



# CONTINENTAL DRIFT

AFRICA HAS  
A MAJOR ART  
MUSEUM AT  
LAST—WITH  
A HOTEL TO  
MATCH.

By Klara Glowczewska



**BLUESKYING**  
The visionary Zeitz MOCAA shares historic Cape Town real estate with the Silo Hotel (in the tower). Below: Athi-Patra Ruga's *The Night of the Long Knives III*, which will be among the works exhibited.



I'm sitting in the bar of Cape Town's new It hotel, the Silo, talking with Mark Coetzee, chief curator of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA). Conveniently for culture vultures, the hotel and the museum are in the same edifice, a former grain silo on the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, the city's harbor. The museum, opening September 22, commands the first seven levels, the hotel—a surprisingly happy combination of industrial chic and chandeliered opulence—the top eight. (Guests have direct access to the museum's sixth-floor sculpture garden.) The views from the hotel's giant, geodesic dome-like windows (by British architect Thomas Heatherwick, who also transformed 42 vast grain storage tubes into the museum's galleries and magnificent, Gaudiesque foyer) are extraordinary: Gulls screech, the Indian Ocean sparkles to one side, Table Mountain looms on another, and from the wharves below tours depart for Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned.

The debut of the world's first museum of contemporary African art on African soil is a historic event. "Think about it," says Coetzee, a local boy, as he calls himself, who spent 25 years in the United States. "Artists elsewhere have these incredible public institutions: the Whitney, the Tate. They're given platforms from which to talk to the whole world. In Africa, before us, there really wasn't anything. Most artists here are [CONTINUED ON PAGE 194]

➔ **SP:** *What were your favorite roles of your grandmother's? And your mother's?*

**BL:** For my grandmother, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*. She is unreal in that. And then *Behind the Candelabra*, the Liberace movie. It's so underrated. What was great is that they would do roles that they thought I would like. She did *Halloween-town* so that I could see her in something. She did an episode of *Rugrats*, too. As far as my mom's roles, it would be *Hannah and Her Sisters*.

**SP:** *I agree. That's my favorite.*

**BL:** She's also great in *When Harry Met Sally*. And she played nuns a lot, which I thought was hysterical.

**SP:** *Did she?*

**BL:** She played a nun in *Charlie's Angels*, and then in *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*. She also played a therapist in *Austin Powers*, and I loved that.

**SP:** *Your mom was well known for one particular role: Princess Leia. How did that affect her?*

**BL:** That was hard for her. It's tough, when you play an iconic character, to break away from it. You have to make sure you have a lot of variety, and make sure you choose roles that aren't similar to others, or else you get pigeonholed as one thing. I don't know if I would play a woman in space in a bikini. You also have to be careful about getting oversexualized, and that was hard for her.

**SP:** *How has your life changed since your mother and grandmother passed?*

**BL:** I've always kind of lived in their shadows, and now is the first time in my life when I get to own my life and stand on my own. I love being my mother's daughter, and it's something I always will be, but now I get to be just Billie.

**SP:** *Is it scary?*

**BL:** It is. It's a lot of pressure, because she had such an incredible legacy, and now I have to uphold that and make it evolve in my own way. And a lot of people have had experiences like mine, too. Tons of people grow up with mentally ill parents who have drug problems. I read this incredible book, *Adult Children of Alcoholics*—it's not a great narrative, but it's a fun psych book.

**SP:** *I'm sure every page you read you were like, "That happened to me."*

**BL:** "Check, check, check!" And it's such a common thing, and people really don't talk

about it. She talked about being mentally ill and having issues with drugs, and a lot of people don't talk about what it was like growing up with that.

**SP:** *You recently released a statement, which I thought was very powerful and honest, that honored the way she lived her life. You said, "My mom battled drug addiction and mental illness her entire life. She ultimately died of it. She was purposefully open in all of her work about the social stigmas surrounding these diseases." She never hid any of it, and she knew that there was strength in being honest about it.*

**BL:** And it ultimately helped so many more people, and that's why I made that statement.

**SP:** *She would have been very proud. Was she ever tough on you?*

**BL:** Oh, she would call me out. The last time I saw her in person, this episode of *Scream Queens* was on, and it was a big episode for me. I had tons of scenes, and I was so hard on myself about it—I hated how I looked, hated my performance. I was really frustrated. She told me, "Come over right now. I want to watch this with you." And she made me sit down and watch it, and she forced me to see the good parts. She was incredible like that. But she was really hard on me, saying, "Shut up, you're great in this. Have faith in yourself. Be more confident."

**SP:** *She did that for so many people. Do you ever feel a responsibility to do that for your own friends?*

**BL:** Absolutely. I'm such a caretaker. I always do that. I'm actually keeping her house.

**SP:** *I didn't want to tell you, but I wanted you to keep it.*

**BL:** I decided... I went back and forth on it, but it's so magical. It's such a special place. And I'm having a couple of friends move in with me, like an old-style commune.

**SP:** *That's so wonderful! Oh, that makes me so happy. Was there ever anything about your parents that you saw as a cautionary tale, or something you didn't want to repeat?*

**BL:** Absolutely. From my mom, maybe living too out in the open. It's good to a certain extent. It's good to be authentic, to help other people, but if it's not helping other people, then don't do it. There were a couple of incidents I wish she could have kept to herself. But, you know, that was the beauty of her. «



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Zeitz MOCAA will have a permanent collection of 21st-century works that aims to represent the 54 nations of Africa and its diaspora—to the Caribbean, North America, and Brazil, to name a few—including works by Edson Chagas, from Angola (the first African to win the Golden Lion Award at the Venice Biennale); Kudzanai Chiurai, from Zimbabwe; and Nandipha Mntambo, from Swaziland. "I like that this museum will force people to come to us, not just us to them, and that it will help young people here understand that their cultural inheritance is important too."

The museum will create and host traveling exhibitions ("We've partnered with global institutions to do exchanges—all the biggies"). It will have a strong educational component ("Museums here have been part of the colonial inheritance. We need to train young people to be curators"). It will have a broad and deep curatorial structure ("Because culture is such contested terrain in this part of the world, with a history of Eurocentric narratives, I wanted to make sure that no one, myself included, could take complete ownership, that there would always be non-consenting voices").

In addition to painting and sculpture, Zeitz MOCAA will focus on art forms especially relevant to Africa now: photography ("It was very involved in the liberation struggles"); costume ("body modification, face painting, jewelry"); the moving image ("important to young people here"); and performative practice ("using the body to create art about all the things that challenge us in the moment").

The galleries are still empty when I visit, but Coetzee describes one of the opening's central exhibits. "It will bring together 50 artists, the most profound, important, evocative stuff from all over Africa and the world." Its title? "All Things Being Equal." In one important cultural sense, they finally will be. ZEITZMOCAA.MUSEUM