



Literary Landscapes

Literary Landscapes is a monthly column by Indra Wussow, a writer, translator and director of the Sylt Foundation.



RW28 Kliptown © Achim Mohné and VG BildKunst

When we talk about literature we tend to think about books, audio files, radio plays and the fairy tales and bedtime stories told by our elders.

Literature can come around in so many different forms and one project I have found completely convincing and worth supporting is that of the German artist group REMOTEWORDS from Cologne.

REMOTEWORDS is a long-term artistic project initiated by the German artists Achim Mohné and Uta Kopp. Referencing art, literature, design and navigation technology, REMOTEWORDS installs messages on roofs of cultural institutions. Applied in capital letters, the messages are not directly visible on location but are best viewed from outer space via satellite photography.

They are spread worldwide via virtual globes on Google Earth and Bing Maps.

So far the prolific artists have painted messages on 30 roofs around the world – each of them a collaboration with writers, curators and philosophers who are closely

connected to the place, cultural institution or the artists themselves. One roof of the University of São Paulo was painted with words of famous Brazilian philosopher Vilem Flusser from one of his most important essays *Por Que Duvido (Why do I doubt?)*.

REMOTEWORDS' first roof message was installed as early as 2008 ('In art we trust' at the Museum Fuhrwerkswaage in Cologne) and in the past seven years they have been in South Africa three times, including an art show at Arts on Main.

They were invited to Johannesburg in 2009 already and worked together with South African writer Niq Mhlongo to install three messages on three roofs around the city. In March 2009, they created the roof 'Maboneng' at the new Arts on Main complex in Doornfontein (RW 8th project) together with the writer from Soweto. Niq Mhlongo suggested a quotation from his novel *After Tears* that had been published in 2007. 'I'm glad you finally arrived, my Advo. Good to see you, and welcome to Jozi Maboneng, the place of lights, he said, trying to hug me.'



RW8 Maboneng © Achim Mohné and VG BildKunst

(Excerpt from *After Tears*, Niq Mhlongo, Kwela Books, 2007, page 11)

Niq Mhlongo understood his message above all as a reminder of those who, for a very long time, were prevented from standing tall in the light and had to create an own imagination of their *Maboneng* – their city of light. Mhlongo grew up in Soweto during the apartheid era and made a name for himself with his descriptions of present-day life in this biggest township in Africa.

From March 2009 onwards, the word 'Maboneng' was an intervention first seen from the sky and from the flyover of the Joe Slovo drive and then via Google Earth since the World Cup in 2010. Not much later, the architects and investors of the district gave their whole new development its new name, 'Maboneng' – a wonderful example of how powerful the arts can be.

In July 2015, Achim Mohné and Uta Kopp came back to Johannesburg to start an exciting new global artwork with the installation of the first word in this project, initiated by German curator, artist and director of the ZKM I (Centre for Art and Media in Karlsruhe), Peter Weibel, for the international GLOBALE art show at the ZKM.

Regarding the development towards an increasing globalisation of artistic practise the REMOTEWORDS team questions the idea of 'globalism', within this project as one phrase is not only planned to be installed on one single roof but to be spread globally via five locations. In such, the globe will be treated as an expanded art territory and as one unitary field of action.

By the actual local inscriptions, this entire phrase is spread world-wide and made accessible for everyone through technology. The viewer can travel virtually with his

computer, iPad or smart phone and embark on a conducted tour on one virtual globe:

ONE EARTH UNITES MANY WORLDS

Peter Weibel's sentence will start in Kliptown in Soweto, where the word 'ONE' is painted on one of the rooftops of the SKY (Soweto Kliptown Youth) NGO, a South African institution founded and run by Kliptown resident Bob Nameng, who has been working successfully for years to empower the local kids in one of the poorest areas in Soweto by means of arts and education.

ONE on its own is a powerful reminder that we must stand together and also refers to the troubled past of South Africa – a past of division, disinterest and neglect, in which a privileged minority marginalised and dispossessed the majority of its people. The consequences are still affecting so many people and places in South Africa and Kliptown is not only a landmark due to the adoption of the ANC's Freedom Charter on 26 June 1955 but unfortunately still a place of poverty and unfulfilled dreams of the majority of its inhabitants.

To show how the arts can unite and overcome separation, the phrase continues on the other four continents and so connects different spaces and continents: in Auckland in New Zealand (University of Auckland, EARTH), in Karlsruhe in Germany at the ZKM Museum (UNITES), at the Taipeh Artist Village in Taipeh, Taiwan (MANY) and at the Ghetto Biennale in Port-Au-Prince in Haiti (WORLDS).

What a powerful reminder of the power of the word and maybe if there is life in outer space, the first images they will see of our earth are the messages REMOTEWORDS is sending into space.

Visit www.remotewords.net for more information on their 30 roofs so far, interviews and on-site photographs. CF