

Sandra Mujinga

Text: Ellen Suneson

Sandra Mujinga's oeuvre invites us to a contemporary world, a hybrid of clubs, music videos and social media. Her aesthetic expression is alluring; short video clips alternate with *haute couture*, mingled with music tracks. At the centre is a body, sometimes her own, sometimes that of a family member, or of people who appear in videos on the Internet, or that of a hired model.

With performances, videos and spatial installations, Mujinga studies what takes place when we "read" what we look at. When we ascribe different meanings and narratives to what we see. Her works often direct our gaze to the background, to all that which surrounds whatever our eyes would normally have been drawn to, and which impacts on our perception of whatever is visible. Sound, objects and movement from disparate contexts are brought together in combinations that manipulate the original narrative and pull our attention and our associations in all directions. Music is a vital tool in Mujinga's explorations of visual processes. Many of her filmed works are seductive music videos, where the sound takes over and changes how we see what we see. In her performances she often assumes the role of DJ. Using music and visual designs, she choreographs people's movements in an art space or club setting. Her music tracks often represent the sounds that form part of the background noise that influences our experience of the physical world. With her works, Mujinga insists on making us better listeners.

In the video installation and performance *When I Stopped Playing Hard to Get* (2015), Mujinga used video footage from Congolese weddings that she had found on YouTube. Like much of the material on the internet, these movies had probably been uploaded for private use, making it available to friends and family. In one of the installation's projections, clips from the wedding videos show women dancing. By replacing the original soundtrack to the footage with her own electronic tracks and suggestive beats, she changes the perception of the women's dancing, and their movements instead trigger associations to dance styles such as hip hop or funk.

In many ways, Mujinga's works reflect the visual processes and hybrid genres that abound on the internet, where image, sound and video sites such as Instagram, SoundCloud, Vine and YouTube have revolutionised the possibilities to produce and publish your own material and thereby participate in a wider creation of meaning. Special conditions and time limits

prevail on these digital platforms, with regard to the type of data you can upload. In the video installation *I Gave the World a Word* (2016) Mujinga examines how the restrictions of the photo and video communities Instagram and Vine influence the conditions of creativity and its reception.

Clips that are uploaded on these websites are formatted to comply with a rule limiting the video length to 15 or 6 seconds respectively. Moreover, users have to relate to the fact that clips will be shown as loops. These restrictions mean that the clips are easier to share on different platforms and thus can reach a wider audience. On the other hand, the format entails that the videos are compressed, which can easily result in a loss of their original meaning when they are seen out of context. In consequence, you as the creator have to accept that you will lose control of your video the moment you upload it on the internet, and that it can be used on social media by others in relation to entirely different types of narratives, and thus generate meanings other than those originally intended.

In *I Gave the World a Word* Mujinga has produced several pieces of music, each no longer than 15 seconds, to explore the fleeting moments that create meaning in relation to the audience's perception and experience. The name of the work is a quote from an interview with Kayla Newman in the music magazine *The Fader*. Newman is famous for her video diary on the short-form video-sharing service Vine. Every day, she records short videos of herself with her mobile while she's in the passenger seat of her mother's car. In a six-second looped video clip, she studies her eyebrow shape complacently in the mobile camera, while saying, "We in this bitch. Finna get crunk. Eyebrows on fleek. Da fuq." The clip went viral and spread to other social media. At the time of writing, her video has more than 38 million views. The phrase "on fleek", which means approximately "on point" or "cool", was not an established expression prior to Newman's Vine. After the video went viral, people have begun to use it increasingly. *I Gave the World a Word* examines the impact of Instagram and Vine formats on creativity and the construction of meaning. The encounter between corporations and grassroots movements engenders a new type of home turf, and thus raises new issues concerning authorship, consumption of arts, the private sphere, celebrity culture, censorship and ways of producing meaning.

Mujinga's performances and video works are rarely concerned with the specific meanings attributed to various visual styles. On the contrary, her works scrutinise *the path* to creating meaning. How the combination of aesthetics, cultures, objects, bodies and sounds orient us towards different kinds of narratives. Her works highlight the potential of mastering the process

of creating meaning. How, by consciously shifting given definitions, things that at first glance seem evasive, oblique and strange can be made accessible.

Background

Asked why she wanted to be an artist, Sandra Mujinga (b 1989) stresses that an essential part of her choice of profession was that she simply had a choice, that many people encouraged and supported her throughout childhood and still do. Mujinga was born in Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but moved to Norway as a child. In 2015, she graduated with a Masters degree from the Malmö Art Academy. She now lives and works in Malmö and Berlin. Mujinga has always been fascinated by thoughts and ideas that do not adhere fully to accepted versions. As a practising artist, she gains access to a space where she can explore the thoughts that make her unsure, notions that seem warped, weird or strange.