

apexart

2012-13 Franchise Proposal by
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Franchise location: Kampala, Uganda

CURATOR/ORGANIZER STATEMENT OF EFFECT:

As an apexart Franchise, our project, Video Slink Uganda, would newly introduce millions of Ugandans to experimental video and art.

FULL SUBMISSION:

Ugandan video halls (or “bibanda”) are often no more than small huts where viewers pay a few cents to watch pirated DVDs on television screens. Located in the majority of villages and towns throughout Uganda, they are the only form of popular visual entertainment and have a wider audience than television and newspapers put together. Numbering in the thousands, these bibanda reach millions of Ugandans each month. So-called ‘fine art’ never breached their corrugated walls. Until now.

‘Video Slink Uganda’ is a curatorial project that involves burning five to seven short-form experimental videos by contemporary african diaspora video artists onto these pirated DVD’s that will be viewed by millions of viewers in individual homes and bibanda.

“VJ”s are local performer/pirates who translate Western films into the primary local language of Luganda, acting as both translator and commentator, making jokes, providing context, and acting as central nodes of distribution to the bibanda. In Uganda, these translations into Luganda’ is predominantly performed by two individuals, “VJ Jingo” and “VJ Junior,” with whom we have existing relationships. In keeping with this tradition of viewership, we will involve these VJ’s in translating these works of contemporary art for Ugandan audiences.

The final step is for the videos to come back to the West, having been through these multiple filters of reception, translation, distribution, and exhibition. The films will be translated back from Luganda into English, subtitles added, and curated into a collection that reveals the marks of its sojourn through a sequence of appropriation and poaching. Through this series of cinematographic and installational translations, ‘Video Slink Uganda’ operates on a syncretic economy whose currency is the slippage that occurs between and through translations.

‘Video Slink Uganda’s gesture of detournement recalls contemporary works such as Chris Burden’s on-camera hijacking of a television news anchor, Negativland’s albums re-mix of a U2 album shopdropped into the music stores in the late 1980’s, The Yes Men’s subversive self-insertion into the mainstream media, embedded art practices by artists such as Artist Placement Group in the late 1960’s, electoral guerrilla politics such as Mr. Peanut, the life-sized tap dancing peanut who won 11% of the vote in his mayoral run in Vancouver, and countless undocumented interventionist projects. ‘Video Slink Uganda’ similarly reaches out towards new audiences in Africa and frames their viewership not as passive and silent but as active participants in the performative production of ‘art.’ By embedding experimental film into Uganda’s existing black market cinema and culture of re-translation, ‘Video Slink Uganda’ raises larger questions about origination, authorship, translation, and the complexity of colonialism.

Video Slink Uganda draws upon our experience as organizers of media screenings in Ugandan bibanda with existing relations to local audiences and VJs. We intend to document aspects of this project with specific focus on the audience’s reception of the works and the VJs’ involvement. ‘Video Slink Uganda’ also draws upon our decade of curatorial experiences curating, producing, and writing about experimental forms of curation—shopdropping, embedded art practices, and media hijacks.