Interview with Bubblegum Club

For the Live Art Festival #8: SUPERSPACES (07. – 16.06.2018) Johannesburg based creative platform Bubblegum Club opens the “Infinity Studio” at Kampnagel. The interdisciplinary program occupies various locations of the former factory for three nights and introduces 17 artists from South Africa. Kampnagel curator Line Spellenberg interviewed Jamal Nxedlana about their collaboration and work process on May 12th 2018.

Line Spellenberg: On your website you describe yourself as a “cultural intelligence agency” – what do you mean by that?

Jamal Nxedlana: It means that research is at the heart of our practice. Cultural insight or intelligence informs everything we do, from the type of content we publish to our curatorial projects and the visuals we produce.

Bubblegum Club produces commercial image campaigns & promotion, publishing & journalistic writing, artistic and curatorial work. What is the core interest connecting all these practices?

Although we do connect these practices it was never our main intention. It was more about creating a space, building a network and developing an operating model for ourselves and other cultural practitioners. And in order to do so we felt that centering our practice around digital publishing made the most sense, especially in Johannesburg where there aren’t many opportunities, particularly for explorative practices.

You are also almost the same group of people who works under the name CUSS as a curators group. I saw a program you did at the KW in Berlin in the frame of the 9th Berlin Biennial. After this we started to talk and we invited you to curate a program at Kampnagel for the Live Art Festival #8. How did you develop the concept for “Infinity Studio”?
The idea has developed quite a lot from when we first started speaking. Initially we were interested in creating a space or studio for independent cultural producers. We imagined the space as a time capsule, organized and conceived in a way that would recreate the creative energy or mood that we felt and that was so stimulating for our practice between 2010 & 2012. In that moment we felt a sense of infinite possibilities, and that where the name Infinity Studio comes from.

Over time we identified a focus for the studio, which was to look at privatization, militarization and escapism in Johannesburg’s urban landscape. End of March 2018, we organized a residency comprised of a 5 days as an immersive cultural tour in Johannesburg. This allowed us to expose and immerse the invited artists to the spaces that we were looking at as the curatorial team. The program we will present at Kampnagel in June will be based on the experiences from this residency.

Can you give us a little background on these key words, “privatization, militarization & escapism”?

It was really when we started thinking about the residency and what our plans were for it. We were thinking about the artists and the aspects of their work that we were interested in and how we could use the residency to focus in on those specific areas of their practices. As we identified spaces and mapped out activities for the residency or cultural tour, we started noticing themes and tropes which we distilled to “privatization, militarization & escapism”.

Coming from the curatorial perspective of a theater some things strike me about the way you work: For one, you invite a lot of quite different artists to participate with individual contributions, maybe extending the idea of a “group exhibition” onto live art?

Yes, but from group exhibition to group work to live art. We looked for people with particular skill sets. For example, writers, vocalists, music producers, digital artists and fashion designers. People with skills that could be combined to produce components for a one group work. The other thing that was very important to us was the way people practice, for example, are they able to work in a group and practice across their area of interest or discipline?

Also, what strikes me is that you think a lot about the space, the framing and communication around the project. The ways of presenting the artists – which is part of the work as curators – becomes artistically itself. Can you describe your working methods for this?

Curation has always been an artistic practice for us and it's no different with this project. Our role has been to create the platform and quite literally the stage on which the work is set and will play out.
The title of the Live Art Festival this year is SUPERSPACES and is presenting artistic and curatorial ways of creating specific set ups of space, art experiences and ‘users’. Can you connect the “Infinity Studio” to this?

I think it connects to this in the way we are approaching the relationship between the audience and the performers, as well as the relationship between the audiences space and the performers space (the stage). We will use curation to reorientate these relationships.

Thank you for your time and thoughts!

About
Bubblegum Club is a cultural intelligence agency, based in Johannesburg. We work to help brands and organizations understand and engage with contemporary South African youth culture. Along with identifying trends, we take the holistic approach of interpreting and explaining them. Through conceptualizing the broader social context of trends, our projects and activations help our clients to organically access youth culture.

Reflecting this mission, the company is divided into two interconnected divisions- an online magazine and an agency.

Our Online Magazine is a compendium of images, news and opinion which presents our perspective on the people and production defining South African youth culture. Its vision is to present an alternative narrative on South African art and society, by showcasing cutting edge creators and their work. The magazine is not based solely on popularity or visibility, but aims to give exposure to individuals and groups who embody passion and innovation. As well as being a showcase, the magazine is a platform for ideas and commentary which frame and advance cultural trends.

Our Agency produces regular reports which identify and interpret emergent trends. The reports are thoroughly researched and theoretically sophisticated, and offer our clients a rigorous analysis of the ideas and aesthetics driving these trends.

Links
Bubblegum Club
CUSS Group:
“Infinity Studio” at Kampnagel