

Publication

Aesthetic Shifts in a Transforming City: Performative Acts and Gestures
in the Urban Space of Johannesburg

Book Item (Buchkapitel, Lexikonartikel, jur. Kommentierung, Beiträge in Sammelbänden)

ID 2795375

Author(s) Siegenthaler, Fiona

Author(s) at UniBasel [Siegenthaler, Fiona](#) ;

Year 2017

Title Aesthetic Shifts in a Transforming City: Performative Acts and Gestures in the Urban Space of Johannesburg

Editor(s) Moreillon, Olivier; Muller, Alan; Stiebel, Lindy

Book title Cities in Flux: Metropolitan Spaces in South African Literary and Visual Texts

Publisher LIT

Place of publication Zürich

Pages 73-99

ISSN/ISBN 978-3-643-80241-5 ; 978-3-643-80241-0

Series title Schweizerische Afrikastudien. Études africaines suisses

Number 12

Keywords performance art, engaged art, johannesburg, urban change, Steven Cohen, Athi-Patra Ruga, Ismail Farouk, Center for Historical Reenactments, Sello Pesa, Vaughn Sadie, Senzeni Marasela

In the last two decades, performance artists repeatedly employed the streets, parks, and neighbourhoods of inner city Johannesburg as their stage for performative acts and happenings, responding to, and engaging with, the democratisation of its urban space. The artists, however, act and interact differently in the urban space of Johannesburg and with its diverse audiences. This chapter presents three different types of performance practice that can be understood as examples in a continuum ranging from theatrical/spectacular to a sublime form that has much in common with mimicry. The argument builds on different performance pieces and performative gestures by Steven Cohen, Athi-Patra Ruga, Ismail Farouk, the Center for Historical Reenactments, Sello Pesa & Vaughn Sadie, and Senzeni Marasela and brings them in relation to spatial, social, and political aspects of public space in the city of Johannesburg.

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