

## **'Show Me The World' – An encounter with Jelili Atiku**

„Show me the world“ is the name for the symposium within the Spielart Festival 2015. It begins on a beautiful bright morning in the Munich based museum Haus der Kunst and lets the attendees enter the world of cross-cultural curating with big expectations.

The first time I see Jelili Atiku, is when he channels his way through the rows of chairs in the conference room; his colourful African robe is standing out in between the white walls, he's smiling and talking to his seatmate. It's not until later that I get told, that he's not only a curator, but also a Nigerian multimedia artist and a political activist, who mostly works in the fields of performance art, installations and statuary.

For Jelili Atiku these three fields are highly connected, which comes apparent during the lectures and workshops. He is a curator in order to show his art; but at the same time he is a political activist using the medium of art. Works like „Ewawo - The Nigerian Prisoner, Performance at Visual Arts Section, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos, Nigeria, 2004.“ are criticizing the conditions in Nigeria and are trying to create changes in the consciousness of the people. As a cross-cultural curator he tries to help viewers to understand the world and to expand their understanding experience and to activate and renew their lives and environment.

And that's exactly what the „Kuratoren-Dialog“ is focusing on, which takes place on the second day of the conference: Jelili Atiku and the New York based curator Judy Hussie-Taylor are sitting next to each other on the stage of Haus der Kunst, each holding a microphone in their hand and are discussing their work as cross-cultural curators. The question that dictates the whole dialog is: „What is cross-cultural curating?“

For Judy Hussie-Taylor the answer is: „Always ask questions and try to approach the artists' ideas in what we want to show and express“ – For Jelili however cross-cultural curating has another meaning; „curating“ means to activate memories and to design something new: It's about generating productive energy.

His questions are therefore: „What happens around me? How to reconstruct the stereotypes? How can I reactivate the stereotypes? And how can I decolonize myself?“

And these are the questions that the workshop, which takes place in a classroom of the Sankt Anna elementary school, are revolving around; It's about the term decolonization, which is the center of all of Jelili Atiku's work – his curating and his artistic and political work. According to Jelili we are all victims of colonial powers– not only in the political sense but also on a social level: We all have always been “colonized” through information, through relations and experiences. That's why his message to the attendees of the workshop is: „Become naive again and liberate yourself from colonialization!” For Jelili a colonial power is a power, that forces us to „stand apart“. Decolonization on the other hand means “progress“, creating new categories and to evolve: “shifting” is the key word of his curating process, which is in the course of the conference.

With Jelili's help we are trying to get to the bottom of the term decolonization – through playing together some games; because for Jelili Atiku curating is practice not a method and for us participants this playful, even naive approach to his work was definitely something new!

On the next day I have the chance to speak with Jelili in private. This private conversation at the Muffathalle in Munich offers the participants the opportunity to ask him questions that were left unanswered during the symposium:

With a coffee in my hand I sit down next to him and ask him questions about his hometown Lagos, about his political performances, which he does in the streets of his town and about his work as a curator, which brought him to many different places around the world: I do too have the feeling now that I have seen a bit more of the world.

“Show Me The World” has not only fulfilled my expectations but thanks to Jelili I also learned about the practice of cross-cultural curating in a cross-cultural and global world of art. He is one of the few examples, that you can shift something in this capitalistic world without money but with a strong volition. Even if Jelili's work as an artist, curator and political activist is more than precarious in his home town<sup>1</sup>, it is just this power of his performances and artworks, which let him create a cross-cultural network with artists and curators and which brought him all

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<sup>1</sup> Few weeks after the symposium „Show me the world“ Jelili Atiku was arrested over performance in Ejigbo, Lagos State by a traditional ruler. To everyone's great relief Jelili Atiku was remanded on bail on the next day. We stay in contact with him and hope that we can help him when he needs our help – this is only one of the things we need to learn from cross-cultural curating in the world of art.

around the world. His concept of decolonialisation himself as an artist, curator and simply as a human being let me think a lot about me and myself in a cross-cultural world and it is important for all of us to find the power of shifting ourself and open our body and mind for all the different experiences of the world.