

VISITOR REPORT

by Musoke Nalwoga

on Black Speaks Back's *ZWARTE IBIS*

Film Premiere

Friday 12 January & Saturday 13 January 2024, 19hr

Melkweg

Lijnbaansgracht 234A

1017 PH Amsterdam

Zwarte Ibis, Already and Forthcoming

On 12 January 2024, Black Speaks Back's short film *Zwarte Ibis* premieres at the Melkweg in Amsterdam. Six weeks prior, on 22 November, the right-wing populist party Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) had secured the highest number of seats in Dutch Parliament. I go up a maze of confusing stairs to find a not too small theatre filled with black people, they all seem to know each other. The atmosphere is positive but weary, like it is good that we are here, but what a strange time and place to be.

The director and film crew are moving between the theatre and the dressing room, nerves are up in the air, but there is a meticulous order to things too. Something great is about to happen. Something freakishly well-thought through. Shug is DJ-ing, everyone knows Shug, I know Shug. She plays Fela Kuti's *Sorrow Tears and Blood*. Fela wrote *Sorrow Tears and Blood* in response to the South African regime's crushing of the Soweto uprising in June 1976. I feel or rather need that from this scene, a revolution to erupt.

Baldwin's bursts of momentous monologues in the second scene of Terence Dixon's 1970 portrait documentary, *Meeting the Man: James Baldwin in Paris* are the mantra that I want to activate this scene.

'The world will change, because it has to change. The Pope will die, because the church is criminal. The party is over. That is what is going to happen.' – James Baldwin, 1970

This second scene takes place in James Baldwin's friend's apartment, a colourful space in which Black intellectuals young and old, male and female, commingle and discuss many wonderful subjects. There is a sense that the outside world is cruel, but for this small moment the cutting intellect of black people in exile: black people in Europe, can manifest in all its glory.

In the world of the *Zwarte Ibis* premiere, beloved MC Jennifer Muntslag is the speaker of the momentous monologues. She teases the crowd and they love her for it. She asks the audience to turn off their phones by singling out and roasting the director's father. Dunlish is the language of the night (a mix of Dutch and English). The energy is high, it feels as though this might turn into a ball.

Jennifer invites *The House of Vibrations*' Miyuko Zoldyck to the stage. Zoldyck soaks and momentarily drowns us (me) in a sound bath. Like a mother, trained in the magical impossibility of putting restless children to sleep, Miyuko bathes and wrings all revolutionary riotousness out of the room. A quiet and slow burning intimacy develops. This is a room full of black people. After the recent elections, Amsterdam as we knew it is gone, our home is in the mouth of a shark. But for this small moment we shall be wrapped in sonic intimacy.

The perspectives in *Zwarte Ibis* are shift. The cuts are fast. We swing back and forth in time, the music has hints of birds, black bodies everywhere are colliding, moving through mazes on a convoluted hero's journey. *Zwarte Ibis* is not a revolution, *it is not didactic, it is dis-interested: it doesn't want to make you feel, it rather wants to feel with you.* *Zwarte Ibis* is the gentle unassuming friend who, with the right amount of courage, will reveal themselves to be strange and deep and wondrous, and mythical, and fleeting, and alien and allegorical. We are still in a haze when the speeches commence, the curator Megan Hoetger and director Frédérique Bergholtz of *If I Can't Dance* take the stage, one by one they give well considered thank-yous and offer up the institutional affiliations that have made *Zwarte Ibis* possible. It occurs to me that the project has been at least a year in the making. Paradise. Already and forthcoming. A communion of three black queer women making a short film with what seems like enough institutional support warms my heart. In collaboration with more than 80 people from the black community!

The director and crew make it to the stage. Jennifer comes back, this time her energy is tentative, it seems as though she has spoken to the crew and they have put rules around the type of questions that should be asked. She is curious still and she opens up interesting avenues that the conversations venture in and out of. We learn that the filmmaking process was horizontally collaborative. We learn that the name of the film, *Zwarte Ibis*, comes partly from a bird that was screaming outside of a window on a far away holiday. It dawns on me that most of the people in the room have played some part in the making of the film. This warms my heart once more. The speeches end and the audience moves to the front and hugging, and loud clapping, and celebration ensues. I sneak out.

ABOUT THE EVENT

Black Speaks Back collective's short film, *ZWARTE IBIS*, premiered at the Melkweg in Amsterdam Friday 12 January and Saturday 13 January 2024. The screenings were accompanied by a welcoming DJ set, singing bowl performance and post-screening panel discussions on black intimacy featuring members of the cast and crew.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Musoke Nalwoga is a curator and researcher with a focus on contemporary art. Born and raised in Uganda, she currently lives in Amsterdam and is the founding director of Motormond, a new art gallery that aims to give a much-needed update to the idea of the 'white cube'. Nalwoga's curatorial practice is reparative and interested in de-building / building institutions, to hack, subvert and productively add to the various ways that the specific art (his)stories of B.I.P.O.C communities are staged, exchanged and archived. She sets the stage for decolonial modes of engaging within the logistics of her exhibition-making process.

ABOUT THE VISITOR REPORT

At If I Can't Dance we see the visitor report as a method of documentation. The affectual, relational and embodied nature of performance work is not always easily captured in audio-visual formats. To supplement such formats, If I Can't Dance commissions written visitor reports, which are meant to offer subjective responses to a lived experience of a work and its context. The visitor report is, therefore, not to be confused with a critical review. It is first and foremost a form of witnessing. The people commissioned to write the report span a range of positions and practices within and outside the field of art.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ZWARTE IBIS was commissioned by If I Can't Dance as part of Edition IX – *Bodies and Technologies* (2022-2023). The commission was led by programme curator Megan Hoetger who also served as the film's production supervisor.

Co-producer: La Fam
Director: Emma-Lee Amponsah
Composer: Chris "Ci" Rickets
Writing team: Nohely Koeyers, Emma-Lee Amponsah, Chris "Ci" Rickets, and Alexine Gabriela
Director of Photography: Henck Pengel
Edited by: Chris Tjong Ayong
Color grading: Yavuz Salim Isler
Text: Mathieu Charles
Narrator: Burnice Hiwat
Lead Actress:
Henriette "Aelia Sapph" Valies

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