

# DOPPIOZERO

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## The Divine Comedy Exhibition: A Journey Beyond Words

[lettera27](#)

10 Aprile 2015

Here the column's introduction: [Why Africa?](#)

### Versione italiana

What goes on during the creative process? How does the thread connecting an idea, a reference or a suggestion with the completed artwork unfold? *Beyond Words*, the section from the catalogue of [The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists](#) the exhibition curated by Simon Njami, now in its third stop at Washington DC's [Smithsonian National Museum of African Art](#) follows these threads through the subjective narrative of each involved artist. Every artist has selected an important word to describe his/her work and connection to Dante's Divine Comedy. Grace, Experience, Hope, Fear ... These words sum up the idea, behind the inspiration, connecting on a logic and emotional level the author and the universal themes of Dante's work. The selection of images, thoughts and words taken from the catalogue, courtesy of the curators, allow us to connect with the artists, listening to their voices, stories and poetics, and to approach the artwork as one of the possible guises adopted by the creative process, deeply linked to each author's life, dreams and visions. Enjoy the journey.

Read also: [lettera27](#), [Emotions, struggles, life, love, loss, between here and elsewhere](#)

**GRACE | Bili Bidjocka**

GRACE noun: *a way of moving that is smooth and attractive and that is not stiff or awkward.*

## GrÃ¢ces&Intentions

ON NAIT DANS L'ESPACE DE LA PEINTURE /

DÃ©s la premiÃ¨re gorgÃ©e / Je glisse / Pente / Chute /

Boue / Dans ma chute /Mords-Me /Moi-mÃªme /

Le calice est vide / VidÃ© dans ma bouche /

Sanguinosa bava / Perdu le bout de la Langue /

Ma source des mots / DÃ©mon / Le Grand Chien de

l'Escalier / DÃ©tresse des papes / Aide-Me /

SPREZZATURA / Ã©croulÃ©o chÃ©i credette chÃ©io

credesse / Even by the grace of my silk hat and

these gathers / Univocal predication is impossible

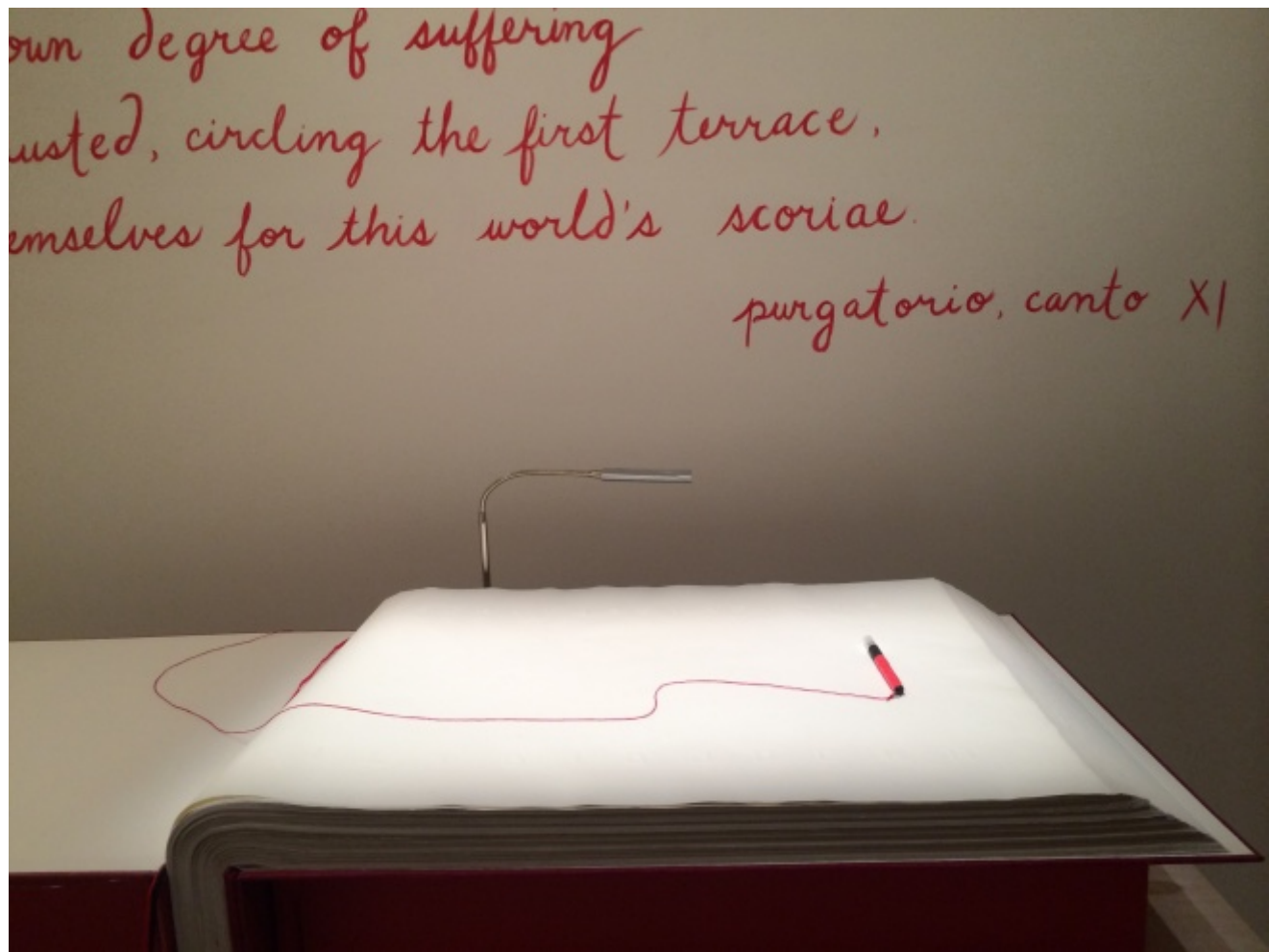
between / Ã©quivocando in sÃ¬ falsa lettura / I reach

/ The Informing Spirit / The divine obscurity /

Ã©lux in tenebris / Here /MediocritÃ© difficile /

Made me more polite / Less sincere / OU ON NE

L'EST PAS.1 **B.B.**



Bili Bidjocka, *Ecriture Infinie/Infinite Writing*, 2014. Courtesy of SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, USA

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## HOPE | Ato Malinda

**HOPE** noun: *the feeling of wanting something to happen and thinking that it could happen: a feeling that something good will happen or be true.*

Old / are the stories / in her golden rust / that form /  
Romantic / maps / as they / peel / away / these  
stories / that / weave / like a thread / through / her  
dress / that / floats in the / breeze / she squirms /  
through / the traffic / and the / traffic / navigates /  
around her / she holds onto her space / playing /

singing / performing / as she grows.

*I wrote these words about my experiences making the video performance piece, *On Fait Ensemble*, and the city of Douala, Cameroon. The title of the video piece is a play on words from the Cameroonian colloquialism, *on est ensemble*, meaning *we are together*. This relation to the word *hope* is one of hopefulness and solidarity. The video is about contemporary Africa and the challenges we have endured as new nations since the bondage of colonialism arrived in our homes. Yet despite what may seem like insurmountable hardships, we endeavour to work together, to build a land. There is pride, resourcefulness and commonality about being African that resonates within me and out toward my fellow Africans. This black, African, female body desires a space of urban permissiveness on my continent where colonial sanctioning of times past leaves us like the weaver bird in flight on my grandmother's farm; where African female sexuality speaks not of bare breasts from a colonial lens but of muliebrity and power. To speak of my ninety-year-old grandmother, her patience unfaltering; on her farm the mango trees grow with the lone orange, and the eucalyptus sing poetry of mysticism, the jacaranda blooms reflect the moon at dusk as the lights in the house turn on. As she knits sweaters for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, the strength of her arthritic hands remind of this power. When I am home, I am hope. **A.M.***



Ato Malinda, *On Fait Ensemble*, 2010. *The Divine Comedy. Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists*, catalogue, ed. Mara Ambrogi, Simon Njami, Kerber Verlag Bielefeld, 2014

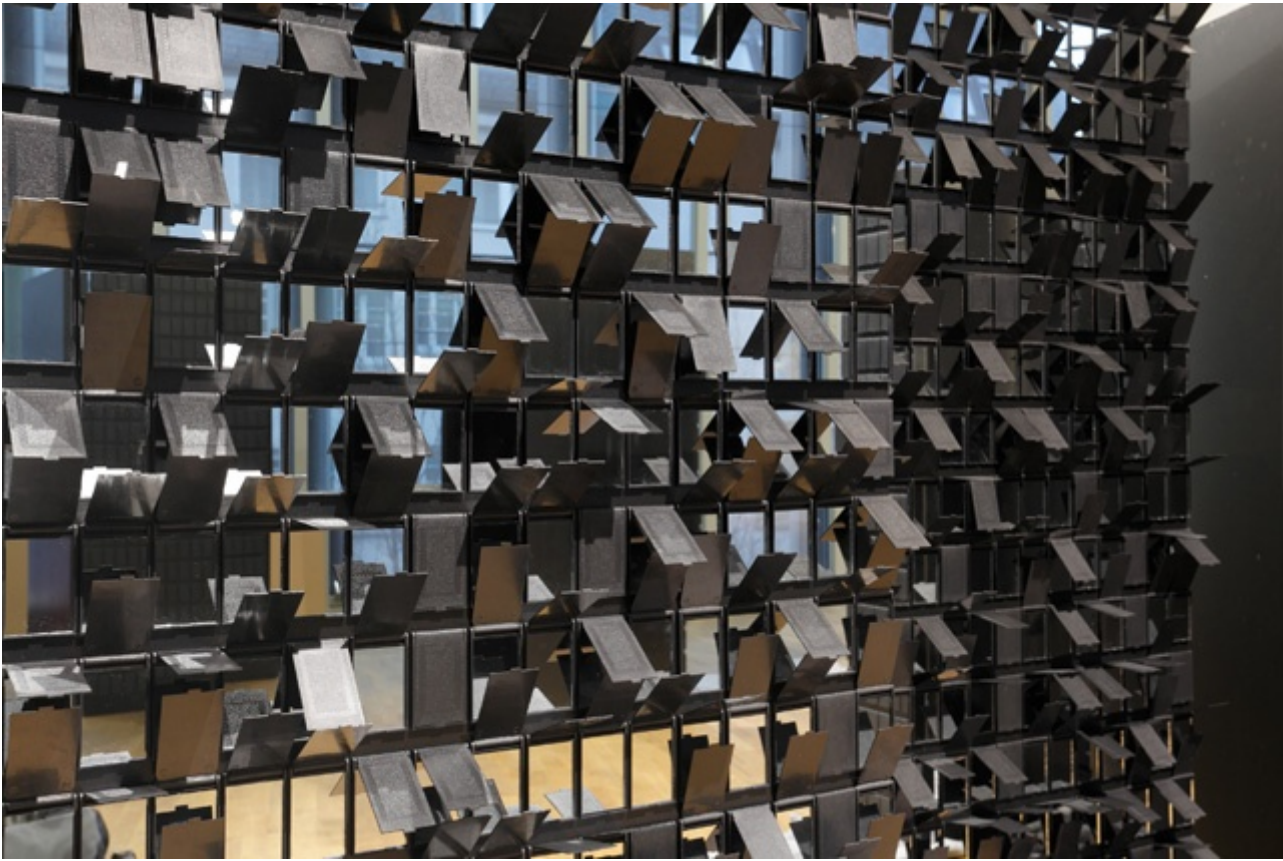
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**OBSCURE | João Andrianomearisoa**

OBSCURE adjective: *not well-known: not known to most people.*

***Dark Black***

The night is black / Black is colour / Black 1000  
colours / Black is illegal / Black is sentimental /  
Black is everything, Black is nothing / Black is  
enigma / Black is black / Black is attitude / Black is  
chic / Black is rebellious / Black is sensual / A  
BLACK / Black is fatal / Black is total / Black is  
fragrance / Black is experience / Black is  
atmosphere / Black is mood / Black is image / Black  
is surface / Black is dream / Black Magic / Black is  
tragic / Black is evil / Black is magical / Black is  
magnificent / The room is black / Black is desire /  
Black passion / Black is enjoyment / Black is  
pleasure / Black is light / Black is being / Black is  
living / Black is ecstasy / Give me a kiss. A Black  
kiss / I LOVE YOU. **J.A.**



João Andrianomearisoa, *Sentimental Negotiations Act V*, 2013. *The Divine Comedy. Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists*, catalogue, ed. Mara Ambrogi, Simon Njami, Kerber Verlag Bielefeld, 2014

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## TEARS | Am̃da Muluneh

**TEAR** noun: *a drop of clear saline fluid secreted by the lacrimal gland and diffused between the eye and eyelids to moisten the parts and facilitate their motion.*

*Coming from Ethiopia and having been raised most of my life in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, my perception of the concepts of heaven and hell is formed by the cultural implications of our religion. As background information, the Ethiopian Orthodox is one of the most ancient forms of Christianity in Africa, and through our church there is a great deal of mysticism that you don't find in other forms of Christianity. Our history is long-standing and the belief that we are the host for the Ark of the Covenant is still an international mystery. With this in mind and having done some research on the topic of tears as it relates to Dante's *Inferno*, the section that I found interesting relates to Canto XX, in which Dante encounters the backward-turned heads of Amphiaraus, Tiresias, Aruns and Manto. Coming from a very conservative society, in which sorcery, fortune telling and spells are often looked down upon, I found it interesting that these rituals are nonetheless practised behind closed doors and often stem from the church. Hence, I would like to produce four pieces in which I offer the viewer my interpretation of the sins of Amphiaraus, Tiresias, Aruns and Manto. In these art works, photography, paint, line drawings and the text of the Psalm of David in Amharic (the Ethiopian language) combine with the prayers of repentance. I chose to*

combine these elements because for me they incorporate both my cultural background and the combining of something digital such as the photograph with an analogue element, such as my line drawing on photo paper. More specifically, the line drawings that I have been doing for the past couple of years are in a sense inspired by traditional holy scrolls, which is basically a long thin piece of leather that is cut, based on the person's height. On the piece of leather, a prayer for protection or toward off illness is drawn, along with verses from the Bible. It is an ancient form of holy scroll but not accepted by the Church because it is considered sorcery; however, the various symbols stem directly from the Church. Therefore, my inspiration is also from these forms that I find so fascinating. **A.M.**



Ãda Muluneh, 99 Series, 2012. *The Divine Comedy. Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists*, catalogue, ed. Mara Ambrogi, Simon Njami, Kerber Verlag Bielefeld, 2014

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## **FEAR | Andrew Tshabangu**

**FEAR** noun: *an unpleasant emotion caused by being aware of danger: a feeling of being afraid.*

*One thing that plagued me prior to arriving in Twasana was fear. I feared for my wellbeing, safety or whether I was going to be accepted by the nuns, priest and the community of Twasana. While I have been here, I have never feared for my safety or my wellbeing. I have been embraced with open arms by the nuns, the priest and the community alike. I have been touched by the commitment, vision and love they have for each other. When I arrived, it was overwhelming and I felt amazed that I was here. It has been incredibly*

*eye-opening, heart-moving, soul striking and soul-starring. When I arrived, there was something that I could not put my finger on. I was filled with compassion and love. I was shocked and surprised to discover that I*

*I came*



*Andrew*

*Tshabangu, On Sacred Ground, 1999-2008. The Divine Comedy. Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists, catalogue, ed. Mara Ambrogi, Simon Njami, Kerber Verlag Bielefeld, 2014*

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## **JOURNEY | Youssef Nabil**

**JOURNEY** noun: *an act of travelling from one place to another.*

Death is a fairly simple word with innumerable definitions and possibilities. And for every single person living today, it has a different meaning, a different reality. For me, death is an old companion that I



think of every day, all the time. Everything I do or anyone I see or meet, for me, could be for the very last time. Every moment I live could be the last. That is how I live and see my life. As a child, it was very painful for me to discover that we are all going to die. I would pray to be the first in my family to die. Since then, I have lived my life, and experienced moments with that singular perspective always at the back of my mind. In a very cinematic way, as I always considered life like "a movie" with a beginning, an end and a story in between to be told. I wanted to keep everyone I love alive in my movie, my life. I have always known that I am here to leave, not to stay. And the more I thought of death, I thought of the afterlife, of going to paradise. *I will go to Paradise, Self-portrait, Hyères* 2008 is almost a yearning to understand and embrace the finality of death and to immortalise the self. As I walk towards the setting sun and into the waters that receive me, moving on to the other world, I present my own captivation with defining the different identities that I have found myself moulded into. We are surrounded by religious, cultural, political and social ideals and norms that one is expected to adhere to constantly. One misstep and we are instantly pointed out and judged. And it becomes all too easy to label those who are going to heaven and those who are going to hell. And more often than not, it's the latter. I have always been irked by this moral policing.

Why should someone else decide whether I should  
go to hell? And so I decided that I am going to heaven,



Youssef

*Nabil, You Never Left #III, 2010. The Divine Comedy. Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists, catalogue, ed. Mara Ambrosio, Simon Njami, Kerber Verlag Bielefeld, 2014*

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## **EXPERIENCE | Amal Kenawy**

**EXPERIENCE** NOUN: *the process of doing and seeing things and of having things happen to you.*

My works focus on presenting images of my society.

They may take on a political dimension, but my approach to my subjects is on a much more personal level. I do not refer to the causes of certain issues or

events, or even the events themselves as they relate to a particular society as a whole. Instead, I always search for their results, for the effect that these issues and events have on the individual. This approach stems from my understanding of the part as a model for the whole. I may have a heart that beats and functions regularly, but I cannot confirm that I am alive.

Emotions inhabit this human frame and make a vessel of it. These abstract/removed emotions, which fluctuate between making up my memories and my dreams, appear to me as constituting my true self, a self that I can see clearly, beyond the narrow confines of my body. I keep a kind of diary which, over time, has become my private space. It enables me to negotiate the elusive boundaries between the imaginary and reality. I have used my diary as a point of departure for my work that allows me to communicate emotions which lie hidden beneath the surface of my physical/material existence. **A.K**



Amal Kenawy, *The Fighter Red Fish*, 2010. *The Divine Comedy. Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists, catalogue*, ed. Mara Ambrogi, Simon Njami, Kerber Verlag Bielefeld, 2014

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## **DAMAGE | Moataz Nasr**

**DAMAGE** transitive verb: *to physically harm (something).*

Damaged man...Damage, damage,  
damage...Damaged soul...damaged heart...  
Damaged man...Damage, damage,  
damage...damaged child...damaged  
wife...damaged life...damaged man... Damage,  
damage, damage...damaged lungs...damaged  
bones...damaged mind...Damaged  
man...damage...damage...damage...damaged  
words...damaged book...damaged  
picture...damaged house...damaged

fence...damaged man... Damage, damage,  
damage...Damaged streets...damaged  
city...damaged train, plane, automobile...  
Damaged man...Damage, damage,  
damage...damaged song...damaged  
lyric...damaged record... Damaged man...Damage,  
damage, damage...Damaged birth...damaged  
life...damaged death... Damaged man...Damage,  
damage, damage...Damaged grain...damaged  
seed...damaged flower...damaged tree... Damaged  
man... Damaged  
man...man...man...man...DaMaGeD. M.N.



*Moataz Nasr, Dome, 2011. The Divine Comedy. Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists, catalogue, ed. Mara Ambrogi, Simon Njami, Kerber Verlag Bielefeld, 2014*

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## SATIN | Mohamed Bourouissa

SATIN noun: *a fabric (as of silk) in satin weave with lustrous face and dull back.*

Well I don't really know quite where to start, let's say the work was chosen in relation to the place that I chose, which is hell. The video I propose is a kind of golden calf. And that's why I think of that famous scene in the *Ten Commandments*, where Moses's people are found worshipping a golden calf - that's what satin makes me think of. I also think there are references to Orientalist painting in the film that resemble Delacroix's work or Eugène Ferdinand's painting of Dante, and satin is predominant. But my project is not about satin any more, it's about the machine, the machine that cuts, strikes, washes, turns things into value and signs. This machine strikes the portrait of Booba. Booba is a French rapper whose writing and

ou, you



Mohamed

*Bourouissa, All-In, 2012. The Divine Comedy. Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists, catalogue, ed. Mara Ambrogi, Simon Njami, Kerber Verlag Bielefeld, 2014*

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## SLEEP | Edson Chagas

SLEEP noun: *the natural state of rest during which your eyes are closed and you become unconscious.*

Soporific / Soporific, loaded in the conscious  
mind? / If you know where it is! / Why do you  
hide the salt that / I need for my nourishment? / If  
you saw it! / Why do you keep those words out of  
my eyes? / Get out of my way! / Unnecessary  
Miracle. / Welcome! / Unreasonable thought! Give  
me what I need. / While I kill time getting lost in  
this sea full of white petals. / Let me stay! / In my  
own corner, enlightened with my own darkness. /  
Because what I have seen it! Is light full of  
darkness. / Like the guilty one, disguised with /  
forgiveness. / I deny it the whole truth and  
disappear like a fog. / That wanders in the morning  
of any day, FULL STOP. E.C.

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Se continuiamo a tenere vivo questo spazio Ã´ grazie a te. Anche un solo euro per noi significa molto.  
Torna presto a leggerci e [SOSTIENI DOPPIOZERO](#)

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