

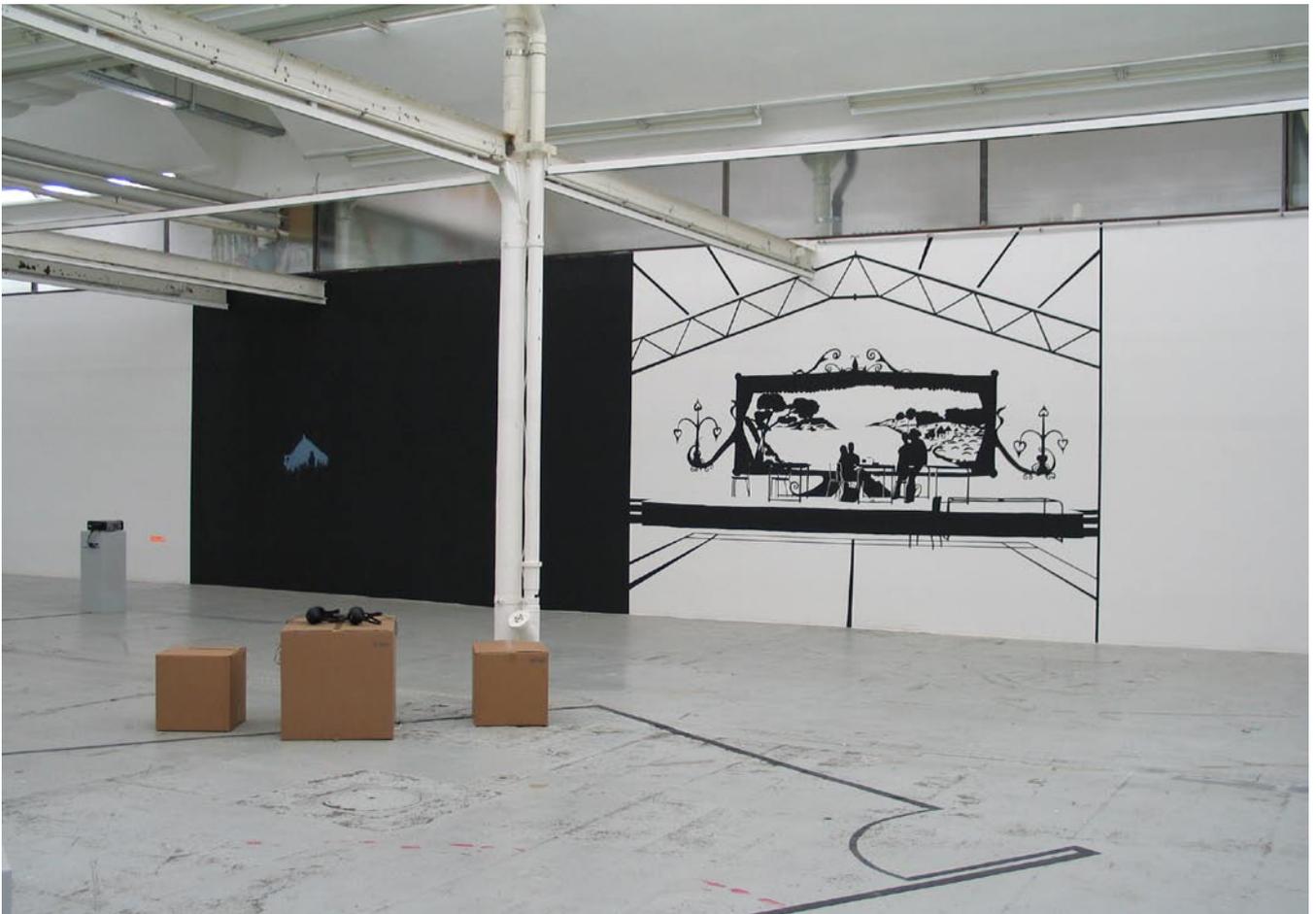
The Expert, Part 1

Sofie Thorsen 2006

In 1962 the Danish Ministry of foreign affairs established the Danish International Development Assistance, Danida, with the purpose to coordinate the Danish development aid. During the following 50 years, Denmark sent out so-called "experts" to work in Danish and international projects in a number of developing countries. The experts left Denmark with certain expectations and ideas about the culture they would meet. They applied very different strategies in the encounter with the local situation. After having returned back home to Denmark, they had to re-integrate their individual and specific experiences into their Danish biography, and to mediate their experiences into the Danish context, which mostly had little more than a generalised image of the places where the experts had been. Of course visual material such as photographs and film were crucial in this mediation process, towards a private, family audience, as well as more public audience at lectures and schools.

«The Expert, Part 1» is the first part of an ongoing project «The Expert». The project works with image production and notions of the African in a Danish perspective.

«The Expert, Part 1» looks at the approach to the local African architecture. It is staged at a world bank secondary school in Zambia. 75 images of white shapes projected as a slide show on the black surface depicts the building process of a pavilion in a teachers garden and includes a short text introducing the situation and different persons. It is juxtaposed with a wall painting showing a communal room in the school, 4 students are sitting on a stage in front of a wallpainting of an African landscape in a theatrical frame. The images are based on amateur photographs taken by former experts in Zambia.



Colonialism without colonies? Relations between tourism, neo-colonialism and migration.
Shedhalle, Zürich, February 25 - May 7, 2006



Projection, text

A: Where are we?

Expert: We are in the teacher's compound of a World Bank secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa.

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A: Why are you here?

Expert: I have been stationed here as an expert by Danida, the organisation for Danish International Development Assistance. I teach religion and history at the school.

A: Can you tell me about the school?

Expert: It is a boarding school with around 400 pupils from different provinces in the country. It was built in the late 60s.

A: Who lives in the compound?

Expert: The teachers from the school. They are Irish, British, Dutch, German, Danish, Indian, and Zambian. Around 35 families. It is quite mixed.

A: What is this?

Expert: We are building an open rondavel, a traditional hut in the garden of our house in the compound.

A: Why?

Expert: Almost everybody in the compound has a hut like this in their garden, like a little pavilion. It is nice to sit inside; you can be outside and in the shade at the same time. It is a small version of the ones they have in the African villages.

A: How do you spend your time?

Expert's wife: I take care of the household and the children. When everything gets to be too much and I need a break, I go for a walk between the huts in the local villages and get glimpses of everyday life there. That is very relaxing.

I tried to go there and draw, but it felt much too intrusive. And it was difficult to have a circle of 20 children around me, wondering about this strange white woman with nothing better to do than to put lines on a piece of paper. I soon gave that up.

A: How much contact do you have with the local population?

Expert: I have brought my enlarger and chemicals with me from Denmark to set up a dark-room where I can develop the photographs I take. People ask me to take their picture, of themselves or their family.

I prefer to do portraits, but mostly people want pictures in full figure in front of their house and with their most important possessions. Usually I take some portraits as well. Mostly people don't notice anyway.

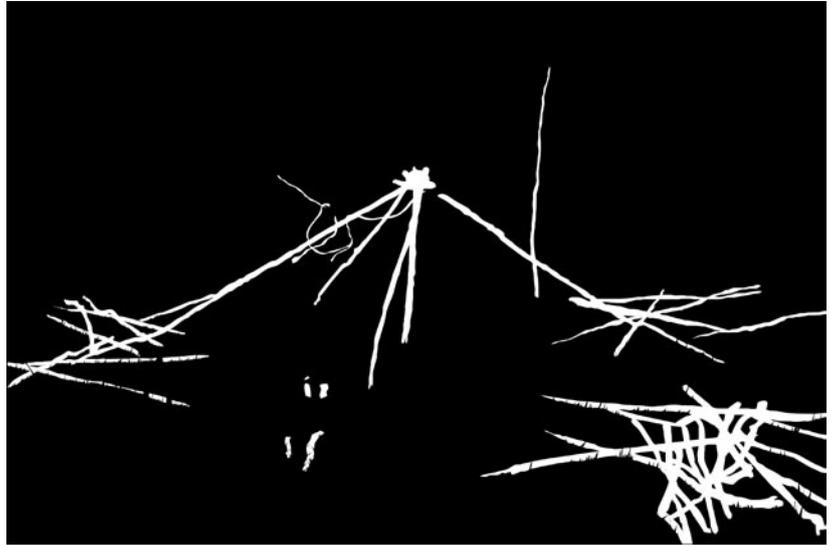
Then I give them a copy of the picture they wanted and keep the portrait for my own collection. After a while people started asking me to come to weddings and parties.

A: Did you dream anything?

The Expert: Yes. I dreamt that I had applied for a job with the United Nations in Somalia. I got the job and thought to myself that it must be very hot there. And it was - when I arrived it was extremely hot.

But at the same time a very Danish landscape opened up before me. Somalia was a green, hilly country with fields and crops that could have been Danish.

Projection, single frames



Projection, single frames

