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2018-19 INTL Proposal

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Re-imagining Futures: A Trans-Nigerian Conversation
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Exhibition location: Lagos, Nigeria

Between 2016 and 2017, two sets of Nigerian artists, a total of 12 writers, photographers and filmmakers traveled by road across Nigeria for a total of 81 days. The project that brought all these artists together was organized by Invisible Borders Trans-African Photographers Organisation and it was called "Borders Within". The central theme was to decipher if it was possible to escape what one has been named, in this case, Nigeria, a mishmash of over 250 distinct ethnic groups. The first set were on the road for 46 days in 2016. With the aim of interrogating post-colonial Nigeria, they traveled anticlockwise, their attempt was to retrace history and how it impresses on the Nigeria of today. The second set were on the road for 35 days in 2017. They traveled clockwise, in an attempt to interrogate contemporary Nigeria and what it means to be Nigerian today and in the future.

While the artists were on the road, they entered everyday conversations with people of different strata, religions, cultures, worldviews across the different regions of the country. They documented their experiences through film, photographs and writing. They continuously blogged their experiences and sometimes gave real-time access to followers of the project so that they too could participate in the road trip virtually.

The result of this work is possibly the richest collection of discourse on what it means to be Nigerian today. We believe very strongly that in a country bedeviled with violence, political instability, ethnic crises and a lingering shadow of a colonial past, showing this work now is timely. Also, not only is Nigeria the world's largest black nation, it is also a perfect microcosm of the larger African condition.

We propose an exhibition aimed at presenting the project as a complimentary association between process and outcome. A part of the installation would be designed to immerse the visitors in the processes of the road trip through collage of images, audio-visual documentations and cartographic depictions. Another part would be focused on outcomes: specific bodies of works, photography, video and writings, realised by artists who were part of the road trips and site-specific interventions.

The exhibition would hold at the Nigerian Railway Corporation Yard in Yaba, Lagos, a location that strategically embodies a lot of the themes considered during the process of the road trips. The abandoned trains and colonial structures, doubled with the historical function of railways in Nigeria are reminiscent of colonial presence and the perceived glory of a distant past. Furthermore, the railway does not only evoke movement (a premise on which the road trip is predicated), it also played a major role in the formation and subsequent colonisation of the country. Thus, to exhibit this project, which looks at the re-engagement and re-imagination of Nigerian history, is to project this new narrative onto this now redundant, abandoned colonial structure, with hopes of setting up a frame for conversation around the tensions between the past and present.

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