



BODY

MACHINE

LOCATION

This work is a moving image project based on Fukeiron; the concept of landscape theory developed by early Japanese filmmakers where the landscape was cast as evidence of real or imagined crimes and rather than photograph landscapes as crime scenes, they would photograph crime scenes as landscapes. The assumption is that the landscape is inherently a crime scene. Photographing here means making or constructing an image & not filming a place per se.

The first reading of the landscape is through a set of coordinates that locate a piece of land in Kajiado, Kenya. The nomadic Maasai, Kenya's indigenous community first settled here. Both this region and by extension Nairobi where they roamed freely with their cattle bear deep colonial and ecological markers. The site also acts as an observatory to witness a shapeshifting seasonal river that exists in a state of both wholeness and collapse.

The second reading of the landscape is through a popular street in downtown Nairobi known as Moi Avenue or Tom Mboya Street. It is named after Tom Mboya; a famous Kenyan politician who was assassinated there in 1969. The street known for its noise, people traffic and petty crime acts as a precarious site where illegal business is transacted and counterfeit goods and realities intermingle.

The third reading of the landscape is through the Odeon Cinema which is also situated along Tom Mboya Street. Due to its strategic location downtown, it is mostly known and used as a bus stop rather than a cinema. It was built in the late 1950's in the art deco style for the colonial elite in pre-independence Kenya but has since undergone numerous transformations from cinema to church to market. It was part of the global Odeon Cinemas established by a British entrepreneur in the 1920's. For this work, the video *Expressway* is usually projected inside a cardboard box or box screen to echo pre-independence mobile cinemas while paired with a wooden model of a highway.

The fourth reading of the landscape is through the shadow cast by the recently completed but controversial Nairobi expressway. It looms over downtown Nairobi while dividing and altering movement within the urban landscape thus ensuring the poor, homeless and working-class scramble for space below the highway. The video *Expressway* tracks movement & shadows cast by a cardboard model of what appears to be a road or bridge. Highways, bridges & the open road are well known plot devices in cinema meant to depict leaving. They are symbolic of change & transition in one's life, growth, new frontiers, adventure and as a pathway to another world. This expressway in Nairobi was built as a monument of progress & development but it only leads us into the shadows (debt). The crime here is witnessed through the mega loans acquired from predatory financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Illegally acquired tenders through Public-Private Partnership projects (PPP) is another a tool that struggling governments like Kenya use to deliver services and infrastructure by contracting with the private sector.

The sound featured in *Expressway* is of cows walking in the city centre & along highways. Some of them usually have bells tied around their necks to lead the herd thus ensuring that the sound is registered long before you see the animals. Most come from the aforementioned region in Kajiado where in November 2022 the worst ever recorded drought in recent years killed off most of the cattle & wildlife. Carcasses were strewn on the

highway & river bank & during one of the site visits there I was able to witness this. While changing weather patterns have altered the landscape over time, the true crime witnessed here is the continuous neglect of drought-stricken communities by the state & a deliberate lack of care & foresight when it comes to not only addressing matters of climate change but also human & animal co-existence.

Herding can thus allude to state manipulation. This analogy connects to a blind beggar who stands just outside a well-known T.V and electronic goods shop on Tom Mboya Street. On one hand he plays a harmonica while on the other hand he holds onto a cane & bowl filled with coins. Vivid images and sound from the tv's and stereos on display inside spill onto the busy street harmonizing with the beggars' performance. Landscape theory emphasizes on the isolated image in the landscape and in this case it's the 'invisible' blind beggar. The harmonica & cane he holds are his 'tools' of sensing the world through the small, hectic and loud space he occupies.

The cane/walking stick is similar to those used by the nomadic Maasai herders. It serves multiple functions such as steering animals, digging, reaching & probing, bodily support, weapons and as a measuring tool to determine water levels while crossing rivers. For blind people such as the beggar, navigation is enhanced through the cane & what's in contact with it. Similar walking sticks that I gathered served as units of measurement and assumed the form of fossils as well as an organic material to construct a mobile cinema & pyramid structure in the exhibition *Body Machine Location*.

Isolated images filmed in Japan during a trip there further added to these landscape and travelogue readings. One instance was recording a vertigo-inducing ascent of 100 meters over a one-minute elevator ride at an observatory tower. This 'supersonic' looping footage is screened inside the museum to contrast with the old service elevator that emerges slowly from the museum's floor in the middle of the room.

Another visit to the Nagoya aquarium led me to encounter Beluga whales; best-known for their echo-location capabilities as well as sociability despite large numbers held in captivity. The underwater, subterranean sound in this video is artificially enhanced through layering, stretching, reversing, slowing down & reverberation. I composed this using a harmonica I purchased at a second-hand goods store there & interfered with the frequency of a shortwave radio using a projector's remote controller while adjusting the motor speed on a 'weather instrument'. It echoes the noise & deafening decibel levels of the electronic goods shops on Tom Mboya Street.

Lastly and perhaps the most intriguing reading of the landscape was through seemingly unrelated occurrences. The field outside my studio becomes a site of unusual activity when a wooden structure is set ablaze in a gun burning ceremony presided over by the then country's president Uhuru Kenyatta. A few months earlier an owl perches on my kitchen window and a murder of crows descend on the field weeks prior to the ceremony. A group of crows is called a murder and a group of owls is known as a parliament. Now pair this information with the violence associated with guns, parliament as a site where public laws are debated and a benevolent head of state who had been indicted for crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court (ICC). This work was screened as an 8-channel video installation on synchronized CRT televisions. It also featured a pyramid structure constructed using the walking sticks I gathered to mirror the one set ablaze by the president during the gun burning ceremony.

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