

PROUDLY AFRICAN & TRANSGENDER

The exhibition Proudly African & Transgender is a cultural intervention for social justice in the form of portraits and stories of 10 transgender African activists. Participants chose to be portrayed in this way because they want their faces to be seen and their voices heard around the world. This exhibition is a dynamic link building bridges between the people portrayed and the people who see them in different parts of the world.

“Transgender Africans have been silenced for a long time. We have been invisible as though we did not exist. Today, many of us speak, we show our faces, we write and we express ourselves openly.

This exhibition is an extension of that. The portraits are our images and they speak our words, they tell our stories, they express our feelings, they exhibit our pride, even our fears, they are our history, they are us today and the history of the African transgender struggle in future. They are strength, hope and pride to generations after us.

I felt lost for a long time. I thought that there was no other like me. I thought I was abnormal, strange and this made me powerless. My transgender niece or nephew, grandchild or friends child will not feel lost. They will look at my portrait and they will gain power, hope, peace of mind and pride. They will know that another transgender existed before and that it is okay to be gender non-conforming.

When the world sees our portraits, they will know that Africa has transgender people and that there is a struggle against injustices on our continent.” *writes Victor Mukasa, Ugandan human rights defender, currently Coalition of African Lesbians, formerly International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission*

How did the exhibition come about?

In December 2008 the first-ever gathering of exclusively African trans and gender variant people took place in Cape Town organised by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. Ugandan LGBTI human rights defender, Victor Mukasa and South African artist and activist for social justice, Gabrielle Le Roux introduced the idea of a trans African exhibition to be shown internationally, and invited conference participants to take part. Each of the 10 people who wanted to share their experience in this way, collaborated by sitting for Gabrielle to draw their portrait from life and then writing directly onto their portraits. They came from Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Namibia, Burundi and Botswana.

Proudly African & Transgender exhibited in these places:

2010

Amsterdam, Holland at Amnesty International in February - March.

Den Haag, Holland, Erasmus University, Afrika Dag, April

Barcelona, Spain at International Congress on Gender Identity and Human Rights. Six of the ten people in the portraits were present and the exhibition

provided a special platform for African activists at that historic global gathering of trans activists.

Istanbul, Turkey during Pride 2010, at the invitation of Amnesty Turkey in June.

Amsterdam, Holland joint exhibition with South African photographer Zanele Muholi's at IHLIA, International Gay and Lesbian Archive, de Oba, Amsterdam's central library, July 29th – October 20th

Malmo, Sweden, Transgender Europe Council, Malmo University, October

Madrid, Spain during the Stop Trans Pathologisation, STP2012 March.

Ankara, Turkey, Galeri Kara during Trans Remembrance Week conference in November

2011

Pretoria, South Africa at African Same Sex Sexualities and Gender Identity Conference, January.

Athens, Greece, Athens Pride, June

Stockholm, Sweden, Stockholm Pride, August

To see the exhibition online: <http://www.blacklooks.org/2010/02/proudly-african-transgender/>

About the artist:

Gabrielle Le Roux is an artist and activist of social justice, she was born in London and raised in South Africa. She also lived in the Canary Islands, and in the Carribean for a decade.

Le Roux's current work combines portraits drawn from life and narrations of lived experiences. It is rooted in the conviction that we change each other's lives with our stories and that people who speak first hand about an issue are the ones who should be listened to most closely.

Le Roux has been challenging racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and transphobia on transnational platforms for more than two decades.

As an activist, she has worked with a range of organizations in South Africa and other parts of the world. She ran the South African Women's Media Watch for several years. Her years as a feminist media activist shape her current work.

Gabrielle Le Roux's work is exhibited around the world in museums, galleries, universities, organisations, conferences, in the streets and on marches.