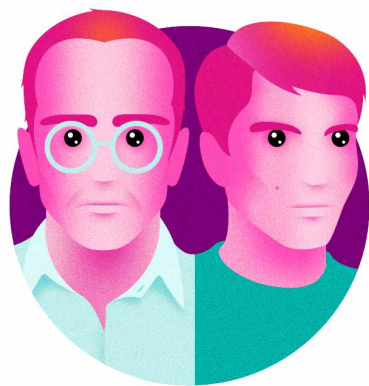


This dynamism so often attributed to the scene confronts the flawed infrastructure of the city of Metro Manila. While mobility between Quezon City to Makati equates to the same travel time from the Philippines to another Southeast Asian state, art practices continue to gain support—not from the government, but from peers, private entities, and the global scene alike. Spanning generations, this DIY spirit proves that even left on its own, a community can endure. ☺

## FUTURA 89+

### Hans Ulrich Obrist & Simon Castets (with Katherine Dionysius)

#### interview BOGOSI SEKHUKHUNI



THE FUTURA 89+ SERIES FEATURES INTERVIEWS WITH ARTISTS, WRITERS, ACTIVISTS, ARCHITECTS, FILMMAKERS, SCIENTISTS AND ENTREPRENEURS WHO WERE BORN IN OR AFTER 1989.

## REGULARS



**Does your work rely on any analog processes, or does it (or could it) exist completely in digital form? Could I fully understand your work by seeing it online, or is it important to see it IRL?**

I think it's more about recognizing the potential for a fluidity in the everyday experiences of the reality we experience, or what can count as such, so what comes out are attempts to unify the seemingly non-confluent worlds. It's funny because when you speak of existing “completely in digital form,” I automatically think “in one’s head.”

**With your *Dream Diary* videos, you talked about closing gaps in our perceptions of what constitutes as everyday reality. What constitutes as “reality”? Is the Internet “reality”?**

I think our sense of what's real tends to rely on what can be accounted for physically—what literally “holds weight”—but at the same time, our actions as a society don't really reflect that, with faith-based religions still being as popular as they are. I think in the same way that our eyes aren't built to see certain aspects of our natural reality, we choose which voice of our “instinct” to listen to.

**You seem to work in a lot of different media—performance, sculpture, installation, video, drawing, and gifs—with no obvious preference for any one in particular. Is this simply the default working method of post-medium contemporary art, or is it a strategic decision of yours to work in several different media?**

We've moved out of a medium-centric world. It's just not possible to continue to have these boundaries because the tools are becoming easier to use and available to a wider group of people. So medium means nothing to me, outside of what best serves the concept.

**Has the Internet made us all the same?**

The Internet could never make us the same; if anything, I think it amplifies the increasing variety of lifestyles and possibilities for personalities that exists. There is a friction or time lag when one uses the same eyes looking at our Internet lives to understand our IRL lives.

**How do you think the Internet has influenced your generation's relationship to sexuality?**

I think a lot more open conversations are being had at a rate we haven't seen

before. Virtual communities are the perfect place for humanity to explore what it is that turns us on. Before social media, there was a South African instant messaging application called MXIT that allowed for a flourishing youth sexual expression that got attention in local mainstream news.

**How was MXIT different to other social networks that you use? Why is it so relevant to your practice?**

MXIT was my first virtual reality experience. There was a variety of chat rooms and scenarios available, and it was, in my opinion, the first time South African kids were able to reach out to other like-minded kids at that scale. It was a kind of proto-social media. It reminds me of the Sandy Stone paper “Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?,” in which she recalls early virtual communities in the 1970s connected by a terminal-based computer network.

echoes through jargon and visual presentation—like the quest for immortality popularized by futurists like Ray Kurzweil, which fundamentally challenges the rationalist view that death is the end of life. The conversation around the nature, location and meaning of conscious thought takes a different form, and I was attracted to the idea of a practice that responds to a conversation through experiences that can change its direction. I see the use of Narrow A.I. ap-



### I am interested in the early days of artificial intelligence applications.

**The project you worked on during your residency at Google and subsequently presented at 89plus Presents: Nouvelles Expériences en Art et Technologie at Fondation Cartier in late 2014 was an interactive video that used chat bot technology to recreate or simulate conversations with your father, who you met on Facebook six years ago. How did you become interested in chatbot technology?**

I am interested in these early days of artificial intelligence applications, particularly the language that is used to describe the current state and possible futures of artificial intelligence (A.I.) and other emergent technologies. There is a kind of casual-capitalist outlook that

applications like chatbots as a dynamic platform for conversations to continue and expand.

**The project is part of a speculative conversation about A.I. and blurring the parameters of what we acknowledge as conscious intelligence and how we “value” experience. What discoveries did you make about your own perceptions of what you consider to be conscious thought?**

The ideas of Alva Noe on the nature of consciousness struck me as insightful and resonated with the readings on Bantu philosophy that I have been getting into. Simply put, it's the idea that conscious experience is accumulated

## FUTURA 89+

and generated through a continuous engagement with one's surroundings. Bantu philosophy expands this notion by allowing me to understand the world around me as active and integral to my conscious development, in a way that speaks to the symbiotic relationships that we know to exist in the “natural world.” This has been an important development for my practice (and personal journey) because it seems to offer more room to play around with in creating the consciousness engines.

**Can you tell us about the actual conversations and the subsequent simulated conversations? Were there obvious differences? Was the simulated conversation intelligible?**

The conversations are a transcript of the exchange we had on Facebook. Conversations with chatbots aren't sophisticated enough to be engaging right now. How interesting a chatbot conversation is depends on how much time you spend adding phrases and responses to the program. What's really interesting for me is having to consciously engage with the moments of suspended disbelief we fall into when dealing with inanimate technology. It makes me realize how much we distort our “sensible” sense of reality

Bogosi Sekhukhuni (South African, b. 1992) is a South African artist who works with video, installation and performance. Most recently, he has participated in an 89plus research trip to Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa in collaboration with Google Cultural Institute and Another Africa.



## REGULARS

to fit these moments, because what's really happening is that we are expanding on those senses and the parameters we build around everyday reality. The Facebook conversations happened sporadically over about five years, and that sense of time is lost in the simulation. I think both versions highlight the levels of communication that get played out, in different but not unequal ways. While the awkward accents and monotony of the computer-generated voices aren't realistic, that unnatural feeling opens up space for the content of the transcription to be investigated more.

**Since your residency, you have been focused on building a corporate brand identity to formalize and house aspects of your practice. Can you tell us more about this "corporate brand identity"? Why is it important to you to build a brand around your art practice?**

It's a way to have a conversation with the institutions and corporate bodies that

I currently need to fund my work. I've always been interested in aspirational aesthetics in urban South Africa. Corporate South Africa has a really strong visual presence in Johannesburg where I grew up; there are innumerable office parks all over the city that often look like self-contained miniature cities or neighborhoods. It's fascinating to me

**Bantu philosophy shows me the world around me as integral to my conscious development.**

how visual cues in architectural motifs inspire specific feelings. To me, the idea of the contemporary artist still heavily references a socio-economic history and context that is foreign to where I find myself. My studio practice, a research gang called Open Time Coven, is a way for me to translate into industry jargon, the many ways I want to express myself.

**Can you tell us about projects you have not been able to realize, such as your DNA project? Do you still plan to pursue this project?**

The DNA project is the first consciousness engine sculpture idea, and yes, I plan to pursue its completion. It's a reasonably big project. I need to raise

the fee to do the full genome test. Once I have the results, I need to organize the raw data that the DNA markers are categorized into, arrange it into something simpler.

**Let's talk about the 89plus research trip to Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa, on which you joined us—along with Missla Libsekal of An-**

**other Africa—to creatively document the visit for Google Art Projects. Did you make any new discoveries in Addis Ababa and Accra?**

I was interested in the generational gap that exists between practitioners in the local industries of Addis, Accra and Johannesburg. The presentations seemed to be revelatory to both us as facilitators and to some of the local practitioners. In this way the 89plus research initiative has acted as a channel.

**You designed posters for us for each city, to promote the project and to serve as archival documents of the trip. The poster for Ghana uses an Adinkra symbol called "Ese Ne Tekrema." Can you talk a little about why you chose this symbol and how you came up with the design?**

The design is based on the idea of a concept tech device that ran on an African-inspired operat-

ing system. I used the Adinkra symbol of the teeth and tongue because of its meanings of interdependence, which related to the idea of progress.

**Can you tell us about your first gallery show?**

My first show was an attempt at acknowledging what I think is a set of visual aesthetics in the consumer culture of the community I grew up in, urban Black Johannesburg. I was interested in this language as a way to encourage a wider participation of the emergent black middle class in contemporary South African art. I wanted to use an appropriated sculptural language and modeled the presentation as a catered event.

**Do you believe in horoscopes?**

Yes.

**What role does chance play in your process?**

I don't think I believe in chance. At this stage of my practice I've been using the passing of time as a generator of ideas. It's not always practical, but the work I've produced that I enjoy the most came out of conditions like this.

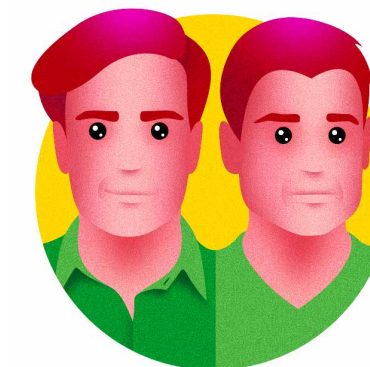
**The future is...**

Available to let. ☺



89plus is a long-term, international, multi-platform research project co-founded by Simon Castets and Hans Ulrich Obrist, investigating the generation of innovators born in or after 1989 through conferences, books, periodicals, residencies and exhibitions. 89plus.com

## PIONEERS Fredi Fischli & Niels Olsen talk to WILLIAM LEAVITT



THE PIONEERS SERIES AIMS TO SHED NEW LIGHT ON ARTISTS WHO HAVE CREATED TRULY INNOVATIVE WORK, TRAILBLAZERS WHOSE LEGACY LIVES AND REVERBERATES IN THE CURRENT GENERATION.

**This summer, I re-read *The Long Good-Bye* by Raymond Chandler. You once mentioned that he is a big influence on you, how he works on a literary portrait of modern Los Angeles.**

I think that he helped me to see the LA of the past, the '30s and '40s, but he also helped me look at present-day LA better. I like his writing, but his work is more dramatic than mine. I think my work is dramatic but not necessarily about suspense, except perhaps *Arctic Earth* (2014), which is that fragment of a mansion floating in space. It's sort of a dramatic situation without a story.

**You have a very specific and unique way of storytelling, in that it doesn't take use of elements that create suspense or dramatizing moments.**