of which were looted by the Colonial British Army during the Punitive Expedition of 1897.

**TLmag: You've said the exhibition is "a dialogue with history and tradition." We've been seeing that word, "dialogue", and its synonym, "conversation", quite often these days. Why do you think contemporary art is so interested in this type of discussion?**

KG: Edmund Burke said that if "you don't know your history you are doomed to repeat it." On the other hand, history is written by the winner and when those winners are defeated in turn, history is rewritten by the next winner. I lived through one such rewriting of the so called "historical facts" after the fall of Apartheid. My dialogue is an iconoclast, believing that absence makes the art grow fonder.



**TLmag: That being said, what is your favourite piece of dialogue at AfroPunk?**

KG: The contradiction between the traditional and the contemporary, the chance meeting of Sol Lewitt wearing a Pende Mbangú sickness mask at a ball thrown by Stanley Livingstone Kubrick.

**TLmag: Where do you think our fascination with masks comes from?**

KG: The mask erases the ego and that makes it so much easier to tell the lies you need express in order to have the freedom to tell the truth.

**TLmag: Do you think there's any truth to the position that 3D printing came to solve our responsive need for the tactility of the digital in an increasingly digital world?**

KG: Not at all: human beings are fundamentally lazy and would rather spend all day long at the beach, or on the sofa, doing nothing. The recent proliferation of drones and 3D printing means that we will soon be able to order absolutely anything on the phone and have it either delivered by drone directly to the beach towel, or immediately printed by the machine placed on the coffee table where books used to be.

**TLmag: In the past five years, how do you think the internet has changed the way we see certain countries in Africa and their contemporary realities?**

KG: The internet is mostly fake news, filtered by algorithms and statistics. It is very easy for armies of propaganda engineers behind computers in Russia, Washington, Delhi or Ghent to pretend on social media that they are part of a revolution anywhere in the world. Opinion is for sale. It's very difficult to know what is true or false, real or fake news today. The future of freedom and democracy is hidden somewhere inside the Dark Web.

**TLmag: What importance do you assign to humour in your pieces, especially considering your home country's recent history and even yours?**

KG: I called one of my first monographic books *My Tongue in Your Cheek* – only humour can save us now that jokes are elected president all around the world.

## RWM RÀDIO WEB MACBA

### SON[I]A

**sonia:** Magnitude that expresses the level of sonorous sensation produced by an intense sound.

The RWM emits SON[I]A, its first program, since May 2 2006.

SON[I]A aims to be an alternative way to receive the information produced during Museum activities; audio information brought to us by characters who take part in activities in and around the MACBA.

This series is produced by: Dolores Acebal, David Armengol, Bani Brusadin, Lúia Coderch, André Chédas, Lucrecia Dalt, Ricardo Duque, Sonia Fernández Pan, Jaume Ferrete, Antonio Gagliano, Carlos Gómez, Roc Jiménez de Cisneros, Raül Hinojosa, Arnau Horta, Yolanda Jolis, Sònia López, Lluís Nacenta, Enric Puig Punyet, Quim Pujol, Mario Quelart, Anna Ramos and Matías Rossi.



### #231 Kendell Geers

11.10.2016 (43' 48")

Kendell Geers ran away from home at fifteen, leaving behind the oppressive environment of a highly authoritarian working class Afrikaans family. This early experience also led him to develop a deep mistrust of power structures in general, and eventually ended up shaping his ideas about art and the way he connects concepts through his practice. In the mid-eighties, just before going into exile for political reasons, he was a member of KOOS, a post-punk band with a cult following founded by artist Neil Goedhals and actor Marcel van Heerden: an explosive mix of dissent, poetry, and the rejection of a system that was clearly on the brink of collapse. "Any form of power for me is something that needs to be questioned and challenged. Today I'm still concerned with that same question of how power manifests and how an artist may intersect with those structures of power."

Involved in the anti-apartheid movement from a very young age, his work reflects a context with many layers of conflict, and acerbically points out the social and racial imbalances of South African society and its colonial history. At first, in his early works along the lines of readymades and conceptual art – always shocking and provocative (like his bomb threat that ended up at Documenta) – and later turning towards exploring the spiritual realm and altered states of consciousness.

SON[I]A talks to Kendell Geers about terrorism, linguistic violence. Africanness and socio-political

ARTE

## Las galerías de Barcelona vuelven a la carrera

- A principios de mes se celebraba la segunda edición del Barcelona Gallery Weekend (BGW). Estas son las mejores propuestas artísticas que deja en la cartelera de las galerías de la ciudad



Anna Maria Guasch

0

Barcelona - Actualizado: 11/10/2016 12:16h

## Kendell Geers



Una de las piezas de «ProPaganDaDa» de Kendell Geers

Geers (Johannesburgo, 1968) es un artista político, y no sólo por su obra, sino por su posición como sujeto que vive en una determinada comunidad y está comprometido con la Historia surafricana. El abuso de poder, las desigualdades sociales y raciales, entre otras cuestiones, lo llevan a plantear preguntas a las que difícilmente encuentra respuesta. Tras ellas late cierta autobiografía que explica cómo, por ejemplo, **en 1988 fue uno de los 143 jóvenes que se opusieron públicamente a alistarse en el Ejército surafricano**, lo que le reportó una condena de prisión y una vida en el exilio.

«ProPaganDaDa». ADN Galería. C/ Enric Granados, 49.  
Hasta el 5 de noviembre.



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Àrtic: Art en bicicleta amb Josep París

28.09.2016

Josep París passeja en bicicleta per les galeries de Barcelona abans de la Gallery Weekend

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# Times LIVE

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## SOUTH AFRICA

# Change Geers: Q and A with Kendell Geers on design that defies the mould

24 February 2015 - 02:11

BY ANDREA NAGEL

Carpenters Workshop Gallery, London and Paris, is represented for the first time in South Africa by world-renowned South African artist Kendell Geers. He brings his designs back to his homeland for the first time as the featured artist of the Guild design fair.

### Inspiration behind this collection?

As a young South African artist I was impressed by the ingenuity of people living in the shanty towns. With a brick and a plank, they'd make a chair. With a car bonnet and a drum, they'd have a table. Their circumstance created a necessity and they used discarded things to come up with innovative ideas to make their lives easier. When I was invited to think about making furniture I decided to work with that same logic. I was inspired by the challenge of making furniture using tyres, packing pallets, oil drums and other discarded materials lying around big cities.

### Is it difficult to transition from artist to designer?

I don't think of what I make in distinctive terms - it's counter-creative. I prefer to think of my furniture as works of art that you can sit on or sculptures that emit light. The way I work is close to the "Renaissance" idea of the artist as a researcher and my interests take me from design to alchemy via philosophy.

### Are you ever fully satisfied with a piece of art or design?

Every work introduces another. Ideas are never static. What seems complete one day needs another level another day as my understanding grows. I think of the works as talismanic gifts shared with the people who choose to live with them. So art becomes an open dialogue between the maker and the person who engages with the work. Art has the unique ability to change the world, one perception at a time.

### Should Europeans appropriate African style to sell their designs?

Art should be an open exchange of spirit and ideas and nobody has the right to control creativity. "African Style" is often European fantasy in the first place, brought to Africa by the colonial merchants a century ago. The world has opened up and if African artists and designers find inspiration in Brazil or Australia or Texas or even the Louvre, I think that's liberating.

### Is it important for works of art to have messages?

Beautiful things are said more poetically with beautiful form and ugly truths need to be said with their own ugly spirit. Art or design not rooted in content is simply an empty sign and that's a waste of time, money, effort and resources. Beauty might be in the eye of the beholder, but that eye is never disconnected from the world.

- Guild is on at The Lookout, V&A Waterfront, Cape Town, tomorrow to Sunday, [www.gulldesignfair.com](http://www.gulldesignfair.com)



T 2014  
PAGE 5JUNE & MORAN  
MARCH 1 2015

## { FURNITURE }

## Shifting Geers

This once-shocking conceptual artist is now producing high-end designer furniture — and watercolours. Shivers. By **Sean O'Toole**

**S**INCERITY in the art world is a bit like honesty in politics: a slippery proposition. Take Kendall Geers, who is currently exhibiting functional sculpture — that's chairs, in layman's terms — at the Guild Design Fair in Cape Town.

Newtillash: Geers is a changed man. Where once he was provocative and unapologetic, the Joburg-born, Brussels-based former bad boy is now modest, measured and sincere. His new sincerity is marked by some startling changes that extend beyond his polite public manner. Aside from producing high-end designer furniture, Geers is also painting. The horror.

An artist who once described his work — broken-bottle-and-glass wire sculptures — to be about the fears, paranoia and desires of "white, paranoid suburban people" is now apparently catering to this same audience's caprice.

Well, not exactly. Fancy a stool that is pretty much an oil drum sexed up in bronze? Or a chair made of stacked car tyres with a back plonked on top? How about a lounge made from stacking pallets?

It is unlikely that this binging intelligent artist's furniture will find favour amongst a mainstream design set that venerates Don Draper's digs as cool.

The reasons for Geers's mid-career shift — just don't call it a mid-life crisis, or liken it to TS Eliot's discovery of Catholicism after wandering the wasteland — are cumulative. Partly it has to do with the current austerity, which the art world has marked by a series of record-breaking art sales. Go figure.

This is exactly what Geers has been doing. "In recent years, I have come to completely need to reconfigure the idea of art," he explained at the opening of his exhibition, *AniMystikAKtivist*, at the Goodman Gallery in Cape Town in December.

"I'm not the kind of person who is going to become cynical or ironic and make fun of a system like that because I believe in art," he added.

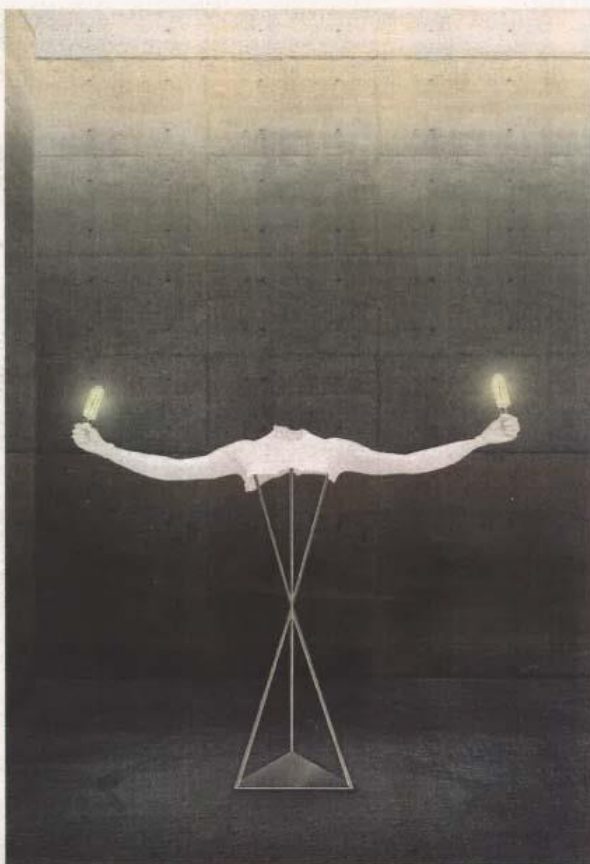
With disarming sincerity he added, "Art has the ability to change the world, one perception at a time."

Some art, let's agree, and very infrequently watercolour painting. Geers's Goodman show last year included 14 watercolour paintings, each featuring a stencilled statement — "joking", "thinking", "spanking" and so on — floating in a sea of blue, green or red. Last year he showed larger canvas works in London and Paris.

"It is not a pastiche or parody," said Geers about his paintings. "There is no irony. It is not art about art, or art about the market."

His decision to paint, he explained, had been partly informed by post-1990 culture.

"We live in an age of acceleration. Sampling, cump and mechanical reproduction have become the norm. From 1987 until today, photography has moved into a major art form and sells for huge amounts



White Dahlia VI. 2014, bronze



Flesh of the spirit 10-02



Thrown for a King



Kendall Geers on his polished bronze stool. Picture: LYDIE NESVABDA

of money in South Africa and around the world. Collage is the norm in music, art, film."

Painting, he said, presented a way to rethink and oppose the dominant logic of the market. Of course, there is the indiscreet truth that this same market values painting above all other media.

"Habit is a very dangerous thing," elaborated Geers. "As soon as you fall into the cosy zone of habit and do what is expected of you, then you are basically dying."

Which helps explain his foray into design. Geers is represented at the Guild Design Fair by Carpenters Workshop Gallery, a London-based enterprise dealing in artist- and designer-made pieces of furniture and objects d'art.

"My association with Carpenters actually goes back a couple of years and revolved around an exhibition that never happened in the end," explained Geers in an e-mail. "I really enjoyed the process and the challenge of working outside the box and it inspired more work."

Geers is adamant that there is an abiding logic that connects his "design" and "art" output.

"All the chairs have been made from the idea of discarded urban materials like tyres, packing pallets and oil drums. It's very close to the ways I worked in the very beginning, recycling waste, although now there is that alchemical transformative process because the materials are no longer waste once I am done."

In case you missed it, Geers is interested in magic and alchemy: Gandalafian magic, if you will; not Steven "Dynamo" Frayne-esque trickery by illusion and invisible wires. "Magic is defined as the method of science with the aim of religion," he told his Goodman audience last year.

"The task of the artist is very complex because one is in communication with this inner space of the imagination, spirit, unconscious, whatever you want to call it, and then the outer space of spiritualising matter and materialising spirit." **LS**

## BLOUINARTINFO

### **Haus der Kunst in Munich opens major exhibition by the South African artist Kendell Geers**



Kendell Geers' 'Hanging Piece' (1993)

The Haus der Kunst in Munich is the first European museum with a detailed insight into the work of South African artist Kendell Geers (born 1968). His provocative installations, videos, sculptures and performances are strongly influenced by his background and his experience as a white South African. This exhibition takes the new director Okwui Enwezor, who heads the House in October 2011, for the first time with a strong exhibition own statement to the public.

Kendell Geers joined already at the age of 15 of the anti-apartheid movement, and later developed a work of art that combines the private to the political, poetry with misery, and violence with erotic tension. Life and work of the artist can be divided into two, each decade

comprehensive work phases: The first, political phase - which is here first time in Europe - covers the years 1988-2000, at that time lived in the Geers system of apartheid and continued deals with its contradictions. With found objects such as barbed wire, neon lights and broken glass, he came to one of provocation, but also of humor influenced visual vocabulary. With acts of appropriation, he formulated questions about the relationship between individual and society. Sun Geers changed his actual birth order in May 1968, the start of the civil rights movement and students.

Later, European phase in Geers' work began in 2000 with the move of the artist to Brussels. To the rebellious nature of his work is now added poetic moment. The range of topics extends from the history of South Africa towards a post-colonial, global context, as he deals with cross-cutting issues of the time such as terrorism, spirituality and mortality.

Life and work of the artist can be read as a living archive - consisting of political events, photographs, letters and literary texts that serve as sources of inspiration and Geers also form a continuation of his work.



## Make art, like love | Interview with Kendell Geers

By Anna Savitskaya ([/authors/anna-savitskaya/](#)) - Friday, October 17, 2014

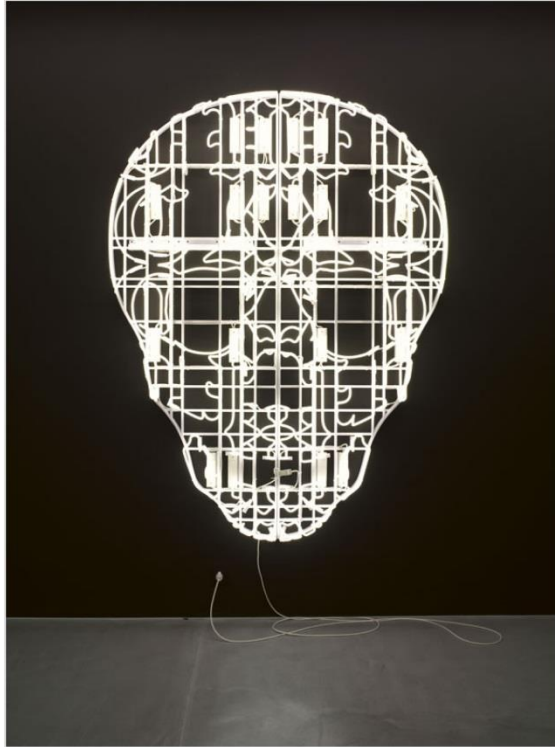


Broken glass and barbed wire always play a major role in describing Kendell Geers' attitude to what is going on in the world. The range of media used is very diverse: sculpture, installation, painting, photography, and drawing. Kendell Geers has exhibited globally and took part in a number of events: Documenta, Taipei Biennial, Lyon Biennial, Glasstress at the Venice Biennial to name a few. He also had solo shows in Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst in Gent, Palais de Tokyo, Haus der Kunst in Munich etc.

### “Make art, like love” – from Manifesto written by Kendell Geers in 2011

Kendell Geers was born in Johannesburg during the time of apartheid. When turned 15, Kendell ran away from home in order to get involved into the anti-apartheid movement. After finishing school Kendell enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg for a Fine Arts degree. To avoid imprisonment he had to leave South Africa in 1989 and lived for a short period in exile in the United Kingdom and New York where he worked as an assistant to artist Richard Prince. After coming back to South Africa in 1990 Kendell stays there till 2000 and then he moves to Brussels. The period between 1988 and 2000 is considered to be very fruitful in Kendell's career, full of harsh political context in his work. Broken glass and barbed wire always play a major role in describing his attitude to what is going on in the world. The range of media used is also diverse: sculpture, installation, painting, photography, and drawing. In 2011 Kendell Geers wrote a Manifesto, where with a series of statements he shares his attitude towards life, time, love, art.

Kendell Geers has exhibited globally and took part in a number of events: Documenta, Taipei Biennial, Lyon Biennial, Glasstress at the Venice Biennial to name a few. He also had solo shows in Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst in Gent, Palais de Tokyo, Haus der Kunst in Munich etc.



Numb Skull, 2007, White neon skull, Photo: A. Morin, Courtesy: the artist

**Artdependence Magazine: Your works can be interpreted as a political statement against terror and suppression made through art. What does art mean to you? Is it, in the first place, your asylum, way of expression or a protest form, means to bring a message?**

Kendell Geers: I believe that the strength of art lies in its ability to transcend logic through contradiction. If it is fully embodied, art could never be subject to a "for or against" reading for it is always simultaneously both creative and destructive. My work does not judge the spirit of the world I live in, but embodies it instead. Art is certainly a sign of hope for it permits the imagination to wander where it cannot in reality. If there be protest in my art, it is in the form of celebrating life and affirming spirit.

**AD: In 1985, to avoid conscription, you enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg for a Fine Arts degree. Was it a spontaneous action or you were already interested in art (and if so, how did it start?).**

KG: It was absolutely a spontaneous protest against the socio-political condition I found myself in at the time. I literally enrolled myself into art in order to not go to jail for six years as punishment for refusing to serve in the Apartheid military. The conditions of enrolling at Wits University at the time dictated that I give a second choice and I felt that to be in contradiction with my right to choose so I decided to follow the irrational illogical option, the second choice, in celebration of my refusal to enter the rationalism of military conscription. Until that day I had never so much as opened a book about art before, much less even drawn an apple.

***AD: How did your trip to the USA influence you when you escaped there at the age of 21? Did apprenticeship with American artist Richard Price change your vision in general and of art in particular?***

KG: I lost faith in what seemed so compelling from a distance. I realized that so called "post modernism" was tagged on by the critics after the fact. I understood that art was a system, already rotten to its core and that what I had perceived to be history was little more than circumstance. The eggshells of my perception were broken and it was time to start making omelets.



Manifest, 2007, Blue neon (What Do You Believe In?), Photo: A.Morin, Courtesy: the artist

***AD: In 1990 after Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners' were released from prison, you finally returned from your exile to Johannesburg where you worked as an artist, curator and art critic. Why did you go back to South Africa? Did you ever think of staying in the USA and working as an artist there?***

KG: I always saw myself as part of the Anti-Apartheid movement so with the release of Nelson Mandela I saw it as a duty to return to South Africa to be part of the new democracy. I returned to South Africa, inspired to build a better future.

***AD: Please tell us about your self portrait (1995). How do you see yourself in it?***



KG: I can talk about this broken bottle "self portrait" for hours!

Many people think that I chose Heineken because I actually like beer and more than that, drink Heineken and I have to correct them. Identity is very complex, especially if you are a White African and self-loathing is part of your cultural inheritance. In 1990, when Mandela was released and Apartheid de-legislated, our identity as South Africans was up for grabs. Our history, culture, morality, faith, values and everything that one might normally take for granted, as "identity" was in my case illegitimate. As an African I consider myself an animist and respect my ancestors, but those ancestors are Dutch. The broken bottle of beer speaks of identity as violence, the self as broken, the spirit the bottle once contained has been drunk and all that remains is the garbage of history.

**AD: In 2011 you wrote a political-erotic-mythical manifest, where you state your basic life principles. How did this idea come up to you? Is there any main principle you follow throughout your life?**

KG: I found myself in a deep depression at the time brought about by the injustices of an art system that cares only about market ranking and price tags. The art system has no use or value for vision, integrity or consequence. I decided to mark time by writing down my thoughts about art. I know that my thoughts then were very different than they were in 1988 when I began and almost certainly would be different again from what they might be in 2022. I decided to take the courage to admit what I am thinking and express what I believe art might be in a time when most artists are terrified of being caught with their pants down. The manifest is true and correct only for that moment of writing, but the thoughts expressed flow from somewhere and are on their way to somewhere else as everything in life is interconnected. Full Manifest is [here](http://www.kendellgeers.com/library/texts/435) (<http://www.kendellgeers.com/library/texts/435>).

**AD: Is recognition important to you?**

KG: Much more important than recognition is the desire for respect.

**AD: Are there any political events now happening in the world, that you would like to refer to in your work?**

KG: The planet is in meltdown and if we do not slow down and pull back from the precipice we are all going to drive our species into extinction. I don't care for politics today because every politician seems to have a price. How can we speak about politics when corporations have bank balances that are the double of the United States? How can we speak about politics when the politicians allow fracking and tolerate the accelerated destruction of nature? How can we respect politicians who use fear as an operating system to dumb their constituencies down into docile consumers?

## The Interview Issue: Kendell Geers

ARTSOUTHAFRICA 13.1 is the 'Interview Issue.' In it, we engage in conversation with a number of carefully selected artists, curators, writers and organisations who we know are truly committed to transformation, to changing perceptions about contemporary African art practice, and promoting the integration of communities that might otherwise not be exposed to the wealth of talent from the continent and the ways in which art can change lives. This is the conversation piece we published with the infamous South African conceptual artist, Kendell Geers.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Photograph of the artist by Lydie Nesvadba and *Post Pop Pangyrik* by Kendell Geers (2013)

The very earliest European maps depicted a simplified view of the world, consisting of Europe, Asia and Libya divided by the Mediterranean Sea, the Nile River and the Black Sea flowing out from the Phasis River. Apart from the misguided notion that the world was flat, the map certainly illustrated the fact that from the very earliest image of the world, Africa (Libya) was an integral and essential component of the European imagination and worldview. Centuries before that, Pliny the Elder fondly noted "ex Africa semper aliquid novi," being, "always something new coming out of Africa." In his book, 'The Natural History', he mentions, amongst other interesting facts, the existence of white skinned African tribes. Long before Pliny, the Egyptians created art, architecture and a sophisticated culture with a religious worldview that is unparalleled even to this day; the world's most impressive and mythical library was said to be in Alexandria. Moreover, it is no secret that the origin of humankind began in Southern Africa and then moved north. So why is it that we are still asking this question about Africa and its identity as if it is something that still needs to be determined and then justified?

The Europe versus Africa question is very tired and relies on clichés and insecurity in order to pass. I have witnessed way too many contemporary African artists claim that Picasso stole his language from Africa, and yet very few of those same artists could explain which ethnic group created the masks Picasso was quoting, much less understand their original religious or social function. The French would surely not get away with saying that Picasso "stole" his cubist ideas from Cezanne, so why do we even tolerate such a one-dimensional reading on our African continent? The sociological and cultural cliché that such a discussion demands is colonial to the core, for it reduces the long history of an entire continent to a graphic element based upon a European misreading of African masks.

It has long served the interests of a very few people, both African and others, to define the continent according to colonial parameters. Ever since the Berlin Conference of 1884, in which a few European countries drew up the borders for the entire African continent, the same European interests have been trying to determine and control what Africa can and cannot be. A handful of European and African curators, writers, historians and opportunists have taken it upon themselves to speak for a continent of at least 55 countries, set on controlling who and what gets to be 'African' or not.

The criteria by which Africa is understood rarely considers the African identity of Christiaan Barnard performing the world's first open heart transplant in Cape Town, or Mark Shuttleworth, one of only two space tourists, or J.M. Coetzee, the only writer who ever won both the Nobel Prize for literature as well as the Pulitzer Prize; twice. Are Academy Award winner Charlize Theron, Interview Magazine editor Ingrid Sischy, and founder and curator of Performa festival Roselee Goldberg not African? William Kentridge and Marlene Dumas are amongst the highest priced and best-selling artists on the planet and both have very deep African roots.

There are those who may even argue that these are all white Africans and therefore do not count, but they would also conveniently forget that the most powerful person in the entire art world today is Okwui Enwezor. It is no secret that the 'Documenta XI' model in Kassel, the most important global showcase of international art, was conceived and born in Norwood, Johannesburg. Some may even suggest that Yinka Shonibare, Olabisi Silva, Adel Abdessemed, Kader Attiah and Ghada Amer are not 'African' anymore on account of the fact that they no longer live on the continent. They will find every reason to ignore everything that does not fit into the image of Africa as an unsophisticated culture, unable to exist outside of a pre-literate, animistic and backward continent of Noble Savages. It should be added that this perception of animism is, not without coincidence, a very watered-down tourist reading of the deep, profoundly true mysteries of life; engaging with it demands more respect and attention than the gatekeepers and custodians have the strength or time for.

This conception and image of Africa and 'Africanness' that we are constantly being forced into a discussion about, has been way too influenced by the criteria laid down by people like André Magnin and Jean Pigozzi who, in putting together their collection, stated that African artists should be formally untrained, for any training at all would destroy their "natural talent." Why are we still locked into a debate about Africa in racist terms that disqualify intelligence, excellence and vision in favour of racist fantasies?

The discussion surrounding "authentic" versus "inauthentic" African art grows out of the academic reading of classical African art, and seeps through every discussion of the contemporary. It is massively divisive to try to exclude the Arabic North and the White South as "inauthentic," just as it would be blinkered to suggest that the classic Egyptian and Ethiopian traditions are more European than they are African. Such discussions are only possible if you accept the colonial borders drawn up in 1884 and buy into the European definitions of "authentic." Is it not enough that you were born and raised in Africa in order to be considered African, and could any self-respecting artist even imagine creating an inauthentic work of art? Moreover, why should artists of colour be excluded from the discussion, when Kara Walker, David Hammons, Otolith Group, Steve Maqueen, Stan Douglas and Carrie Mae Weems are often even better versed in the African traditions than their continental counterparts?

No sooner does one take off from Johannesburg International Airport than one acquires the label 'ex-South African', as if one's identity is something that may be discarded like an old set of clothes. This kind of xenophobia is a hangover from the apartheid era and is really nothing more than a rusty old nail that pins one's foot to the blood-red-soiled earth of our history.

Given the African diaspora, and given that today there is a South African emigrant or exile in just about every corner of the world, imagine the strength to be gained from embracing identity in an open-source manner rather than constantly drawing attention to our old apartheid inferiority complexes. Instead of looking for differences to define everything that we cannot be, it might be worth our effort to crawl out from beneath the laager wheels and embrace Africa as a continent large enough to support difference, contradiction and dissent. Why do we demand of ourselves to justify our continental identity when we are happy to accept that Europe, North and South America and Asia are vast continents inhabited by billions of people with different identities that need never be justified? Has any European artist ever been asked to define the authenticity of their European art?

I was thinking about your questions as I watched the FIFA world cup final, and thought about the irony that the German soccer team included players of Turkish as well as African descent (in addition to the blonde-hair-blue-eyes stereotype) yet nobody dared to ask any of them to prove how 'German' or 'European' they are. Why do we always try so damn hard to disqualify our artists with the non-discussion of identity by playing into the hands of the European goalkeepers of cultural politics? Is identity not something that we simply are and could not escape even if we tried?

The world has changed; cultural definitions and borders are constantly being called into question today as Nike, Adidas, Microsoft, Apple, Ikea, Nokia and Sony melt down every difference in sweatshops around the planet, in order to make us all walk, talk, look and think the same. Rather than a discussion about what makes contemporary African Art authentic or not, surely the more pressing issue is about the possible role that art can play in the age of global meltdown and spiritual bankruptcy?

Kendell Geers is a South African conceptual artist, living and working in Brussels, whose work is often seen as a response to horrid socio-political conditions. Using a wide variety of media, from painting to sculpture and installation, Geers layers materials as he layers ethical, aesthetical and spiritual questions. His work explores the boundaries of what is permissible and questions the most basic concepts of identity, power and language.



## Exhibition traces the shift and the development of Kendell Geers' aesthetic language



Journalists walk through the installation 'Mirrors, Razor mesh' (2008) of South African artist Kendell Geers during a press tour of the exhibition 'Kendell Geers 1988-2012' at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, southern Germany, on January 31, 2013. AFP PHOTO / ANDREAS GEBERT.

MUNICH.- The artistic practice of Kendell Geers spans a variety of media and genres including installation, sculpture, drawing, video, performance, and photography. This exhibition traces the shift and the development of the artist's aesthetic language, grouped together from 1988 to 2000 and from 2000 until the present, each being a twelve-year cycle. The show provides the first overview in Europe of Geers's political phase from 1988 to 2000. Born into a staunch Jehovah's Witness, white, working-class Afrikaans family in the height of apartheid, Geers understood the power of faith, politics, and ideology at a very young age. He ran away from home when he was 15 to join the ranks of the militant anti-apartheid movement. From those seminal experiences as a front-line activist that earned him a six-year prison sentence for treason, Geers developed a body of work that fuses the personal with the

political, the poetic with the abject, and the violent with an erotic tension. In his works of this period he explored the moral and ethical contradictions of the apartheid system and aimed to challenge all forms of power. For example, in 1993-94, during the run-up to South Africa's first democratic election, Geers joined every major political party, from the extremist right wing to the Communist party. This was a period in South Africa's socio-political transition to a democracy with constant flare-ups and violent clashes. On July 19, 1993, the day that the artist joined the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), seven IFP members were executed by ANC gunmen. By supporting the whole political spectrum, Geers expressed his doubts about the fetishization of party politics. The resulting performance artwork "Untitled [ANC, AVF, AWB, CP, DP, IFP, NP, PAC, SACPI]" was so controversial at the time that the artist was forced into hiding. Throughout his artistic practice Geers developed a visual vocabulary characterized by provocation, humor, and violence. The use of found objects such as barbed wire, neon lights, or glass shards indicates the crucial role the readymade plays in his work. Geers selects the quotidian object for its symbolic value rather than for aesthetic reasons. According to Geers, every object is more than the sum of its physical parts and is instead the embodiment of an ideology, and a portrait both of its maker and its consumer. For this reason the only work of art he ever made with the title "Self Portrait" is a bottle of Heineken beer with a broken bottleneck. Like his ancestors the Boers, Heineken beer was imported into South Africa. For Geers, this beer represents the values, and morality of the Boers, convinced that apartheid was a legitimate political system. In rejecting his own ancestors and their totalitarian ideologies, Geers symbolically breaks open the beer bottle in order to set himself free. His "Self Portrait" (1995) now stands as a monument to the liberation of the self from colonial rule. The readymade also plays an important role in the form of the artist's personal archive that serves as a source of inspiration and represents a continuum in his oeuvre. Encompassing newspaper articles, Hollywood films, political posters, photographs, and letters, this archive illuminates the artist's literary and linguistic sources. Publications such as "Country of My Skull" (1988) by Antjie Krog, who writes about the findings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, indirectly manifest in the work "Country of My Skull" (2010). It is a cannibal trophy from New Caledonia that suggests an effigy of the artist's identity, his country and mixed heritage. Political sources are also included in the archive. The infamous photograph by Sam Nzima from 1976 showing Hector Pieterse, the first student killed during the Soweto uprising, links to "Untitled" (1976) where the artist found the discarded autopsy register that shows Hector Pieterse's

name. As a personal document, the death certificate dated 1988 of the artist's grandfather was transferred in the work "Asphyxia - suicide", which evokes the end of patriarchal power. Placing his own life with all its vivid detail and personal experiences, his memories, fears, and desires as well as mythological ideas at the heart of his practice, Geers depicts himself as a "EuroAnimist", bringing together the ancient animistic traditions from the African continent with the languages of the European avant-garde movements. In 2000, at the symbolic age of 33, Geers decided to stop making art for the entire year and instead undertake a spiritual quest in search of a vision of art that would redefine his personal beliefs and his artistic practice. That year marks a significant shift in the ways the artist conceived of his work: He moved toward a poetical and animistic approach, suggesting more universal themes such as terrorism, spirituality, and mortality. The installation "Postpunkpaganpop" (2008) that marks the center of the exhibition invites the visitor to walk upon a mirror floor through a labyrinth made out of razor mesh. What is usually used to mark a military border is transformed into a personal search for a "mystic truth": As the mirrors reflect whatever is above as below, the spiritual sphere is connected to the earthly, the outer external material world to the inner metaphysical. These mystical and mythological principles are not only central in Geers's art but also in his self-perception. He models himself on the archetypal "trickster" spirit, constantly changing and transforming himself and his work to resist being pinned down. In 1993 at the Venice Biennial, he changed his date of birth to "May 1968", which marks the start of the student and civil revolution ("Title Withheld [Kendell Geers]"). His Curriculum Vitae ("T.W. [C.V.]") begins on April 6, 1652, the date when Jan Van Riebeeck disembarked from his ship at the Cape of Good Hope to declare it a Dutch colony. Other events included are the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, scientific developments such as the discovery of the Theory of Relativity in 1905, and political activities including Idi Amin's military coup in Uganda in 1971 and George W. Bush being elected President of the United States in 2000. The dates listed in Geers's CV are not fixed but continuously changed as the artist adds and subtracts events over time, corresponding to his changing perception of himself and his identity. As an archive in itself, the CV reflects on history as a subjective process: Geers understands his identity, like his readymades, as a composite of events and perceptions, some of which he experienced personally and some that he "remembers" through the perceptions of others. The exhibition is curated by Clive Kellner, curator-at-large at Gordon Schachat Collection and former director of Johannesburg Art Gallery.



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# 艺术界 LEAP

THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA

## *THE ALCHEMIST: AN INTERVIEW WITH KENDELL GEERS*

SHOP TALK

INTERVIEW: STACEY DUFF / IMAGES: GALLERIA CONTINUA / PHOTO:  
OAK TAYLOR-SMITH



**South Africa – New York – South Africa**

**LEAP:** So what got you into making art?

**Kendell Geers:** Well, it's very simple. In South Africa during apartheid, every white male was supposed to go into the military. Conscription was mandatory and involuntary. I was against

apartheid and therefore against the military. And the only way I could not do my military service was to study. I ended up studying art as a way not to go to jail, because if I didn't go to the military I would have had to go to jail for six years. Eventually, there actually was a trial and I was sentenced to six years in jail.

**LEAP:** So you were a conscientious objector.

**KG:** I wasn't a conscientious objector. I was part of the anti-apartheid movement and said, "I will not go to the military and I will not go to jail." Going to jail as a conscientious objector would have somehow been supporting the system. So, I decided not to go to jail. I decided not to go into the army. I went into exile instead.

**LEAP:** Right, you were twenty and it was 1989. What was New York like then, and what did you take away from your apprenticeship with the American artist Richard Prince?

**KG:** It was a great time for New York. I forget who the President was then, but I think Giuliani was the mayor. He was starting this kind of clean-up campaign, but things were still very much rock 'n' roll. CBGB's was still around, 42nd Street was a red light district, and there was still a gay underworld. The city had not yet become this kind of bourgeois family kind of place—things were a bit wild. What I took away, I think, from Richard Prince was his humor. He had this satirical black humor—in both his personality and in his work—especially in the way he worked with text and color.

**LEAP:** Back in South Africa, Nelson Mandela was released and you no longer had to live in exile. After a year in New York, you returned to South Africa, where you started writing for newspapers and making art. What kind of art scene was there in Johannesburg at the time?

**KG:** The period between 1990 and 1994, when you had the end of apartheid and the beginning of something else, was one of the most extraordinary things I've ever experienced in my life. It was also a time when one had no choice but to fill various roles within the art world. There was no context, no structure for art and artists. There was a very small, little art world. It was extremely regimented in terms of what was permitted, and there was no space for dissent. There weren't artist-run spaces. Artists were, in a way, castrated, you could say.

**LEAP:** The artists were castrated?

**KG:** Yeah, by the galleries and collectors. The market demanded an extremely decorative and easy solution to the question of making art. In order to survive and make a living, you were forced to make pictures that could hang behind the sofa and would look good on the wall. They couldn't be too big or too small. There was this really dictatorial demand on what you could or couldn't make.

**LEAP:** So at that time, you were also using performance pieces as a means to alter the structure of the South African art scene?

**KG:** I was using whatever means necessary, whether it was in my work as an artist or in the things I was writing about—I was trying to say that there were alternatives to making [decorative] work and that one should not make art in order to sell. If it sells, that's great. But if it doesn't sell, that shouldn't deter you from what it is that you're trying to do.

## **The Pentagonagram and the Star**

**LEAP:** Can you tell us about Stairway to Heaven, one of the works here in the main space at Galleria Continua? Set against a purple background, it features a large star formed out of police batons painted in gold leaf.

**KG:** It represents the Pope—gold and purple are the Pope's colors. It's about state violence and, I mean, let's face it, capitalism is the bastard child of Catholicism. It's the Catholics who originally taught us how to hate. The Catholics taught you to look in the mirror, hate what you see, and give all your money to the Church in order to be saved and forgiven.

**LEAP:** Daniel Buren once told me that any art presented in public is by definition political. Still, your early work seems more overtly political.



**KG:** Do you think a giant pentagram put up on a wall is not political in a country where pentagrams are on the flag?

**LEAP:** Those aren't pentagrams on the Chinese flag. They're stars.

**KG:** Yes, but stars are also pentagrams. The difference is the flag [in China] is a red flag with yellow pentagrams. My work here is a yellow pentagram on a purple background. **LEAP:** Right, so it's a star and a pentagram. It's a matter of semantics.



**KG:** I use the word “pentagram” because I find it interesting that in both politics or in, let’s say, something like alchemy, it has a set meaning—you draw a pentagram for protection. In this work, it’s a symbol of man—the two legs, the two arms, and the head. And that’s the way you would see them on all the flags, whether it’s the United States flag, the Chinese flag, the flag of the European Union. When you invert it, so that the pentagram faces down, that’s a symbol of the devil. It’s a symbol of chaos. What fascinates me is that these symbols work even on an unconscious level. And with the inverted pentagram, you open yourself up to invasion by evil forces...dark forces.

**LEAP:** But isn’t that response to the pentagram, as you’re defining it, specific to Western culture? Will the pentagram function differently in a non-Western context?

**KG:** The ancient Egyptians, who were certainly neither European nor Western, were using this symbol in the same ways, depending on which way it was pointing. And in the world of spirits and in the world of reading things, it doesn’t matter what culture or language or age we’re coming from, we’re still trying to deal with the same things as Newton and even Plato. We may have evolved as a culture, but I don’t think we’ve evolved as a species. We like to think of ourselves as more intelligent, but we just have access to more information. The thing is, as a visual artist—as an artist—I can speak to your rational brain. I can speak to you with work that you understand. But at the same time, your animal brain will also be reading the same thing. At the back of your head, you understand with your unconscious, with your instinct. And you’ll be arriving at irrational conclusions that you can’t explain because it’s a different language, it’s a different part of the brain from the rational part.

**LEAP:** Right, and your irrational conclusions or responses are obviously very different from your rational ones.

**KG:** It’s the same in any great work of art—whether it’s the Mona Lisa or whatever—you can’t explain it.

Kendell  
Geers.  
*Demon  
est Deus  
inversus 23*,  
2011. Cortesia  
ADN Galeria.



Hi ha moments en la història en què els subterfugis, el cinisme i els dobles significats dominen els discursos i les ideologies. Els primers anys del segle XX van ser especialment foscos i convulsos, uns anys de crisi a tots els nivells en els quals només es podia reaccionar a través de la fúria: "Donin-se, a si mateixos, un cop de puny a la cara i caiguin morts." Així acabava el sisè dels set manifestos escrits pels dadaïstes.

Una mica més tard i amb la situació encara no resolta, Luis Buñuel també buscava no només *épater le bourgeois* sinó despertar l'espectador de la seva letargia, incomodar-lo

i fer-lo reaccionar. I la seva estratègia no pot ser més eficaç: *El gos andalús* s'inicia amb una escena memorable en la qual un home sosté una navalla d'afaitar (el mateix Buñuel) i dissectiona l'ull d'una dona. La indiferència no hi té cabuda i la comoditat, tampoc. El 1973, Bruce Nauman segueix la mateixa tàctica per sacsejar l'espectador en un gravat en el qual apareix invertida la següent amonestació *Pay attention mother fuckers*.

La primera dècada del segle XXI està resultant tan convulsa com la del segle XX, però menys clara potser. No hi ha hagut una gran guerra que ho hagi arrasat tot, sinó moltes i

molt subtils transformacions que han fet que el sòl de les certeses es trenqui sota els nostres peus. *Sorry, we're fucked*, escriu Kendell Geers sobre un mirall en el qual ens veiem reflectits.

Aquests dies ens retrobem amb Kendell Geers, que presenta una magnífica mostra del seu treball a la galeria ADN de Barcelona. La seva manera de treballar i les seves formes de presentació no poden ser més pertinents, no només en relació amb el context global sinó també amb el de l'anestesiada (sobretot cultural i institucionalment) Barcelona. Geers va començar a articular el seu treball a partir d'un sentiment de culpa a causa de la seva condició de blanc nascut a Sud-àfrica. Testimoniatge d'innombrables injustícies, Geers va optar molt ràpidament per aplicar un estil directe i sense concessions. En els antípodes del políticament correcte, Geers s'autodefineix com a *terrorealista*; és a dir, "exhibeix allò que és real de manera impúdica, sense els filtres ideològics, morals o religiosos que solen alterar-lo", tal com escriu Pierre Olivier Rollin, comissari de l'exposició.

Aquests són alguns dels treballs que es mostren. Una decorativa derivació del *Love*, de Robert Indiana, transformat en un enorme mural en el qual les lletres configuren filigranes en què es pot llegir la paraula *cony*; variacions (en forma d'explícits penis afegits) en diversos motius com a icones religioses, populars o polítiques, o una instal·lació de la qual pegen del sostre maons, com els que van utilitzar els activistes contraris a l'*apartheid*, que van suspendre maons des de ponts perquè colpeguessin els cristalls dels cotxes quan aquests passaven sota el pont. Com els dadaïstes, Buñuel, Nauman i d'altres, Geers no ens deixa que ens relaxem. *Sorry, we're fucked*. A veure si reaccionem.

## UN COP DE PUNY A LA CARA

Sobre Kendell Geers i altres artistes que mostren el que és real de manera directa i sense concessions  
*per Montse Badia*



## Art

Coordina **Antoni Ribas Tur**  
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### La transformació pel camí del dolor

La galeria ADN obre un diàleg amb el sexe, la violència i la religió presents a l'obra del sud-africà Kendell Geers. Per **Antoni Ribas**

Kendell Geers va néixer el 1968 en una família blanca a la Sud-àfrica de l'apartheid. Des de fa uns anys, viu a Bèlgica. Malgrat que afirma que l'art és la seva vida, assegura que haver nascut a l'Àfrica i ara viure i treballar a Europa no han afectat la seva mirada. "El món s'ha tornat un lloc molt petit, ja no hi ha res amagat o fora de l'abast. Entre Sud-àfrica i Europa hi ha més semblances que diferències, tots tenim la mateixa experiència del capitalisme", afirma mentre caminem entre les obres –algunes dels darrers anys, d'altres acabades de sortir del taller– que formen la seva primera exposició individual a la galeria ADN de Barcelona.

Ninxols buits, gerros fets amb ossos d'una columna vertebral humana (fossos en bronze), una creu realitzada amb dues porres, una cadena les baules de la qual

són mans tallades, idols africans pintats de blanc i que ploren pintura negra, fotografies pornogràfiques, estatuetses de Crist i Buda... Les obres de Geers són dures, provocatives, implacables fins a resultar aclaparadores. Res de tot això no és, però, gratuït. "Les meves obres no transmeten un missatge, més aviat fan una proposta. Creen una situació, la interpretació de la qual l'ha de fer l'espectador. El que mira ha de fer de traductor de l'ambigüitat entre ètica i estètica que es dona en cadascuna de les peces", diu l'artista.

Amb les seves obres, Geers proposa un "baptisme de foc". "Les darreres generacions vivim còmodament, volem fingir que la violència i la mort no existeixen i les amaguem, però encara durant la Segona Guerra Mundial formaven part de la vida de les



Kendell Geers diu que cal mantenir el diable a ratlla.

persones", diu. Les imatges punyents i obscenes amb què omple els seus treballs són només el primer pas del que Geers vol aconseguir amb les seves obres. "La meua experiència em diu que només canviem quan topem de cap contra la paret –recorda–, així que el sentit profund de les meves obres va dirigit cap a trobar un camí de transformació a través del dolor". Vistes des d'aquesta òptica, les obres adquireixen un to gairebé místic i l'artista apareix com un xaman. Les fotografies pornogràfiques esquitxades de pintura daurada i platejada tenen un sentit ritual, dignifiquen les models d'aquestes imatges. Cal, però, que assumim l'altra cara de les nostres vides. "Només cal que et miris la roba que porta; la persona que l'ha feta probablement viu en una situació d'extrema violència", conclou.

Les referències gairebé constants a la religió tenen a veure amb la seva relació amb l'Estat.

"La religió occidental és massa dogmàtica i desequilibrada, i cal trobar l'equilibri entre la creació i la destrucció". La col·lisió del racionalisme i el misticisme encara afegeix una altra patina de sentit a les obres de Geers,

“

**Les darreres generacions fingim que la violència i la mort no existeixen i les amaguem**

carregades alhora de ràbia i d'espiritualitat. I abans d'acabar la conversa, recorda que "el diable és l'altra cara de déu, i que si no l'assumim i el mantenim a ratlla, sempre tornarà per mossegarnos".

**KENDALL GEERS: HELLRAISER**  
ADN Galeria. Fins al 14 de gener



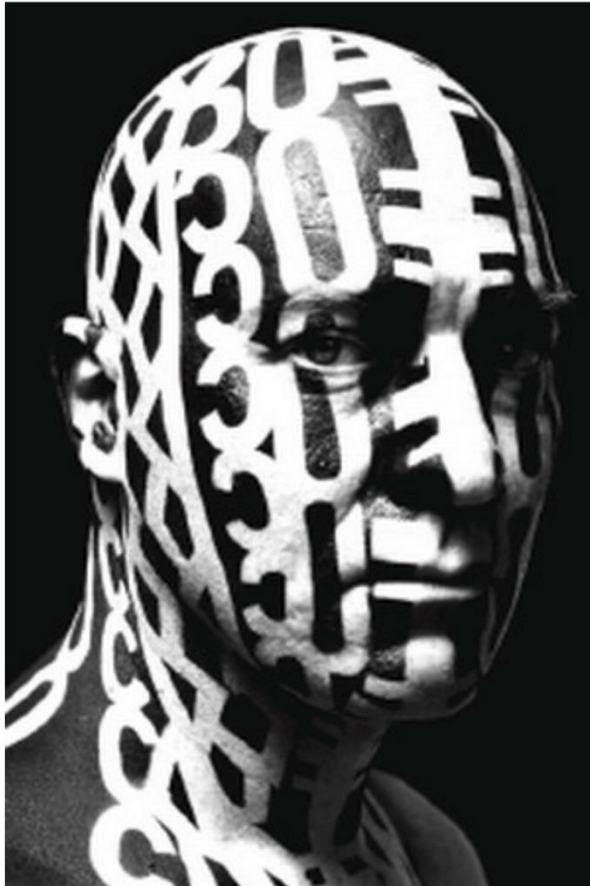


### TSHISALIVE

## Still edgy after all these years

06 June 2010 - 02:00  
BY KAREN RUTTER

He's been called a punk, a prankster and a postmodern trickster. Kendell Geers is also a passionate artist. He spoke to Karen Rutter about his exhibition at the Goodman Gallery in Woodstock, Cape Town, which opens on Wednesday and ends on July 10



IN YOUR FACE: Kendell Geers as F\*\*\*face, part of his latest exhibition, Third World Disorder

**'It's like looking at a car crash - you see the blood, and you see your own mortality'**

He once famously urinated into Marcel Duchamp's Fountain in Venice. He sprayed semen (his own) on a Hustler centrefold and hung it at an exhibition. His shows have included a brick thrown through a gallery window and a broken beer bottle. But has Kendell Geers, notorious shock artist and punk prankster, finally tempered his tune?

On the eve of his first solo exhibition in Cape Town in over a decade, the artist is as anarchically articulate as ever, railing against an art establishment that has become "culturally castrated" and a country that ignores the vital contribution artists make. Geers's mixed-media show, Third World Disorder, is his "most personal ever", he says, referring to his relationship with South Africa, and "focuses on notions of violence and the debris of a dysfunctional society".

The exhibition includes photographs of Geers, including one titled F\*\*\*face, and a wall of traditional ritual aprons worn by Ndebele women at various stages of their lives. Geers did the designs and e-mailed them to the women, who beaded them onto the fabric. He described his show as a "binary approach which takes in both a creative and destructive model".

People are sometimes disturbed by his work, he said, because "it's like looking at a car crash - you see the blood, and you see your own mortality. Some people find this hard.

"The collection is strongly inspired by violence - how it has become so banal, and how we don't know how to deal with it. In the apartheid years, it was easier to identify violence against an ideological enemy. Now, artists live in fear and don't know how to approach violence. They end up castrated," he said.

"I don't see many signs of hope, from either artists or politicians."

His disillusionment with politics and politicians has informed much of his recent work - and prompted his move from South Africa in 1997. He now lives in Belgium. An objector who refused to serve in the army during the '80s, and an outspoken opponent of apartheid, Geers nevertheless does not find much to celebrate in the new South Africa.

"I honestly believed that the doors of learning and culture would be opened. But they've never been more hermetically sealed. Artists are like cultural thermometers, or barometers, taking the temperature of a place. They need the space and support to do this. But it wasn't happening here.

"A country that doesn't respect its cultural workers, that allows its ballet companies to close and its painters to leave, cannot grow. The humanising aspect is lost."

As a South African artist living and working abroad, he said, he is able to contribute more. Geers has attained critical success in Europe, with his work included in such prestigious exhibitions as the Venice Biennale, Documenta 11 in Germany, and solo spots in London, Turin, Ghent and beyond. Is he regarded as a "bad boy" in international circles, too?

"Nah, not really," he said, smiling. "Except for the right wing in Belgium. They hate me."

He turned serious: "I think South Africans have a love-hate relationship with me. In a way, I broke the virginity of the South African art world - literally, with semen - and it's always going to be complicated. But viewers need to have the courage to decode my work, to take it to the next level.

"My latest work takes a more shamanic, alchemical approach. It's about developing signs and symbols that are universally recognised. What I am doing is a kind of urban contemporary folk art.

"And again, there is that binary thing. Take the word 'f\*ck'. If I say 'f\*ck you', it's negative. If I say 'f\*ck me', it's positive. So in one work I paint my face with these words, placing myself in the middle of the extremes," Geers said.

He has not lost his touch. Confrontational, smart and critical, there's no ignoring the contribution Geers has made - and continues to make - to the South African and international art landscape.



### Kendell Geers Presents an In Situ Production-Action in Murcia, Spain



Ilse Ghekiere in Lady / God / Gift, Kendell Geers specific project for Dominó Canibal. Sala Verónicas, PAC Murcia 2010.

**MURCIA.-** For the fourth phase of Cannibal Domino, the South-African artist Kendell Geers is creating an in situ production-action at [Sala Verónicas](#) in Murcia. In one single gesture, it will address and invoke the elements, remnants and spirits of the three preceding projects by Jimmie Durham, Cristina Lucas and The Bruce High Quality Foundation, while at once activating the double colonial representation of the "other": the good native who contributes to the process of acculturation by absorbing the prevailing culture, and the cannibal as an embodiment of the savage pagan to blame for all social and historical ills. The artist attempts to graft a savage perspective into the issue of cannibalism, alluding to the devouring of the cultural enemy as an image of terror and, at the same time, as poetic stance.

Working in collaboration with the performance artist Ilse Ghekiere, Kendell Geers' contribution will follow an essentially performative methodology, understood not as a spectacle but as a visual, spatial, allegorical and sculptural form of production. In a scenario containing the remnants and memory of the previous phases of Cannibal Domino, as well as an evocation of motifs culled from the cave-painting and social imagery of the Region of Murcia, Geers and Ghekiere will produce works as the result of ritualistic cooking. In consonance with this mythological and poetic methodology, the by-product of Geers' actions, stagings and objectual manipulation is not predetermined. It is generally accepted that the best cooks never stick to a recipe, instead allowing the meal to slowly brew following the spirit of the dish.

In this latest twist to Cannibal Domino, Kendell Geers will step beyond the territories of reflections on the economy of the artistic, memory and the holy that preceded him, to explore in depth the archive of the histories of cannibalism and the policy of representation of the pagan savage. The actions and outcomes of this creative ritual will make use of the "Confusion of Tongues" of culture, where what is a gift in one language is poison in another, and where the terrorist is viewed as a cannibal for one or a freedom fighter for the other. This polyvalence underlies the very title of the project "Lady/God/Gift", remitting to the Old English etymology of Lady Godiva: Godgifu or Godgyfu, meaning "God Gift". And just as that legend about the transgressive exhibitionism of a naked woman in the public space may be useful in abolishing oppression and blinding the voyeur, the work Geers proposes here views cultural conflict as poetic material by questioning Cannibal Domino's invocation of cannibals in civilised Spain.



## Kendell Geers



### Time Out says ★★★★★

There's a festive echo in this exhibition by the South African-born artist Kendell Geers. Glance through the gallery's front window and what catches your eye is a stylised display of a small green tree on a plinth against a white wall of what could be mirrored frost or snow patterns. However, Christmas isn't the intended association. All the works in the exhibition make reference to conceptual art forefather Marcel Duchamp. The show's title, 'A GUEST + A HOST = A GHOST', is the text Duchamp printed on foil sweet wrappers he handed out at an exhibition opening in 1953.

Geers has taken Duchamp's textual wordplay as the starting point to create his own, as a wall of abutting four-letter words, cut out in negative in different sizes in mirrored plexiglass. You have to stare hard to decipher each word: Lust, Hate, Fuck, Luck, Will, Kill. Less effort is required to see that, up close, Geer's Christmas tree is actually Duchamp's readymade bottle rack, with foliage created by smashed green Heineken beer bottles.

In the back gallery, four large glass sculptures like framed windows have been created using the dimensions of panelled artworks by Duchamp. Each is glazed with bulletproof glass and has been shot at several times with a rifle, creating effects in the glass like spidery starbursts or ripples frozen in a pond. It could be trying to make a connection too far to equate all this smashed glass with the West End and party season, but either way it's all rather beautiful and somewhat obscure. I expect Duchamp would have approved.