

# To Mikhael Subotzky

28 March 2014



Michael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse, *Ponte City*, detail. 2011

Mikhael Subotzky  
Johannesburg, South Africa

London, UK  
28 March 2014

Dear Mikhael

I got your message. We'll send your studio some photographs of the *Ponte City* installation now on view in San Francisco. It's quite different from the installation of the same work at the 2012 Liverpool Biennial, where I first saw it.

I was in Liverpool yesterday, as it happens. The Biennial there has commissioned me to be a 'Curatorial Correspondent' — we'll see what that might mean: I guess I'll be writing to and from the Biennial, from Liverpool and from elsewhere. It should be impossible to get it wrong.

I have a question for you, related to **Ponte City**. We're planning the book that will accompany, or rather follow, the San Francisco show. It's going to include a range of writing genres, including more literary, diaristic, even epistolary texts and lyrical modes — we think this befits a project about **intimacy**. As someone once wrote: the epic is heard, the lyric is overheard. We have a list of several texts suggested by you, from your own planned book. Thank you. My favourite is the quasi-fictional piece by Harry Kalmar on the visit of Italo Calvino to Ponte, not long, I suppose, after it was first occupied. Question is: do you know of any texts that address what it's like to be a **resident** of Ponte City? We lack the voices of the residents.

By the way, it's useful to be showing a project like yours that's so much to do with residential housing, in a city that's experiencing such a housing crisis. That crisis has escalated even in the last year, since we first talked about this. The number of expulsions is growing.

You must know Vaughn Sadie. He lives near you in the old Ansteys Building in the Central Business District. Two weeks ago, we staged the site-responsive performance that he conceived with the choreographer Sello Pesa. It's titled Inhabitant. They performed it at the intersection of 24<sup>th</sup> Street and Mission Street in San Francisco (on the plaza above my local subway station). It was originally staged in

the street outside your studio, along the frontier between new Maboneng and the rest of old Jeppestown. Forces of aggressive redevelopment bear upon both those sites. In each place the needs of some collide with the desires of others, and the ability of many to inhabit the city is in doubt – like Ponte City, but outdoors.

Not knowing Liverpool so well, I realise I cannot say what sites in that city might carry the same value, or serve the same role. Where in Liverpool – which buildings, which street corners – most symbolises the crisis of housing in that city? I cannot say, but others could.

It's our question, not yours.

In the fall, there's going to be a week-long series of sessions concerning, in various ways, what it means for an organisation such as the Liverpool Biennial to inhabit the city, and beyond that, perhaps, what it means for artists to reside there. Doubtless, we'll have to begin by asking how, nowadays, the residents of the city are and are not able to inhabit it.

Best wishes

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