

Inauguration speech by Pieter J Mathews, curator of the official South African Pavillion at La Biennale Venezia 2016

The Honourable, Consul-general Saul Molobi and all other ambassadors, Excellency's, commissioners, curators, ladies and gentlemen.

Dumelang, Good Afternoon, Goeiemiddag, Buenasera and welcome to our proceedings tonight. I would like to offer some curatorial remarks.

In the global society we live in today, we see the re-emergence of the ancient concept of city-state, where citizenship of a country does not necessarily imply loyalty to a country. But where new and temporary relationships between citizens and the city itself is a much more accessible idea. City managers are fully aware of this relationship and make use of it when marketing their city as destination or investment opportunity.

As a practicing architect in a South African City, I strongly believe that architects have a vital role to play in this relationship-making between citizen and city, but that much time is wasted in boardrooms, conferences and conventions. In 2012, after visiting this very Biennale, I decided to start walking the walk in my own backyard rather than talking the talk. I went back to South Africa and initiated an uncurated, DIY, guerrilla design movement. Our movement needed a name. We decided to call it Cool Capital.

It is in this spirit that I want to tell you a little more about the city where I live and practice: an administrative capital city with a heavy political burden. My City has many names: Pretoria, The metro of Tshwane, Ipitoli or the Jacaranda City. It is also sometimes negatively called the Moustache City or *SnorStad* with reference to the many male civil servants and military corpse who used to work and live in the CBD - They obviously all had moustaches and with reference to this you can see a collection of moustaches made by 60 different people during a foundry visit, after which it was cast in bronze and made into a collective artwork by local sculptor Guy du Toit. Just like the moustaches were made into a singular artwork, we needed to combine all the names of our city into one concept. Although my city is landlocked, it has an incredibly beautiful and graphic plan. We decided to make this plan the official emblem of our movement. This plan can transform like a Rorschach test into many versions to resemble a Jacaranda tree, a man or a Pegasus. Our emblem allows anyone to interpret and assimilate the city plan and make it theirs. You can see this interpreted in the logobench, which was cast in concrete and in the incredible city-map mural design by Eric Duplan. The little bridges and connections on the mural illustrates Cool Capital's aim: To connect the city with its people and to connect people from different cultures, languages and suburbs.

The idea of connection is further enhanced by a sculpture armature by Rina Stutzer. The artwork was put up in a pop-up fashion in different locations all over the country and the connections that organically form from one point to the next are clearly visible.

Every October the entire city is turned into a feast of purple when 70 000 Jacaranda trees that line the streets coordinate to bloom over an eight week period in October. It is a city

with clear skies and amazing sunsets. You can see one such sunset on one of the murals of the Pretoria skyline. On this mural you can also see a landmark of our skyline: The Voortrekker Monument. The monument is one of the top ten tourist attractions in South Africa. The building was designed by architect Gerhard Moerdijk in the art deco style. This monument is a good example of transformation and reinvention, and it is this flexible character that has enabled the monument to thrive in spite of its controversial past. The monument graciously allowed us to light it up in pink during the October months in 2014.

Let's stay with an uncomfortable past as we consider the photograph of the wall to my left. This intervention by South African artist Diane Victor was made in the TPA building close to Church Square and documented by Carla Crafford. The building was constructed at the height of Apartheid; an epitome of Brazilian modernism and the international style, it fell into disrepair because of its uncomfortable past. Victor's intervention is a dust-artwork on the floor of a previous boardroom on the 13th floor. On one of the walls of this boardroom is a 13m mural painting by one of South Africa's masters Alexis Preller. Victor depicts the late president Paul Kruger laying in state. This intervention created a new consciousness of the building, and reconnected it to the city and its people and its past.

Lastly, you will arrive at 16 handpainted chairs by high school learners with artist Jan van der Merwe as supervising artist. Each chair represents a simple and voyeuristic element of city life. These chairs are set out as a collective theatre, but each chair is also a small theatre in itself. You are invited to sit in this theatre and watch the documentary film *DorpStad* translated it means TownCity. This film reflects on the inaugural Cool Capital and what it achieved.

Just as the theatre of chairs shows small angles and views of my city, this pavilion is a collection of the outcomes of the Cool Capital movement. It shows how 1000 active citizens in my city ignored politics and beauracracy, took ownership of where they live, brought about social coherence and most importantly – contributed to more memorable and personalized urban spaces.

4 Years ago, I was inspired at this very event, La Biennale di Venezia, to start this movement, and today we have come full circle: My city became our laboratory for guerrilla design citizenship, and we were successful. We are back in Venice to report on our actions, and not on our words.

Thanks again to our entire team who worked endlessly for 8 weeks. Carla Taljaard, Jan Hugo, Chenette Swanepoel, Yolandi Viljoen, Carla Crafford, Neil Human and Guy du Toit. I would also like to thank the team from the consulate in Milan for their support and the Department of Arts and Culture for this opportunity.

Enjoy the evening.