Editorial

Welcome to Jozi Book Fair 2010!

Jozi Book Fair 2010 is on at Museum Africa on the 7th, 8th and 9th August! This 3-day event will feature several authors, book launches, workshops, exhibitions and performances related to the world of books. In the South African context literature is more than just about leisure. The world of books is a powerful tool in social development and in the search for a better life. Ms Lindsey Collen, profiled in this issue, is the Guest of Jozi Book Fair 2010, as well as of the Women’s Day programme. Her work is testimony of the role literature can play in changing lives.

The theme of this year’s Jozi Book Fair, “Publishing in Crisis”, reflects this concern with the role of publishers, writers and readers. In South Africa, less than 1% of the population has access to books, libraries are in crisis, authors are struggling to survive, and a nation that has enjoyed democracy for only 16 years has a culture of debate that is in crisis.

The Jozi Book Fair will attract small publishers, booksellers, libraries, NGOs, projects and foundations interested in a culture of reading and freedom of expression. More importantly, the Jozi Book Fair aims to involve the reading public at the heart of the fair.

This newsletter of the Jozi Book Fair will be out weekly until the fair, and will profile various aspects of the fair’s programme, and news from the world of books.

Enjoy!

Oupa Lehulere

Announcements

By Searatoa van Driel

SPARCK (Space for Pan African Research Creation and Knowledge) lands in Johannesburg with Totems, a mobile exhibition by Herve Youmbi. Totems, a mobile multi-media installation, considers the impact of capitalism on the contemporary African art world and exposes the clichés of the global art market.

Totems is on a four-city tour across Africa and is at the Point Blank Gallery at Drill Hall, Johannesburg until the 2nd of July. It is being exhibited in partnership with Keleketla Library.

For more information and to keep updated on SPARCK, visit their Facebook page.

GUEST OF THE JOZI BOOK FAIR: LINDSEY COLLEN

By Searatoa van Driel

Lindsey Collen is this year’s Guest of the Book Fair. Collen, a political activist and Commonwealth Writers’ Prize winner, has also worked as a teacher, nurse’s assistant, community worker and potato harvester.

Born in Umtata, Transkei in South Africa in 1948, Collen studied at the University of Witswatersrand, where she became an active anti-apartheid activist. Collen later studied at the London School of Economics and lived in New York and the Seychelles before moving to Mauritius in 1974, where she has lived since.

And it is in Mauritius that her books are set.

The Rape of Sita, published in 1993 was shortlisted for the Orange Prize in 1996 and won the prestigious Commonwealth Prize for Best Novel in Africa, is about the rape of a woman and her struggle to overcome it. It was banned in Mauritius within hours of publication because it was considered blasphemous.
Mutiny, published in 2001, is set in a Mauritian prison. It is both a human drama and an analysis of the global political climate of the time, told through the eyes of three women. Mutiny received numerous awards and was named “one of the Best Unread Books of the Decade” by the UK Guardian Weekly.

Collen has written several other novels and also has a new soon-to-be-published, Malaria Man and Her Neighbours, which will be launched at this year’s Jozi Book Fair.

Collen has also played an important role in Mauritius’ own indigenous language publishing. She was co-compiler of the first major dictionary of Mauritian Kreole and has translated several Kreole folk stories and children’s stories into English.

Collen frequently writes articles for online publications, such as the New Internationalist and continues to remain political as part of LALIT, a political party in Mauritius.

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s this year’s Guest of the Jozi Book Fair, Lindsey Collen features substantially in this year’s programme. Collen will be part of several events.

The first will be a workshop on Mother Tongue and Indigenous Language Literature and Publishing. Having played an important role as an activist in both the writing and publishing of indigenous language literature in Mauritius, her insight into the challenges facing indigenous language publishing and writing will benefit greatly those interested in publishing and writing South African indigenous language literature. This workshop will take place on the 7th of August.

The second event Collen will be involved in is the book launch of her latest book Malaria Man and Her Neighbours, a story of hope, set in Mauritius. The novel follows four ‘unusual heroes’ who are willing to fight for the rights of their community. Malaria Man can be viewed as a sequel to the much acclaimed Mutiny, as it too narrates the struggles of the poor and oppressed. The launch of Malaria Man will take place on the 8th of August. (For the full review of Malaria Man and Her Neighbours, see the Book Review on page 4.

Lastly, Collen will be a panelist in the Round Table discussion ‘Violence Against Women in Literature’. This discussion will deal with how violence against women has been treated in literature and the impact it has on society’s perception of it, etc. Lindsey Collen, writer of The Rape of Sita, a critically acclaimed and controversial novel dealing with the rape of a woman and her struggle to overcome it, is the perfect candidate to discuss violence against women and its treatment in literature. This Round Table will take place on the 9th of August as part of our Women’s Day programme.

Programme Updates – Focus on Lindsey Collen

By Searatoa van Driel

From the World of Books

By Nerisha Baldevu and Martha Legong

Jozi Book Fair (JBF) has been providing support and assistance to Thembi Majombozi of Africa One Education and Enterprise CC. Majombozi runs creative writing classes for Grade 7 learners in Soweto, sixteen of whom read their writings at the Jozi Book Fair 2009.

The writing project is faced with a range of challenges. The high illiteracy rate and the lack of a reading culture in South Africa have resulted in many children entering school with little understanding of what reading means.

JBF’s support to Majombozi’s Grade 7 writing classes includes: an agreement with Evelyn Wood to provide basic reading skills, ChildLine to provide counselling services to children writing about trauma and abuse, and Jozi Book Fair 2010 Exhibitors to assist with writing classes and reading material for learners.

Jozi Book Fair links with public libraries

JBF has a campaign to connect with public libraries in the Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and Tshwane Metropolitan Councils. The JBF also seeks to form links with organised reading and study groups, reading circles and book clubs, and especially those connected to public libraries.

Many public libraries in the lower and upper middle class areas have a substantial number of organised readers, whereas those in poor working class communities do not work with organised readers. But, many indicated that they were organising their regular readers and users into reading circles.

Several public libraries in Soweto were not working with organised readers, but it is encouraging that they are keen to work with the JBF and organise their readers into book clubs and study groups.

Thami Mngadi, the chief librarian at Spruitview Library in Ekurhuleni is co-ordinating story-telling sessions with three local créches with children aged of 4-5 years old. Other activities include the promotion of indigenous languages and competitions. Children are also encouraged to draw and these are then displayed in the library.

The Spruitview Library has also just established a book club of 10 women who are keen to participate in the JBF. The women are also interested in new and innovative ways of working with the community and involving them in the JBF programmes. JBF will run activities in communities together with public libraries before, during and after the Book Fair taking place in 7, 8 and 9 August 2010, at Museum Africa.
Libraries in Crisis

By Martha Legong

Libraries experience a decline in funding and this is caused by cuts in government spending, affecting community and public libraries. The global economic crisis also accelerated budget cuts in libraries thus affecting the publishing industry negatively. Due to these budget cuts public libraries have had to find alternative ways and avenues of funding other than government money.

Even though it is proven that access to a library can improve a learner’s performance, in South Africa less than 7% of schools have a functional, well equipped school library. The few libraries that exist in schools are run by teachers and not librarians, and are therefore not fully operational during school time as teachers also have classes to teach.

The library sector and communities themselves, need to understand the issues underlying the crisis of literacy and why working class communities continue to face challenges when it comes to literacy-building. The crisis of literacy is not separate from other issues and struggles in communities and is brought about by the inequalities and disparities of the past.

An analysis of the relationship between the literacy crisis and the political and economical crisis is needed to inform solutions otherwise this struggle will not yield results.

This calls for an understanding of the situation, the history and the journey of literacy in working class communities in the country, and an elimination of any prejudices against the working class when it comes to issues of reading.

Library users or potential users in communities need to inform and lead the fight for access to resources and the challenges surrounding that. One way of doing this is to have organised groups of readers that will mobilise for change around literacy issues. Librarians should encourage and support these groups.

Exhibitor Profiles

By Searatoa van Driel

African Perspectives Publishing

African Perspectives seeks to unleash wisdom through the midwifery of ideas and visions, and seeks to engage in a critique of and resistance to the callous indifference of the mind, soul and society to the values of dialogue. African Perspectives’ aim is to do this through a Socratic commitment to questioning ourselves, authority, dogma, parochialism and fundamentalism.

African Perspectives Publishing is broad and diverse, ranging from Congo ‘63, a story about Donovan ‘Mac’ Mackey as he completes his schooling, is initiated into manhood and then is recruited as a mercenary by a logging company to protect their interests in the Congo, to Bless Me Father, an autobiography of a Cape Town-based writer and poet Mario d’Offizi, to a book of poetry, Azanian Love Song by Don Mattera.

African Perspectives publishes and distributes creative thought from writers from Africa and the African Diaspora through books, audio books, cassettes, CD’s and DVD’s.

African Perspectives’ latest offerings; WENA, a book of poetry by Ntsiki Mazwai will be launched at the JBF on the 7th of August and The Politics of South African Football by Alphie Osheberg Alphie Koonyaditse, will be in discussion on the 8th of August.

Contact African Perspectives at (011) 728 7306, alternatively email francis@rfc.co.za. Visit the African Perspectives Publishing website at www.africanperspectives.co.za.

Botsotso Publishing

Botsotso is a grouping of poets, writers and artists who wish to both create art as well as to generate the means for its public exposure and appreciation. Botsotso aims to publish art that is of people in South Africa as expressed in the many languages spoken and written in South Africa.

Botsotso was launched in October 1994 by the Botsotso Jesters, a poetry performance group made up of Allan Kolski Horwitz, Siphiwe ka Ngwenya and Ike Mboneni Muila, as an insert in NEW NATION (one of several anti-apartheid weekly newspapers) in the 1980s.

Some recent publications include poems by Natalia Molebatsi, Prince Shapiro, Mak Manaka, Dennis Brutus; books in the form of collections of poetry by the late Isabella Motadinane, one of the founding members of the Botsotso Jesters and a children’s book by Allan Kolski Horwitz.

Contact Botsotso Publishing at botsotso@artslink.co.za or (011) 487 2112 or visit their website at www.botsotso.org.za.
Book Review: Malaria Man

By Melissa Louis

Accidental Heroes

The Malaria Man and Her Neighbours, set in Mauritius, is Lindsay Collen’s latest novel. It is a story of hope as we are shown how the seemingly powerless come together to stand against oppression.

“The Malaria Man is found dead, reclining on her bed…” We feel like we have stepped into the middle of the story as four deaths are presented to us. Everything is a mystery.

The novel then moves on to introduce the four likeable, unusual heroes, Malaria Man, Melomann, Eshan Zukahi and Brij Kalapen, who are willing to fight for the rights of the poor and oppressed. Their world is one of sugar estates, pig breeding, malaria control and potato planters, but it is a world troubled by changing circumstances and ruthless authorities. Their land, their work, their livelihood is at stake, and because of their courage in speaking out and bringing people together for a common cause, we sympathise with them and their struggle. By the end of the book, we have become a part of the uprising.

Collen makes a strong juxtaposition between the heroes and the villains.

There is a gentle affection in Collen’s tone as she writes about the four friends, making them so vivid that they seem to jump out of the pages at you. The villains on the other hand, are dry, ridiculous even. We want to mock them, we are angry with them. We want to laugh and point at the ridiculous Area Manager, who gets bitten by mosquitoes as he tells the malaria control workers that their department is useless and will be closed down.

Lindsey Collen is very careful throughout the novel to never give you the full picture at once, uncovering the tale bit by bit, giving little clues and pieces of information that you need to put together yourself. This means the reader is always kept guessing and you find yourself even more absorbed by the story.

This article appeared in the Mauritian weekly newspaper, L’express on the 25 June 2010.