

NO THANK YOU

MOZAMBICAN SOCIETY, DESPITE ITS OPENESS TO THE DEPICTION OF NUDITY, OBJECTED TO PAUL EMMANUEL'S PHOTOGRAPHS THEREOF

Paul Emmanuel,
*The Lost Men
Mozambique*,
2007, pigment
printed
photographs on
voile, silk, steel,
aluminium
Installation view
of Catembe Ferry
Jetty, Maputo
Photo John
Hodgkiss

Earlier this year, artist Paul Emmanuel exhibited his public installation project, *The Lost Men, Mozambique*, on Maputo's Catembe Ferry Jetty. The installation, pictured here while still *in situ*, was subsequently partially removed from public view by police on grounds that it depicted male nudity. First exhibited in 2004 at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, this updated photographic installation records the names of men who lost their lives in the fight for Mozambican freedom. The names, obtained after extensive research, were embossed onto the artist's body.

Commenting on the work's removal, Jorge Dias, an art teacher and curator with Mozambique's National Art Museum, remarked: "Mozambican society, especially in Maputo, is accustomed to having men and women coming together in the streets and exposing – sometimes in a very open manner – their genital organs. In music, dance and other forms of expression, eroticism is more and more present. In sculpture and painting, the representation of genital organs has become normal. Perhaps this reality is not censored because it is part of our conventions and is morally accepted."

After referring to established tropes of public art familiar to Mozambicans – monuments, murals and large-format banners – Dias speculated that Emmanuel's work may well have challenged "the perception and understanding of public art by political power structures, as well as a society rooted in moral values and conventions that are at odds with these new realities". — Sean O'Toole

