

THE FILMMAKER:
Franco Sacchi

Franco Sacchi is a journalist and documentary filmmaker. Born in Zambia and Italian by nationality, he currently lives in Boston, where he is a filmmaker-in-residence at the Center of Digital Imaging Arts at Boston University. In 2007, he directed and co-produced a documentary about Nollywood. "This Is Nollywood" won the Audience Award at the Abuja International Film Festival in Nigeria. Since then he has launched the Nollywood Workshops to help African filmmakers improve their craft and connect with others from around the world through webinars and workshops conducted in Lagos.

The 18 year-old, \$250 million Nigerian film industry produces some 2,000 movies a year—a number that puts Lagos in a league with Mumbai and Los Angeles. But in Nollywood, unlike Bollywood or Hollywood, movies can cost as little as \$10,000 to make and take barely a week to shoot. The films are straight-to-VCR, VCD or DVD and cost around \$1.60 a piece, though they can be rented for a fifth of that price and are also shown on satellite television. While their quality of acting and production may appear lacking when compared to the products of other film industries, Nollywood movies are avidly consumed throughout Nigeria, across Africa and beyond.

It is difficult to articulate the surprise and delight I felt when I first discovered Nollywood. Here was the third-largest movie industry in the world, exploding all over Africa, with Nigeria as the epicenter of the revolution. It had all the qualities of an authentic, grassroots movement. Even today, it feels like a full-blown insurgency—an eruption of energy and creativity. Some have compared the Nigerian video industry to the “informal sector” in African manufacturing, but Nollywood goes far beyond that. The spirit of Nollywood is resilient, fiercely independent and contagious. Nigerian filmmakers are intensely aware that they have created Nollywood against all odds, in the midst of a devas-

tating economic collapse and without the financial support of their government or foreign investors.

As a filmmaker, the story of Nollywood seemed simply irresistible. Nollywood provides a unique opportunity to show what every storyteller has in common with African filmmakers. It became immediately clear that the founding fathers of Nollywood had the same ambitions that every filmmaker has. They want to tell stories that relate to their audiences and breathe life into their characters. However, their immediate objective is to reach an African audience rather than a global one. As Nollywood director Bond Emeruwa told me, “I cannot tell the white man’s story, he tells me his own story in his own movies. We have the same themes, but we are telling our own story our own way, the African way. African storytelling is so rich that it will be impossible for us to exhaust all possibilities.” For Nollywood filmmakers, movies have become the most natural medium to adapt the storytelling tradition. The result, however, is much more multi-cultural than we ever could have ever imagined. Nollywood does not fit any romantic and pristine idea we may have of African culture. Some directors, like Emeruwa, are extremely conscious of the potential that Nollywood has to educate and promote positive social change, but many other filmmakers make unabashedly commercial film, aimed at financial success and entertainment. In this way, Nollywood is like all film industries everywhere.

But Nollywood, despite its size, is much different than its counterparts in Hollywood or Mumbai. As a film industry, it resembles an immense laboratory, driven by a do-it-yourself ethos that has bypassed the studio system and allowed single entrepreneurs, producers and directors to make, distribute and sell their movies without asking permission. Nollywood is decentralized,



The actor prepares, Nollywood style.

chaotic and unstructured. Its end product feels authentic and spontaneous. Without a doubt, these are reasons why, in spite of all their technical shortcomings, Nigerian movies resonate so deeply across Africa, and with millions of Africans in the Diaspora.

The Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie observed that poverty and exoticism are “the single story” of Africa. Stereotypes are not necessarily untrue, she says, but they are incomplete. When the West looks at Africa it seems incapable of going beyond stories of war, AIDS and safaris. Relying solely on this reality to

describe an entire continent robs people of their dignity. In Nollywood films, the protagonists often have regular office jobs, they go to parties and suffer jealousies and deal with everyday problems. In the midst of all this, Nollywood is able to portray police corruption, domestic violence, the trauma of urban displacement—all of the complex issues that characterize modern society across Africa. In Nollywood films there is a sense of familiarity to African audiences. Many times I heard Nigerians saying that when they watch Nollywood films they can finally relax.

© Pieter Hugo, from the series “Nollywood.” Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York and Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

This new movie industry has created a range of possibilities for a new generation of Africans. As the star actor Saint Obi said in my documentary, “This is Nollywood,” “Early in my career I discovered that through acting I could be successful in life without committing any crime or having to compromise my values. It was just me, and my God-given talent.” All of the sudden, there are real opportunities for young Africans to pursue a viable career in one of the most difficult and competitive sectors of any society—the creative industry.

All too often, Nollywood films are ruthlessly criticized for the melodramatic acting and lack of technical standards. Many even worry that some of the blatantly commercial aspects of Nollywood are hurting African art films. The reality is that many Nigerian filmmakers are perfectly aware that more needs to be done. If Nollywood wants to revitalize the movie theater experience and go beyond the home video model, the sound quality of its films needs to improve considerably. But it would be a serious mistake to use this type of criticism to dismiss the Nollywood phenomenon in its entirety. We must remember that the low standards of Nollywood films have allowed a vast number of self-taught filmmakers to express themselves. Nollywood can be truly understood only if we recognize that there’s real power in determining what stories are told, and how they are told. Nollywood does not depend on grants from European cultural institutions to make just a few art films; its directors do not have to wait for a visa and a scholarship to study in America to learn how to make popular movies. It is always the single producer-investor, outside any type of studio system, who takes all the risks and decides which story will be told next. In creating their own industry, Nigerian filmmakers showed they were not afraid to take control over their own stories, their own destiny. In doing so, they have changed African filmmaking forever.

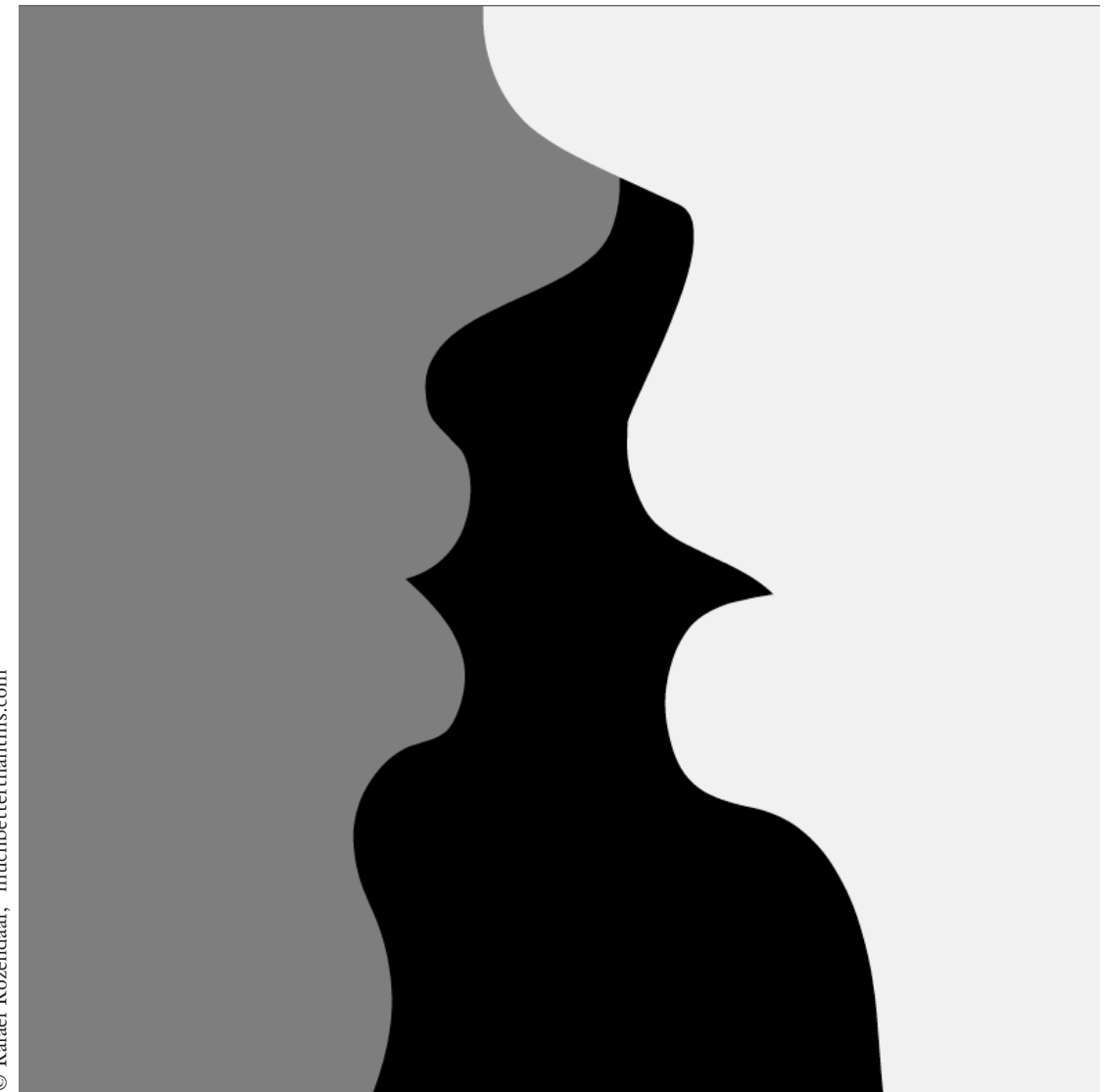
THE INTERNET ARTIST:
Rafael Rozendaal

Rafael Rozendaal is a Dutch artist and an important figure in the ever-expanding world of Internet art. Most of his works are single-page websites that visually or interactively engage the viewer. In exhibits, his works are displayed through a projector. In 2010, Rozendaal's pieces have been shown in Germany, the United States, Japan, Colombia, the United Kingdom, Puerto Rico and Greece.

The position of painting is always moving. Painting started in caves, churches, town halls. It was mostly murals. At some point, painting broke free from the wall and onto the canvas. Later, painting broke free from religion and the state and became a place for visual theory—particularly modernism. Currently painting is largely a medium concerned with power and status at the highest level—the most exclusive jewelry.

I am not a traditional artist. I intend to create work that is original and unique in style and presentation. Painting itself has seen different incarnations, from museum murals to small-scale paintings that fit in the homes of the wealthy. I like to draw inspiration from the past. My work has similarities to paintings, in that, like traditional art, netart involves a visual display for the viewing pleasure of the spectator. Because these works are immaterial, they can be seen very privately at home or as a huge installation in a museum. The website can exist anywhere you want, anyway you want. I have no expectations on how people approach my websites. It is a new format, and it still has to find its place. I hope people experience them in many different ways. The websites should not try to be paintings. Paintings are already very good at that.

I take from paintings. I love paintings. It is an instant format, everything happens in a rectangle. (As opposed to long video pieces or installations that take hours to digest). Paintings are great on the Internet too. They make great jpg’s. But what happens when



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Rozendaal’s websites, he says, “should not try to be paintings.”

those images start to move? And what if you can interact with them? I am not sure what interaction means, but I have always been intrigued by the possibilities. It seems to catch the viewer’s attention and suck them into the piece. But not all my pieces are interactive. It’s all very intuitive and sometimes I make a piece that moves on its own and sometimes the piece needs your input to come to life.

I am interested in the possibilities of representing what I see around me. A painting of a tree is something other than a tree.

We have been able to represent—or record—the world in many different ways; drawing, painting, photos, moving photos, sound. Interactive representation is something new and something else. In my piece www.pleasetouchme.com you see a blue hand that does not move until you touch it. An interactive picture of a hand is not a movie of a hand. You drag the fingers and they do what you ask them to do. And after a while they move on their own. It’s not a painting or a website or a movie. It’s just art.