

## ON DEEP MEMORY

In 2015 when standing in front of a building in Stockholm, I was asked what I would do with it. My answer was that I would paint something bold, bright and beautiful that screamed 'Africa'. Ever since I started traveling to Europe, I have been struck by how little visibility of Africa is found there. When traveling or living in South Africa, most cities, such as Cape Town where I live, are characterised by a Eurocentric presence and visual dominance that litters the urban landscape.

This could be attributed to a number of 'historical' and 'common memories' that seem well documented in the process of colonialism.

However, through selective historical erasure it is seldom remembered that Africa once dominated Europe and helped shape it into the powerhouse it is today. It is also forgotten that Africans were once considered equals in Europe. They were part of established society, and can be found among early intellectuals and others who figure in writing and in portraits dating back to the early 1500's. References to Africans were a positive sign of strength and military power.

When working through possible titles for the show, museum director Joanna Sandell suggested the title Deep Memory. At the time I was not aware that this was influenced by her encounter with Sam Matambo's sculpture of the same name. Nevertheless I found "Deep Memory" fitting, it seemed to answer to my questions of the absence, amnesia and deep memory of Africa in Europe.

Memory is a fickle thing. It is widely accepted that memory is susceptible to error. This may include remembering events that never occurred, or remembering them differently to the way they actually happened. These errors or gaps can occur due to a number of different reasons, including the emotional involvement in the situation, expectations and environmental changes. As the retention interval between encoding and retrieval of the memory lengthens, there is an increase in both the amount that is forgotten, and the likelihood of inaccuracies of memory occurring.

Deeper levels of analysis gives us more elaborate, stronger and longer-lasting memories than shallow levels of analysis.

It explains why we remember some things much better and for much longer than others. There are theories that focus on the depth of processing involved in creating a memory. According to these theories, memory is merely what happens as a result of processing information. The deeper information is processed, the longer the memory created will last.

It is possible to draw a clear distinction between so called "common memory" and "deep memory": common memory is that which "tends to restore or establish coherence, closure and possibly a redemptive stance", deep memory is that which remains essentially inarticulate and unrepresented, that which continues to exist as unresolved trauma just beyond the reach of meaning.

There are also theories suggesting that our past life selves are not just characters in past dramas; they still live within us today as 'sub-personalities'. Their 'unfinished business' can make itself known through irrational fears, phobias or patterns that are not easily changed. Roger Woolger's "Deep Memory Process" is a process developed to deal with and heal trauma from our past lives. It combines active imagination, bodywork and psychodrama with shamanic or spirit journeying and integration between lifetimes. By working with the residues of our past lives, the argument goes, the present life can be transformed.

This is very similar to what African shamans do in a somewhat different process. In his book *Indaba My Children*, Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa alludes to the process of selecting traditional bearers of great knowledge. These are women and men with good memories

and a great capacity to remember words and repeat them verbatim. These chosen people are told the mysteries of the tribes under an oath never to alter, add or subtract a single word.

In one sense, this form of preserving tribal history through the centuries relies on memory as a process of learning by repetition. At the same time, this highly specialised art seems connected to an entirely different form of "memory" – a kind of shamanic recall of events that supersedes individual lifetimes and personal experience. Crucial to the role of the shaman, is the notion of memory as something approximating cross-cultural or archetypal memory, and the ability to bring the past into the present, along with the future.

The Deep Memory exhibition seeks not necessarily to make Africa present in Europe, but perhaps to echo the historian Friedlander when he writes: "commentary should disrupt the facile linear progression of the narration, introduce alternative interpretations, question any partial conclusion, withstand the need for closure". The artists taking part in this exhibition have been invited to look at the different ways in which we deal with the memory of history and the residue left by the deep memory. The exhibition reiterates that although we may never be able to explain or retrieve everything, working through our memory may help to keep watch over any absent meaning.

– Breeze Yoko, curator