The Life of a Dress

MOZAMBIQUE

2013
The Life of a Dress

MOZAMBIQUE

2013
The Life of a Dress

Amanda Ericsson

ISBN 978-91-981595-1-6
Hello Mozambique

17
15 March–24 March
Arrival
Karol and the puppets
Mamoli Mission orphanage
Liberdade Orphanage

45
25 March–31 March
Workshops and meetings
Mima-te Spoil Yourself
Markets

69
1 April–6 April
Preparing the expo
Swaziland

85
7 April–14 April
Meanwhile and in between

109
Epilogue

110
Contributors

112
Colophon
Hello Mozambique

In March 2013 I was invited to Maputo, Mozambique to set up and organise an updated version of the exhibition and workshop *The Life of a Dress*. This was my second visit to the country and I had been eagerly awaiting my return there for three years. Back in November 2010 I came on my own with 50 photographs of revived dresses in my bag, knowing very little about what to expect from the country in which I was just about to curate an exhibition involving second-hand clothing. As a result from this first visit a new branch of *The Life of a Dress* had evolved making me once again question my personal motivation and aim behind it.

On my return to Maputo, things had moved on and I had put *The Life of a Dress* in the framework of being part of an action-based research project in up-cycling textile management for The Swedish School of Textiles. Together with the Swedish Embassy I had prepared for this second visit for quite some time. The gallery *Núcleo de Arte* had been pre-booked and a schedule of meetings had started to take shape. We had five weeks ahead of us to make, define and execute *The Life of a Dress 2.0*. One of the big differences this time was that we were now a team of five people, willing to contribute, explore and evolve the concepts of the project. Jenny, a former intern at The Swedish Embassy who back in 2010 had been responsible for the project’s first visit, was no longer in Maputo. She had moved further south and just given birth to a little girl. The
The project’s Mexican photographer Roberto Rubalcava was again by my side and Brazilian puppeteer Karol Silva who was volunteering in the project was soon to join us, as was David Sauvage, American film director and my Swedish photographer friend Lina Scheynius. They had all shown interest in the project and had offered to contribute with their different skills to make the project stronger.

The aim of this visit was to learn more about the current climate of Mozambican fashion and projects relating to the second-hand clothing industry in the country. We were to develop a new version of the exhibition and workshop and for my research agenda I wanted to follow up on how the visitors and participants acted in the space we were to create, what were they making and would there be any difference in the perception of the concept from the first time? For three years I had been sharing my experiences from my own fashion brand *dreamandawake* with the founders of the now fast-developing Mozambican fashion-brand *Mima-te* which was developed by Nelly and Nelsa Guambe during my first visit. Since our first meeting at Núcleo in 2010 we had been bouncing ideas through the internet. This visit was an opportunity to finally work and share some time with them. I also wanted to use photography to preserve and manage the impressions and experiences we were to live through, as in 2010 there had been too many to practically cope with. I wanted to see if we could find a way to further share the Mozambican passion for arts, craft and solidarity. I also wanted to work with more dresses and continue to experiment with ways of making them live longer.

Retrospectively, I have to admit that I did not manage to accomplish all I had wanted to achieve. Plenty of ground had to be covered to map and document the general flow of the workshops as well as putting together a one-week event, this proved to be a considerable time and energy consuming task. I had so many roles during this project that I had little time to engage in anything wholeheartedly as I was attempting to keep one step ahead. I could however take comfort in observing the inspirational activities going on around me, Karol's work together with the kids from the streets, Roberto's interaction with the artists at Núcleo and David and Lina's documentation with Nelly and Nelsa from *Mima-te*. The strong magic and unpretentious attitude in people I had experienced in 2010 was more than present but my obsession to preserve it and documenting the project itself had brought me further away from what originally was the core for me: the revival of dresses. Through this book I would like to share glimpses from some of our experiences, far from all but however at least a few. The aim is not to share a beautified image of a segregated country in great poverty. It is rather an attempt to explore, experiment with and question local and global trade patterns of fashion and second-hand clothing. The moments in here are all part of the story and ongoing journey of *The Life of a Dress*. 
15 March–24 March

Arrival

We land at Maputo’s recently completed Chinese-built airport and are picked up by Jenny and Rupert. After a few days in their new home sorting out the remaining materials from 2010 our first puppeteering workshop is booked in for the nearby village. To learn more about local hand-weaving we visit the studio Ponki where Aruindo weaves beautiful fabrics from organic cotton and reused clothes. After getting a lift back through the rather bumpy sandy dunes we settle in in Maputo. Meetings after meetings are made to get an understanding of the current climate. One of our many meetings is with Judieta and Manuel at the recycling organization AMOR. AMOR is one of the very few recycling organizations that has containers placed out in Maputo, collecting materials for recycling and reuse. The hunt for textile materials and dresses takes off and we head over to the markets of Zimpeto and Fajardo together with Rejao de Carvalho. Rejao is a musician, illustrator, graphic designer and artist who will do the poster for the exhibition. We participate in a TV program at TV Mozambique presenting the coming exhibition and workshop. After this we pay a visit to the design studio of Portuguese-born Iris Santos. She is a designer making dresses using the traditionally Mozambican designed, but produced abroad, capulanas (printed sarongs). We reconvene with Nelly and Nelsa to plan the coming documentation process and set goals for what we would like to achieve in the coming month.
Hand-weaving studio Ponki, Ponta do Ouro

Mama Africa, Mozambican Designer

Hand-weaving studio Ponki, Ponta do Ouro

Designer and artist Rejao de Carvalho making sketches for exhibition poster
Rejao de Carvalho

Zimpeto Market, Maputo, collecting materials for workshop
A few weeks before I was about to leave for Mozambique, Karol, a friend of mine, told me that she wanted to come along and volunteer in the project. Karol has worked with children and puppeteering for several years and we had for a long time been talking about doing a project together but had not yet found the opportunity. I was excited to hear about her interest but there was little I could offer her in return for her work as the project had already been set. A few days later she started a fundraising project online using Facebook, Tumblr and Paypal to raise money to cover her flight and visa fees. And so she came along.

Karol Silva, growing up in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, has since 1996 lived and worked in London, England. She builds thrilling universes through puppetry and play, combining leftover materials into unique characters shaping thoughtful stories of confusion and love. When re-working dresses there are plenty of scraps, cut-off arms and lengths of skirts put aside to rest. Some pieces are stained or have holes and flaws which are tricky to work around. These pieces could now be used in the puppetry workshops. Karol uses the textiles, empty water bottles, empty toilet-rolls and old newspaper and with the assistance of glue and tape new life is breathed into the materials. Through considered craft expressive creatures are born. To see Karol and the children’s working process and play together turned out to be a journey on its own.
During our first week in Maputo we had several times passed by a group of kids in the street outside *Mundos* (a restaurant popular among foreigners). One night we are on our way home with our arms filled with empty plastic bottles we have collected for upcoming workshops. The boys are curious about what we were going to do with them and within a minute Karol has invited them to make a puppet for themselves. An hour later they are all sitting in the street, rolling newspaper for the heads, using the plastic bottles for the bodies and cutting fabric for their clothes. They were later invited to join the exhibition where they made a big puppet all together. Karol became *Tía* (Aunty) Karol to the boys.

**Mamoli Mission**

As part of her mission in Mozambique, Karol wanted to share her puppetry with kids who live without their parents. In Ponta do Oro we reconnect with Nick Vaughan from *Mamoli Mission /The House of Nations* which is an orphanage situated on a hill in the South of Mozambique. We meet a group of 38 children, aged between six and fifteen who are waiting for us all dressed up in the same pink t-shirts. The kids live and go to school here together. A few of them are helping out in their local bakery which gives some income for the orphanage. Karol immediately launches her play and after a few hours of making, playing and short performances it is time to drive back before the darkness overtakes us.
Old dresses, cut-offs, materials used for the making of puppets
In Maputo Karol makes three visits to Liberdae Orphanage which is housing 26 girls. They are aged between six and fourteen years old and live together in a few rooms. They cook, eat, clean and take school classes together. The home is run by nuns connected to the Christian Council of Mozambique. We all present ourselves and the kids show us around their rooms, kitchen and common areas. There is a sewing-machine in one of them but no one knows how to use it. Karol explains the project we are working with and why we are using the old dresses. The girls are invited to join in the exhibition and together they make a big hanging mobile of flying puppets. The older girls are also invited to join the workshop and learn how to use the sewing-machines, however when that day arrived they didn’t attend the workshop. After a few hours we find out there has been a misunderstanding and the vehicle booked had been cancelled.
Cutting a broken dress into stripes for the puppets, Liberdade Orphanage

Cutting materials for hair and clothes, Liberdade Orphanage

Puppet made from plastic-bottles and newspaper, Liberdade Orphanage

Cutting a broken dress into stripes for the puppets, Liberdade Orphanage
Karol shows how to make the clothes for the puppets, Liberdade Orphanage
Sewing-machines, Liberdade Orphanage

Materials, Liberdade Orphanage
The puppet's new home
25 March–31 March

Workshops and meetings

We are hosting our first workshops at ENAV, National School of Visual Arts. David is to give a short workshop to the students in how to make a documentary in one hour. Karol is in the room next-door, sharing her puppeteering skills. For the redesigning workshop we have brought a few books, photographs and a selection of second-hand dresses which are soon being cut into. We start off to make the BIG MAMA dress and the students work very quickly. They organise themselves in small production units where someone is trying on the garment, another one is cutting and the third one is sewing. Later on in the week we have a meeting with ISArC, The Higher Institute of Arts and Culture. ISArC is an art school offering design and art education programs. In a few of the school’s courses the students are encouraged to create new products out of reused and recycled materials. I give an introduction of the coming workshop to the design students and invite them to join in. We meet Karina Gonçalves who is running the design programs and Wacy Zacarias who is assisting the fashion design department. She was the winner of the young designer category at the Mozambique fashion week in 2010 with her brand Woogui. Today she is on the board of The Association for Mozambican Designers. Later on in the week Karol and I go hunting for some more materials for the workshop. On the Sunday we all meet up with Nelly and Nelsa who are soon about to have their first catwalk show.
Whether in Europe, Asia, America, Australia or Africa there is a great amount of people amending old clothes, giving garments from the past a prolonged lifetime for the future. Many people do so for themselves out of necessity, others for the fun of it, or to better follow the fast changing aesthetics of fashion. There are also some who take these principles one step further and turn it into a business. Through redesign second-hand clothes are refined, highlighted and placed back onto the global market. In 2010 I met the Mozambican twins, Nelly and Nelsa Guambe. They grew up in rural Chicuque and were eighteen when they got a scholarship to study Public Administration and Development studies / Political Sciences at the UNISA in Pretoria, South Africa. When I first met them I was ending the making of a small collection called Queen of Africa which was made in the workshop of the exhibition. I asked the two charming twins if they wanted to model the dresses and soon after the fashion shoot was over they told me that they would like to make a brand and business based on old dresses. They selected the name, Mima-te (Portuguese for spoil yourself) to brand their finds. This was the third time I experienced an immediate interest from young women to further develop the formula of second-hand clothes + design + photography, from a hobby into a business. I shared my story and experience from the development of my own dress.
Preparing the fashion show, Maputo

and concept brand dreamandawake with them. Visual media and an online platform was pushed as crucial tools to communicate to a wider international market. We stayed in contact through email and skype and soon the twins started to sell their dresses in occasional sales at Núcleo de Arte. A logo was developed by a friend of the twins and this was screen printed on white fabric which were sewn onto the garments as labels.

“Mima-te's belief is that up-cycling what has been given to Africa as a sign of good will (but much too often ends ups as waste) is an innovative way of creating a new image of Mozambican clothing” – Mima-te website

Today Nelly and Nelsa are known by the market vendors as the twins who buy what no one else wants. The dresses are redesigned, crafted and reconstructed in Maputo by the skilled and experienced hands of the local tailors. Nelly and Nelsa have since 2010 strategically developed their brand. In March 2013 we documented their working process, discussed quality aspects and bounced ideas for their first collection The Mafalala-collection which was shown at their first fashion show at Núcleo de Arte during our visit. Condé Nast, the American media company, soon showed interest in the twins' work and David started producing a documentary showcasing them entitled The twins from Mozambique.
A great amount of people in Mozambique work with the trading of goods in the many streets and markets of the country. Coconuts, cashews, and fresh vegetables are to be found in a mixture of cheap Chinese imports, semi-used electronics, toys, tools and mountains of second-hand clothing from high-consumption countries. These clothes create a big market and is an important income for many people. The clothes have originally been donated to charity organizations in for example, Europe, Australia and the United States, whereupon they have been sold further to commercial middlemen who sort, grade and bale them for further trade. The bales are exported all over the world. The bales which are finding their way to Mozambique enter through the ports whereupon they will be resold. Local vendors, often specialised in different garments, buy their bales in the local warehouses and separate and sell them further at markets such as Baixa, Fajardo, Zimpeto, Componi and Xipamanine Markets. Here, hundreds of stalls present clothes from all over the world. Branded second-hand clothes such as Banana Republic, Target and Victoria’s Secret are popular. Most of the clothes that are sold are not altered or redesigned. We find a few tailors who use the materials from second-hand clothes and combine them with the traditional capulanas (printed sarong), creating beautiful dresses. To make a living selling second-hand clothing is however difficult. Quality of stock is one main issue which can cause great problems for the vendor who
might have invested his last money in a bale which turns out to be of poor quality or containing unpopular goods. The long-term effects of a non-developing local textile and clothing production is widely discussed. The out-flow of money from poor countries to commercial actors and charity organizations through the trade is another critical matter.
Tailor in the market using capulanas and second-hand clothing to make new dresses, Componi market, Maputo
1 April–6 April

Preparing the exhibition

We are busy with the preparations of the exhibition. More second-hand material is collected as quite a few dresses have been used in the workshops in the past weeks. I meet up with the artist and sculptor Fiel dos Santos who during my first visit contributed with making two dress-hangers from reused guns for the exhibition. One of these hangers is always used in *The Life of a Dress* as a symbol of solidarity and power of re-construction. This time we are working on making bullets into buttons and Fiel works on getting the bullets properly emptied and cut. I polish and varnish them but soon I know there will be little time to actually finish this work in time for the exhibition. We visit FEIMA which is the local handicraft market. We soon realise we only have a few days left in the country as time has been – and is – moving quicker than we want it to. While waiting for the photographs for the exhibition to be printed we take a short 48 hour break in the preparations and jump on a chapa (minibus) to Swaziland. For five hours we are transported across the border to the little kingdom through the South-West of Mozambique. We pass by beautiful landscapes and cross the Manzini border accompanied by heavy loads of bales containing second-hand clothing. These are smuggled through the border as official trade of second-hand clothing has been banned in Swaziland.
When we arrive in Malkerns it is pitch black as a thunderstorm has turned all electricity off. In the morning we visit the famous *House of Fire* which is a gallery and event space filled with creative powers. We meet with Roland Thorn, who tells us about the many and active fair trade crafting workshops in Swaziland. He soon calls his brother Jiggs who is in charge of the gallery and we get a tour around their space. Music, art, design and craft are celebrated all year around but especially meet once a year in the *Bushfire Festival*. The scenery is beautiful and the air is fresh. Everything seems to be near at hand in Swaziland and the surroundings are green. We take off to see some more of the many fair-trade businesses working with textiles. Next to The House of Fire is *Gone Rural* which works with around 800 women in their own homes making fair trade baskets and accessories, aiming to preserve culture as well as improving life conditions for women. We visit *Baobab Batik* and *Yebo Art Gallery* and their affiliated art NGO *ArtReach* in Ezulwini. Here we come across the Swazi designer Khulekani Msweli studio and shop. He is behind the fashion brand *Jerempaul* under which he combines incredible traditional handicraft and second-hand materials with new fabrics and new design. Exhausted but uplifted by the beautiful people we have met in this very short time we head back to Maputo to pick up the threads for the exhibition we are about to create.
Sukumni Bomake (Rise-up Women!) a community-based organization striving to provide and improve employment opportunities for women in rural Swaziland
Time for a break in Gone Rural’s design studio

Gone Rural’s dyeing department outside their head office in Malkerns

Gone Rural design studio, Malkerns
Khulekani Mswe, designer and founder of the fashion-brand Jerempaul
Garments made from textile left-overs, Baobab batik

Work in progress, Baobab batik

Els Hooft by her design table, Baobab batik

Garments made from textile left-overs, Baobab batik
Meanwhile and in-between

The hours of sleep are cut and I am rushing the schedule to get it all together in time. The poster designed by Rejao is approved by The Embassy and the program is finally set and translated into Portuguese by Karol. We set up the space at Núcleo with dresses, photographs and sewing-machines borrowed from the Scandinavian School. We are the first foreigners to show anything since the refurbishment which took place the year before. The exhibition opens and people wonder curiously around. When we are about to close for the evening my eye catches a few materials lying in a pile on the floor and Karol and I start to cut into them. We soon have more and more people next to us digging into the pile, cutting, thinking, working around the pile of materials. A couple of hours later we have a line of dresses in front of us remade by the visitors. The workshop has opened. On Thursday morning the first students from ENAV and ISArC join. A few of them film and edit a short video of their working progress. We have more kids and adults passing by, looking, experimenting and/or making something with the materials we have collected in the markets throughout the past weeks. Artists from Núcleo’s workshop behind pop in and out, making a bag, dress or a shirt. One of the artists Falcao, turns a light blue dress upside-down and transforms it into a pair of Alibaba trousers. Joao Paulo A. Bias, J-P, who in 2010 came in to the workshop with his
old canvas to make bags now paints on old cut-open jeans, creating large canvases. A German journalist stops by to interview Mima-te. The kids that Karol has been working with in the street ask me how to make shorts. Soon they are all sitting by the machines, threading and sewing.
Exhibition poster made by Rejao de Carvalho
Workshop and Exhibition

The exhibition and workshop is open to the public for seven days. Photographs, dresses and a small cinema showing a film from *The Life of a Dress* in Mexico occupies the gallery of Núcleo de Arte. The space has four sewing machines set up in the middle, free for the visitors to use. *Mima-te* has a pop-up shop in the space, selling remade dresses and showing photographs by Lina showing Nelly and Nelsa wearing their dresses. The puppets that were made in the past weeks are displayed, creating a puppet-corner. The stream of people coming to Núcleo is very broad, boys, girls, men and women between two and 75 years old, most of which are of Mozambican origin but also people from Brazil, England, Germany, Holland, Italy, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, Tanzania and USA. All creations made in the workshop are to be kept by their makers and in the last few days of the exhibition the initial content of the workshop is slowly replaced with the participants’ creations. A few visitors to the exhibition also show interest in purchasing some of the students’ works. The machines are very busy throughout the week and the participants who had never sewn before quickly learn as they start to teach each other. The repurposing process is vibrant.
Artist Mulungo and his newly made bag
Artist Kester and his newly made top

New bag made by Armando
Making a dress for Fiel's giant puppet

Students working on a film showing their working process
Work in progress, Santo’s dress

Dress and neckless made in the workshop

Falcão and his new trousers
Puppeteer Agnes giving a performance

The Workshop

Finished dress
Pile of materials

J-P drawing on his jeans-canvas
Epilogue

The Life of a Dress is an experimental project that peeks into some of the areas affected by the over-producing giant of the fashion system. It observes and explores the tiny adjustments at ground level that may incite large-scale change. The project is process driven and aims to look at manners and scales of working with fashion, which has not yet been fully explored. It evolves with the people and places it visits along the way. Instead of supplying answers or conclusions I wish to examine subjects that are raised before and throughout the process, in the preparation and making of the exhibition and in the actual crafting taking place in the workshop. This is where people use their imagination to repurpose materials (or situations) that have been discarded by someone else.

The objects made in the workshops become symbols of the power of the hand and the power of man. No matter if they are functional, pure ornaments or prototypes for a whole business idea, the things hold a value that is independent from any market. Once again the Mozambican approach – passionate, proud and unpretentious – to creating and trying without fear inspired me greatly. It is one of my hopes that this power of collaboration, crafting and experimenting may begin to influence one of the great waste- (or resource) creating industries of the modern world, and help push understanding and action closer together.
Contributors

**Roberto Rubalcava**
Born and raised in Mexico City, Roberto's background surrounded by vibrant color and playful environmental light is reflected in his work. Roberto discovered his passion for photography at 22 years of age. He started to photograph professionally in Mexico City then moved on to New York to expand his experience. He subsequently moved to London. His work is based between fiction and reality focusing on everyday themes exploring and documenting his life.

www.robertorubalcava.com

**Karol Silva**
Karol Silva was born in Brazil and has resided in London since 1996. Karol is an actress, artist and puppeteer who completed her MA in Theatre Practice at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Karol has been giving puppetry workshops for children since 2006 in addition to creating her own work on film and performing with other companies.

www.karolsilva.com

**David Sauvage**
David Sauvage is an award-winning documentary and commercial director. His first film, “Carissa,” told the delicate story of a young woman who turned her life around. The film won multiple jury prizes and was Executive Produced by Academy Award-winning director Davis Guggenheim. He is grateful for the opportunity to tell The Life of a Dress story.

www.davidsauvage.com

**Lina Scheynius**
Lina Scheynius was born 1981 in Vänersborg in Sweden and grew up in Trollhättan. She moved away from home at age sixteen and currently lives in London. She works with natural light and a small automatic camera that allows her to move around a lot. Some of her clients include AnOther magazine, British Vogue, Double, Exit, Elle US, Numero Korea and Dazed and Confused.

www.linascheynius.com
Thank You

Family and friends, loved and beloved, all designers and people we visited and who shared their time with us, all the participating students and teachers at ENAV and ISArC. Andrew Brooks, Café Camissa, Maputo, David Goldsmith, David Sauvage, Fiel dos Santos and the TAE project, Jenny and Rupert / Back to Basics Adventures, Jorge Dias, Karol Silva, Liberdade Orphanage, Lina Scheynius, Moosie, Nelly and Nelsa Guambe / Mima-te, Nhongwene and the artists at Núcleo de Arte, Rejao de Carvalho, Roberto Rubalcava, Mamoli Mission / The House of Nations Orphanage, Tekostipendier, The Swedish Embassy of Mozambique, The Swedish School of Textiles, University of Borås, Xipamanine Cultural Centre, Yin John

Contact
info@thelifeofadress.com
www.thelifeofadress.com

Publisher
The Swedish School of Textiles,
University of Borås

Printed by
Responstryck AB, Borås, Sweden, April 2014