

Start in the Sewer

Tuesday, February 22nd, 2011 by Leila Bloch and Rob Scher

<http://www.mahala.co.za/art/start-in-the-sewer/>

The pulse of the crowd near Adderly street beats a little different today. On the surface, it's the same hustle and skip of the usual traffic. It's a typical Monday morning on the newly refurbished forecourt of the Cape Town Station. Commuters are commuting, hawkers are hawking and bergies are... well, sleeping in the morning sun. On closer inspection however a few things appear out of place. Piles of trash are scattered around the square and in front of us a number of giant wooden frames lie on the ground. It takes a lot to get the average Capetonian to notice something more than the mountain. But Infecting the City is insidious; a festival where it's hard to distinguish between art and reality, street cleaners and performers. If the art at this festival is about anything it's about the local, the impetuous, the disgusting and the surprising.

Like algae blooms, around the city centre, unusual performances are taking place. A New Zealand lecturer guides a Dutch-inspired treasure hunt with a sheep and a Spanish nurse by his side at the Michealis Collection, while a statue on the Grand Parade has been covered in cling wrap. Somewhat naively we choose a "relics of the past" tour over Irish Dancing, and Ethiopian coffee. To do everything would have taken all day. The promise of underwater canals and Indiana Jones-esque exploring had us excited for what was in store. We get on a minibus and are taken on a flash tour of the historical landmarks making up the old waterways of the city, most of which, these days, rest under tarmac.

One and a half hours later after an extensive history lesson that takes us to the top of Molteno Road, the reservoir, and then down to the Castle, we confront our claustrophobia in the underground tunnels of the castle. Dank, roach infested and with a lingering smell of sewerage, we cling to the underground walls of the canals with head-torches and over-sized gumboots, observed, appropriately, by swarms of cockroaches, the iconic logo of the festival. The clinging and crawling in darkness is a physical theatre piece in itself! We emerge from the manhole, drained, but inspired by the Reclaim Camissa project which passionately creates awareness around the increasing levels of water wastage in Cape Town.

It was an unexpected and adventurous initiation into the festival and a definite must if you're interested in the historical geography of Cape Town.

Tomorrow promises more. **Navigate carefully**, as the disparate nature of the festival means you could miss something... and be willing to stumble across, and enjoy, something unexpected.