
Uriel Orlow

Orlow's practice is research-based, process-oriented and multi-disciplinary including film, photography, drawing and sound. He is known for single screen film works, lecture performances and modular, multi-media installations that focus on specific locations and micro-histories and bring different image-regimes and narrative modes into correspondence. His work is concerned with residues of colonialism, spatial manifestations of memory, blind spots of representation and forms of haunting.

Orlow's work was presented at major survey exhibitions including the, Manifesta 12, Palermo (2018), 2nd Yinchuan Biennial (2018), 13th Sharjah Biennial 13 (2017), 7th Moscow Biennial (2017), EVA Biennial (2016, 2014), Manifesta 9 (2012); 8th Mercosul Biennial, Brazil (2011), Aichi Triennale (2013); Bergen Assembly (2013), 54th Venice Biennale (2011) amongst others.

Recent Solo Shows include Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Paris (2018); Market Photo Workshop and Pool, Johannesburg (2018); Durban Art Gallery (2018); Kunsthalle St Gallen (2018); PAV - Turin (2017); Parc Saint Léger (2017) The

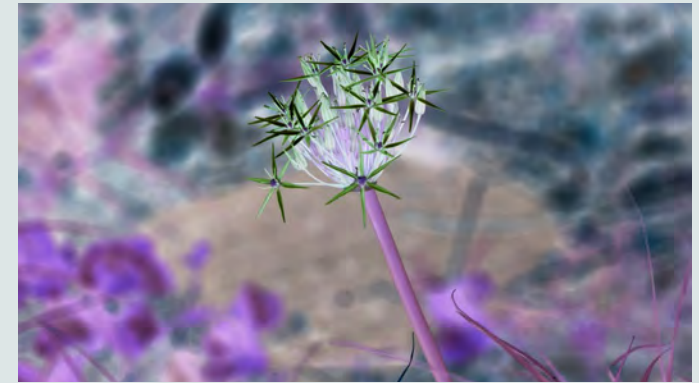
Showroom, London (2016); Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2015); John Hansard Gallery, Southampton (2015); Depo, Istanbul (2015); Spike Island, Bristol (2013); CCS Paris (2013); Al-Ma'mal Foundation, Jerusalem (2013); Les Complices*, Zurich (2013); Kunstmuseum Bern @ Progr (2013), Centre PasquArt Biel (2012); Kunstforening, Oslo (2012).

Orlow's work has also been shown in museums and galleries and film festivals internationally including in London at Tate Modern, Tate Britain, ICA and Gasworks; in Paris at Palais de Tokyo, Fondation Ricard, Maison Populaire, Bétonsalon; in Zurich at Kunsthau, Les Complices, Helmhaus and Shedhalle; in Geneva at Centre d'Art Contemporain and Centre de la Photographie; at Kindl, Berlin; Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart; Project Arts, Dublin; Casa del Lago, Mexico City; Kunsthalle Budapest, Jewish Museum New York, Museum of Contemporary Photography Chicago, Contemporary Image Collective (CIC) Cairo; Tabakalera, San Sebastian; amongst many other venues.

In 2018 Sternberg Press published his major monograph *Theatrum Botanicum*.

Soil Affinities





Soil Affinities takes its starting point in Aubervilliers' 19th century market gardening past which ended when factories started to take over, around the same time as European countries, including France, began to develop a colonial agriculture in Africa. *Soil Affinities* is guided by a series of interconnected questions : What remains today of Aubervilliers' market gardening past apart from the town's street names? How can plants become a compass to map historical and contemporary (post-)colonial relations?

In 1899, following the infamous Berlin conference which divided Africa between the European powers, and around the same time as suburban agriculture had to make space for new industries and their factories in Aubervilliers, the French colonial department created the colonial test garden at the Eastern end of the Bois de Vincennes in Paris. In specially designed transport boxes — the so called Ward crates — plants would be shipped from the Americas to Paris and from there to the newly set up test gardens in Dakar, Saint Louis and elsewhere in West Africa.



Over time those same gardens also started experimenting with and cultivating European staples — such as tomatoes, peppers, green beans, onions, cabbage etc. — for the growing French settler population. The large scale cultivation of staple vegetables in West Africa — as opposed to the previous economic plants such as cocoa, coffee, peanut etc. — took off after independence from France in 1960 with a number of French and European companies creating industrial farms in Senegal producing almost exclusively for Rungis,

one of the biggest wholesale markets in Europe, just outside Paris.

Soil Affinities traces these lines and networks of terrestrial connections between plants and people, across different geographies and temporalities, through video, photography, and other documents gathered in France and Senegal over the past year. The installation is conceived as a display of these materials, in a horizontal, non-linear manner that allows them to speak for themselves as well as cross-fertilise each other.

Wishing Trees





Preview:

<https://vimeo.com/276186613>

pw: multivolti

Wishing Trees (Falcone)

<https://vimeo.com/276200293>

pw: mafai

Wishing Trees (S. Benedetto)

<https://vimeo.com/276189717>

pw: multivolti

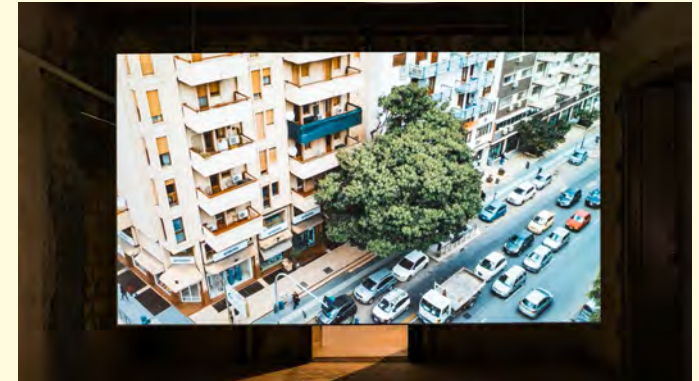
Wishing Trees brings together three Sicilian trees that hold memories of significant events and people, connecting human histories and nature and listening to their reverberations in the present.

According to legend, a 440 year old, tall cypress tree on the outskirts of Palermo grew out of the staff of San Benedetto (1526 – 1589), a freed son of African slaves in Sicily and the first black saint of the Catholic church as well as one of the patron saints of Palermo. San Benedetto joined a Franciscan hermit's community and served

as their cook and leader, and later became a Franciscan Friar and important spiritual counsel but always returned to cooking. In the centre of Palermo stands a giant *Ficus Macrophylla* – a cloned sibling of a tree introduced to the botanical garden in the early 19th century from Lord Howe Island via Paris. The imposing ficus towers over the former residence of investigative judge and prosecuting magistrate Giovanni Falcone and his wife Francesca Morvillo who were brutally assassinated by the Mafia in 1992. Falcone spent most of his professional life trying



to overthrow the Sicilian mafia and its deep reach into public life through a root and branch court case. Falcone's and a few months later Paolo Borsellino's murder, lead to the first popular resistance movement against the mafia, initiated by women. Finally, further afield, in the south east corner of Sicily, the trunk of an olive tree serves as a diminishing reminder of the WWII armistice that was signed under its shade in Casibile in September 1943.



Through contemporary stories of conflict, migration and feminist anti-mafia activism, the roots of these trees reach into the present. Uriel Orlow's multi-part installation presents portraits of veteran anti-mafia activist Simona Mafai and three young migrants from Senegal and the Gambia, who work as cooks at Moltivolti, a social enterprise in the Ballarò neighbourhood of Palermo, and connects their lives to the hopes and desires the trees still stand for.

Theatrum Botanicum

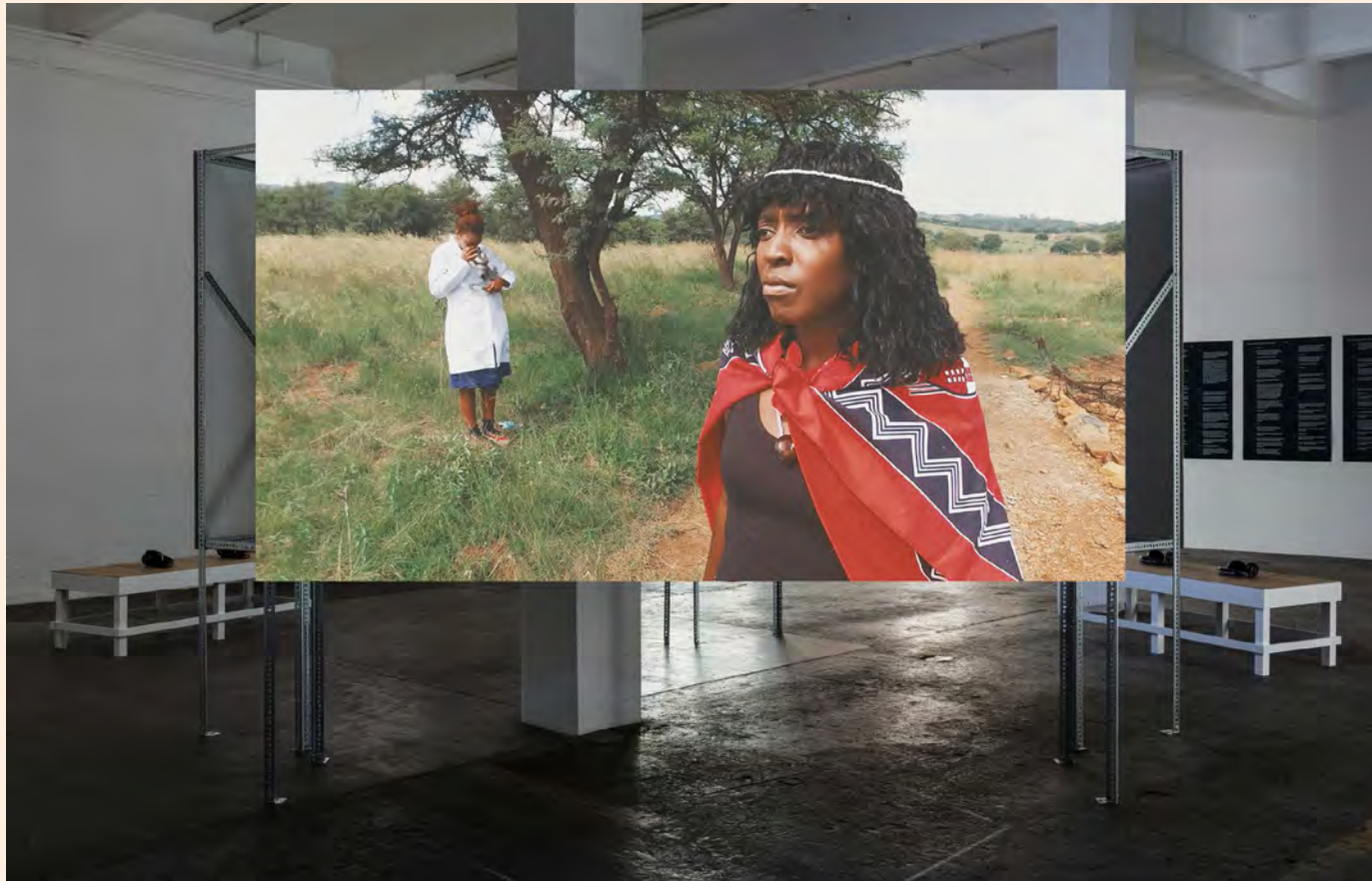


Theatrum Botanicum (2015 – 2018) is a major new body of work by London-based artist Uriel Orlow, which looks to the botanical world as a stage for politics at large through film, photography, installation and sound.

Working from the dual vantage points of South Africa and Europe, the project considers plants as both witnesses and actors in history, and as dynamic agents – linking nature and humans, rural and cosmopolitan medicine, tradition and modernity – across different geographies, histories and systems of knowledge, with a variety of curative, spiritual and economic powers.

Works in video, sound, photography and installation highlight botanical nationalism and other legacies of colonialism, plant migration and invasion, biopiracy, flower diplomacy during apartheid, the garden planted by Mandela and his fellow inmates on Robben Island prison, as well as the role of classification and naming of plants.

Single-channel HD video with sound, black and white / colour, 28', 2017



Trailer

<https://vimeo.com/244551753>

Preview

<https://vimeo.com/237088801/>

Password: ngcobo



Imbizo Ka Mafavuke (Mafavuke's Tribunal) is an experimental documentary set at the edge of a nature reserve in Johannesburg. A kind of Brechtian 'Lehrstück', the film shows the preparations for a people's tribunal where traditional healers, activists and lawyers come

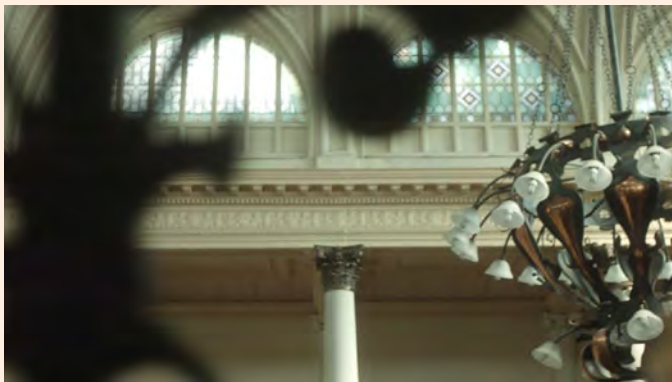
together to discuss indigenous knowledge and bio-prospecting. The pharmaceutical industry has come to consider traditional medicine as a source for identification of new bioactive agents that can be used in the preparation of synthetic medicine. This raises new questions about intellectual



copyright protection of indigenous knowledge. *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke* asks who benefits when plants become pharmaceuticals, given multiple claims to ownership, priority, locality and appropriation. The protagonists in the film slip into different roles and

make use of real-world cases involving multinational pharmaceuticals scouting in indigenous communities for the next wonder drug. Ghosts of colonial explorers, botanists and judges observe the proceedings.

Single-channel HD video with sound, 18', 2016



Trailer:

<https://vimeo.com/277542457/8e0670869e>

Preview

<https://vimeo.com/277345258>

Password: ngcobo



The Crown Against Mafavuke is based on a South African trial from 1940. Mafavuke Ngcobo was a traditional herbalist who was accused by the local white medical establishment of 'untraditional behaviour'. The film explores the ideological and commercial confrontation between two different yet intertwining medicinal traditions and their uses of plants, with slippages across gender and race further questioning notions of purity and

origination. The re-imagined court case is filmed at the Palace of Justice in Pretoria, where the Rivonia trial that sent Mandela and his fellow accused to Robben Island prison was held.

Single-channel HD video with sound, 17'



Trailer

<https://vimeo.com/252504545/dcce891149>

Full Film

<https://vimeo.com/237151788/>

password: ngcobo

'Muthi' is the term for traditional medicine in Southern Africa. Before the establishment of cosmopolitan medicine, traditional medicine was the dominant medical system for millions of people in Southern Africa. Europeans' arrival was a turning for this ancient tradition. Muthi and African healers were perceived as unscientific and ineffective but their cultural dominance was still considered a threat to British colonial rule and Christian missionary endeavours. Efforts were made to reduce their sphere of influence or

eliminate them altogether. Yet colonialism and capitalism also helped medicinal plants to thrive. Urbanisation and the rise of consumer culture radically changed traditional healers' practices and created a growing market for traditional herbal medicine which threatens sustainability and biodiversity. The pharmaceutical and food supplements industry has also joined in the trend and markets traditional plants to new consumers ignoring the cultural and spiritual contexts of the plants. Today around 200,000



indigenous traditional healers practice in South Africa compared to 25,000 Western-trained doctors and over 60% of South Africans consult these traditional healers. The film follows the enduring herbal practices at rural and urban sites in Johannesburg, the Western Cape and Kwazulu-Natal. Muthi have curative, spiritual but also economic powers and are part of a larger system of knowledge, history and politics.

Muthi are inscribed in chains of value, which include plant collectors, petty traders, traditional healers, local communities and users, as well as the international medical industry. Without explicit commentary, the film touches on issues around erasure and continuity, tradition and modernity, indigenous knowledge and alternative medicine in post-colonial contexts.

5 black and white photographs, 150 × 120 cm, 2016-17



This series of photographs shows trees as witnesses of history. They hold an embodied memory of events and, like ghosts, remind us of how the past lives on in the present.

Wild Almond Tree, Cape Town

The inside of the wild almond tree in Cape Town planted in 1660 by the first Dutch settlers to keep out the indigenous Khoikhoi and their grazing cattle from the vegetable garden set up to replenish the passing ships from the Dutch East India Company.

black and white photograph, mounted on aluminium, 150 × 120 cm, 2016-17

Single-channel video, 5'22", 2016-17



Preview

<https://vimeo.com/269798092>

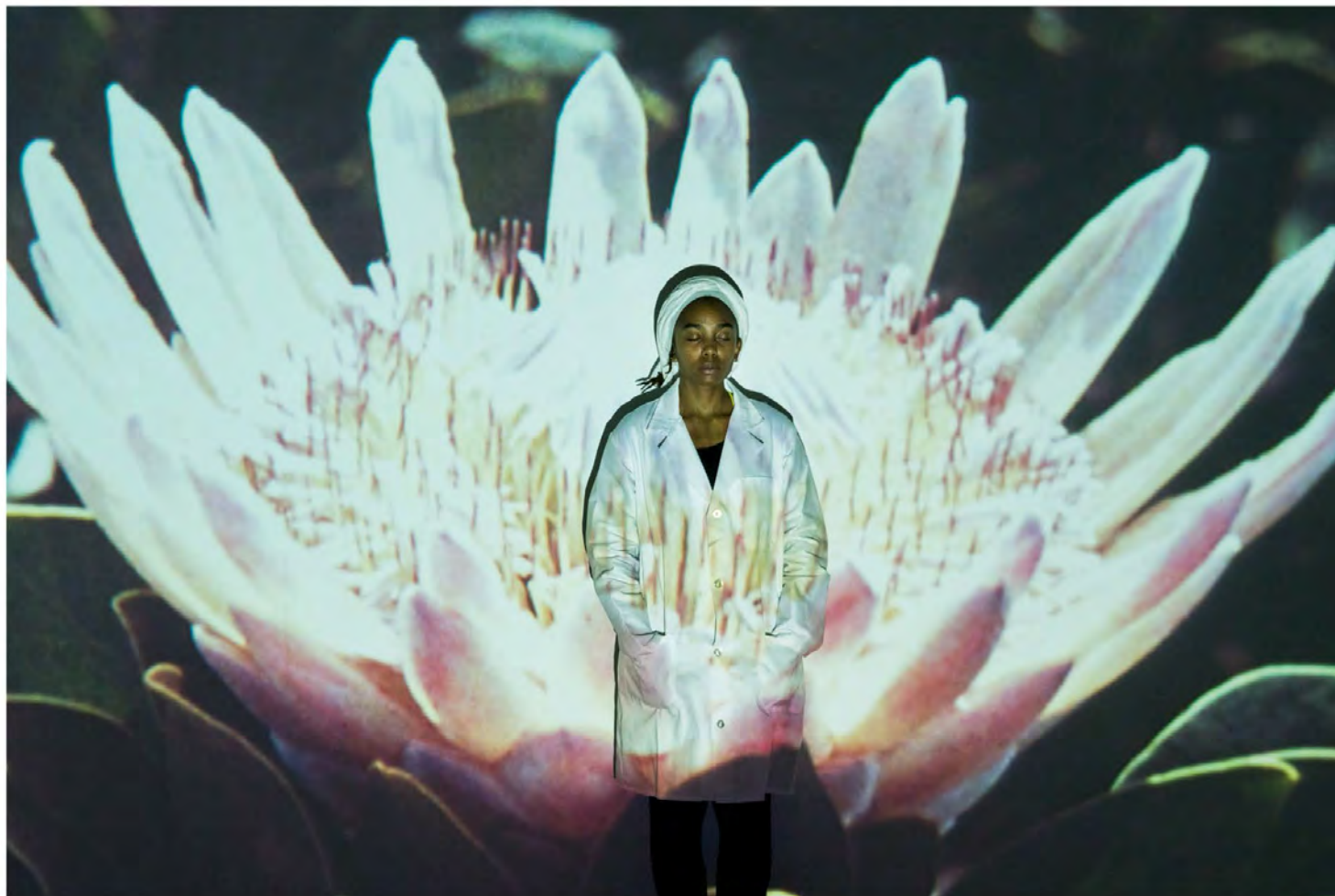
password: Kirstenbosch

In 1963, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of Kirstenbosch, the national botanical garden of South Africa in Cape Town commissioned a series of films to document the history of the garden, the Cape Floral Kingdom, and the jubilee celebrations with their 'national' dances, pantomimes of colonial conquests, and visits from international botanists. The films' protagonists – the scientists and visitors etc. – are all white; the only Africans featured are labourers. Considered neutral and passive, flowers were

excluded from the boycott until the late 1980s and so botanical nationalism and flower diplomacy flourished unchecked at home and internationally. The films have not been seen since 1963 and were found by the artist in the cellar of the library of the botanical garden. Orlow collaborated with actor Lindiwe Matshikiza who puts herself and her body in these loaded pictures, inhabiting and confronting the found footage and thus contesting history and the archive itself.



diptych, each pigment print on baryta paper, 55 × 65 cm, 2018 (#1)



pigment print on baryta paper, 55 × 75 cm, 2018 (#2)



pigment print on baryta paper, 55 × 75 cm, 2018 (#5)



pigment print on baryta paper, 55 × 75 cm, 2018 (#6)

6 Overhead projections

Herbaria are not only repositories of plant specimens but also function as a historical record of botanical exploration. The plant specimen is dried and mounted on a sheet of paper and made available for scientific study, naming and classification. However, the plant itself also resists being

subsumed completely in this rational system of control over nature and its imprint drawn over time on the paper covering and protecting it in the Herbarium speaks to us in a less precise but more evocative voice – in echoes – of its own mysterious conditions.

Surround sound audio, 22 40", 2015 – ongoing



European colonialism in South Africa (and elsewhere) was both preceded and accompanied by expeditions that aimed at charting the territory and classifying its natural resources, in turn paving the way for occupation and exploitation. The supposed discovery and subsequent naming and cataloguing of plants disregarded and obliterated existing indigenous plant names and botanical knowledge and imposed the Linnaean

system of classification and its particular European rationality.

What Plants Were Called Before They Had a Name functions as an oral plant dictionary of indigenous South African languages including Khoi, SePedi, SeSotho, SiSwati, SeTswana, xiTsonga, isiXhosa and isiZulu.

8 pigment prints 29 cm x 42 cm



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6 PVC banners, 200 cm x 200 cm

12 archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle German etching paper, 25 cm x 25 cm



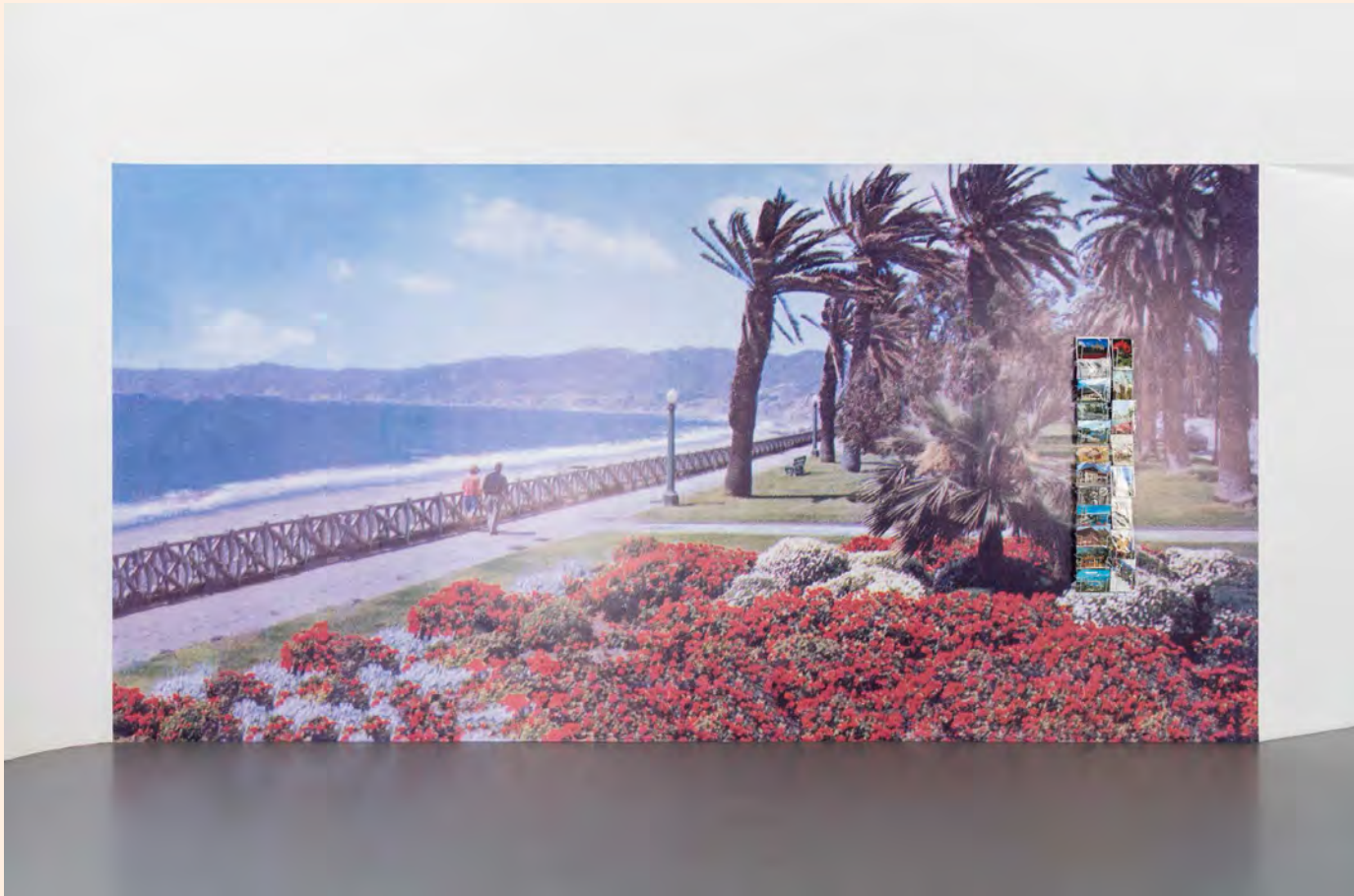
The term 'muthi' is used in most indigenous languages in South Africa for traditional medicine. Muthi derives from the Zulu word for tree. Various natural products, such as roots, barks, leaves, bulbs, seeds and fruit are prescribed and prepared by an inyanga, a herbal healer, as muthi.

South Africa is considered a hotspot of botanical diversity: 10% of the world's plants are found on

less than 2% of the planet's surface. Around 3000 species of plants are used as medicines in South Africa. Despite this, much less is known and preserved of Africa's healing history, compared to the healing knowledge of other ancient cultures.

This series of portraits of plants used in South African traditional medicine shows them as sold in bundles in contemporary markets.

Wallpaper, vintage postcards, rack



The bright red geraniums that trail from the balconies of Swiss chalets and clamber up palm trees in California aren't, botanically speaking, geraniums at all, nor are they Swiss or Californian; in fact they are pelargoniums. They were first brought to Europe – and misidentified – after 1652, when the VOC (the Dutch East India Company) established a permanent settlement and a Company Garden at the Cape and started to



explore the surrounding flora to bring back new botanical treasures. Alongside pelargoniums, those discovered included proteas, ericas and many other mainstays of European gardens. By the time the confusion between the two species was resolved, 'African geraniums' had been around for 150 years and British commercial growers and gardeners were reluctant to give up the familiar name.

Concrete plinth with loupe and seed, slide projection with 81 slides, photograph mounted on aluminium/wallpaper image, framed photograph, 2015 – 2017



Nelson Mandela and his co-accused Rivonia trial ANC comrades were imprisoned for 18 years from 1964 to 1982 in a special section for political prisoners at Robben Island prison, off the Atlantic coast in Cape Town. In the prison they founded a garden that was to play an important role during their time there. It was in this garden that the manuscript of Mandela's biography, which was eventually published under the title *Long Walk to Freedom*, was hidden. In the late 1960s, rare yellow

flowering Crane Flowers (*Strelitzia Reginae* / Bird of Paradise Flower) were found at Kirstenbosch, the South African National Botanical Gardens in Cape Town. These native flowers of South Africa are usually orange. A process of selective breeding was started, pollinating yellow flowers with each other by hand. It took almost 20 years to build up stock of seeds of the highly prized yellow *Strelitzia Reginae* – roughly coinciding with the time Mandela was in Prison in Robben Island. In 1994,



after Mandela became the first black president of South Africa, the flower was renamed 'Mandela's Gold'. At Kirstenbosch the grey squirrel that the colonialist Cecil Rhodes brought with him from England and which has naturalised there, will

consume the entire capsule of seeds if unchecked. In order to protect the seeds from this European 'predator' each fertilised flower is enclosed in fine-mesh chicken wire.