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Art on Alex Streets



Alex provides the perfect locale considering its geographical relation to Sandton - the bustling yuppie breeding ground of northern Jo'burg. The districts have always cut a striking contrast to each other. Aside from trying to legitimize and draw attention to spaza shops, the aim is to galvanise community interaction between divergent class groups, bringing white Suburbanites into a context which they normally choose to leave outside of their comfort zones.

MOBFLASHING

Just Do It! Creative Strategies for Survival brings strangers into Alex and art into the community

Invasive sunlight assaults my senses as I watch locals mill about their home turf, mingling with newer, whiter faces who feast their eyes on a totally foreign space: the streets of Alexandra. *Just Do It! - Creative Strategies for Survival* is a site-specific exhibition currently inhabiting those streets; an artistic initiative including five local artists and curator Katharina Rhode. The aim is to bring focus to the informal economies of townships, namely spaza shops, who survive in our globalised economy through creative, street level survival tactics.



I spent much of my time being pulled aside and chatted up by gogos, men playing cards on upturned beer crates and young folk sheepishly asking to have their pictures taken. The artists displayed their works beside, inside and around the spaza shops but most of the time the art became an extension of the shop itself. Creatively re-branded and reimagined exteriors seem to fit well in a setting that's already colourful just by virtue of its uniqueness and people.



The experience proved an engaging social experiment and welcome break from my dreary suburban point of origin. Set in a part of our city that's quintessential to our context, and yet obscure to many of our city's denizens, I'd recommend this to anyone looking to take a peek beyond their spit-shine bubble.



The exhibition runs every Saturday until the 3 March. More details at apexart.org or search *Just Do It! Creative Strategies of Survival* on Facebook.

In communities where travelling to far-off, formal shopping centres isn't viable, spaza shops have carved a niche as uniquely South African community spaces. The small, family-run shops are not simple retailers. Open from early morn 'till late, they provide people with goods and services ranging from groceries and haircuts to booze and cigarettes. More than that, they create a space where the community can interact and localise. Recently, such establishments have come under threat from supermarket chains and shopping malls which are slowly moving in to capitalise on township residents.