

stagings made in NAMIBIA

post-colonial photography

STAGINGS MADE IN NAMIBIA is a collective experiment. It presents images made by 124 photographers from Namibia – independent since 1990 from the South African apartheid regime; the former settler colony of “German South-West”. Actors, archivists, artists, bar women, blue-collar workers, Carnival fools, DJs, drag queens, farmers, homeless people, immigrants, journalists, photography students, teachers, the unemployed, youth workers – people from quite different backgrounds have taken these photographs for both a Namibian and a German public.

As in a game of “Chinese Whispers” disposable or cheap cameras were distributed in 2007 and 2008 to anyone who wanted to participate: from Windhoek to the Waterberg and up to the Kavango region in the north, the Aminuis Corridor in the east and Lüderitz in the south.

Very soon, though, the project was “charmingly derailed” (Gesine Krüger). Against the background of the genocide committed by the German Schutztruppe in 1904 to 1908, and in the light of the growing discussion of the reparations issue since the centenary year of 2004, the initial primary interest was in the visual afterlife of a divided and shared colonial history and in the various Namibian ideas about Germanness. Many of the photographers took a new angle, however: from increasingly different viewpoints they staged images of their daily lives and presented the people photographed as active subjects.

The photos, which were selected from a total of around 5000, often recall theatre or film stills. By demonstrating their own staged character they differ from the apparently authentic postcard motifs or the sensationalist images of poverty that pervade the visual presentation of Namibia – in Germany at least. And they provoke – particularly when the people in the photographs look at us – a reading that reflects on the difference between image production and subsequent viewing. Instead of only being able to understand them as representative portrayals of a post-colonial reality we are challenged to further research.

The photographs were first shown in 2009 at the Bethanien in Berlin and at the National Art Gallery of Namibia in Windhoek as well as at the Braunschweig festival Theaterformen in 2010. For the first time they are now being displayed in Switzerland, in complementary selections in Geneva and in Basel.

curated by Evelyn Annuß