

# In the land of giants

Art and wildlife compete for guests' attention at Segera, Jochen Zeitz's wilderness retreat in Kenya, but in Cape Town the entrepreneur is dedicating an entire museum to his collection of contemporary African art, one of the biggest in the world. Sophy Roberts flew out to meet him

Photography by David Crookes



*Suit II (After a 16th Century Benin Ivory Salt Cellar Carving of a European Explorer Wearing an Elaborate Suit), 2102, by Walter Oltmann. Right, an aerial view of Strijdom van der Merwe's Migration, 2012-13*



© Walter Oltmann, Strijdom van der Merwe, courtesy of the artists and Zeitz Collection at Segera (Founding Collection, Zeitz MOCAA)

Right, the cylindrical Wine Tower at Segera, set above a rainwater harvesting tank, cooled by solar energy. Below, Jochen Zeitz with Segera field guides and rangers



artist, Walter Oltmann, subtitles it *After a 16th Century Benin Ivory Salt Cellar Carving of a European Explorer Wearing an Elaborate Suit*, and a huge bronze throne, *State of the Nation*, by Zimbabwean Kudzanai Chuirai. There is also a wine ‘cellar’ in a tower which looks like a windmill without a sail.

We circle in closer. Impala scatter at the sound of the helicopter. Warthogs with tails like radio antennae dart into the bush. An eland looks upon the commotion with disdain until it, too, turns and runs, casting madder dust into the air. When we land it’s not on the mown piece of land, criss-crossed with lines, which I took to be the helipad. ‘Not everyone gets Segera,’ says our pilot with a smile. He explains that the markings are a piece of land art by the South African artist, Strijdom van der Merwe. ‘This isn’t like any other lodge in Africa,’ he says through the intercom: ‘You have to approach it with an open mind.’

Zeitz meets us off the helicopter. He is 51 years old, tall, strong and blonde with the good looks of an adventurer from another time. Soft-spoken, with only a slight German accent, he starts to talk about the Africa he visited for the first time on the day the Berlin Wall came down. He pulls out maps to better explain the extent of his vision for Segera, which includes tearing out 300 miles of fencing and rehabilitating land for wildlife. ‘I bought Segera because I have a passion for Africa,’ he says. ‘I wanted somewhere to enjoy it. I didn’t buy a pretty ranch. This place was completely run-down and overgrazed. It was almost desert. But I also saw a beautiful mountain, game that could come back and a land that could be rich again. I saw the potential for something bigger.’

Although he relates to the romance of old Africa – in the library at Segera are the private journals and unpublished letters of Ernest Hemingway, David Livingstone and Karen Blixen – Zeitz also subverts the colonial clichés. He wears khaki, but with sneakers. He flies small planes, including the 1929 Gipsy Moth biplane, G-AAMY, which starred in the film of *Out of Africa*, and now lives in a hangar at Segera. He has also amassed one of the world’s largest, most representative collections of contemporary art from Africa and the African diaspora.

Zeitz is a former Chairman and CEO of Puma, roles which he took on aged 30 and held for the following 18 years. Currently, he is a director of the Pinault family’s luxury goods conglomerate, Kering (and Chairman of its board’s sustainable development committee), as well as a board member of Harley Davidson, and co-founder and co-chair – alongside Sir Richard Branson – of The B Team, a non-profit organisation dedicated to making business better for the planet. »

© David Crookes, courtesy Segera Retreat. © Guillaume Bonn/Condé Nast



**I**t is springtime in Laikipia, in Northern Kenya. Beneath our helicopter, the grass is sun-scorched and brown veined, with green riverine loops and bends. Yellow fever trees line the waterways and a pool where Lord Delamere used to come and bathe, according to Karen Blixen’s memoir, *Out of Africa*. We can see wildlife – a rhino in the 58,000 acres that belong to the Wildenstein family, large herds of giraffe, and strings of cattle that belong to the Masaai. There are areas that are heavily grazed. Then the landscape changes again, to acacia bush and elegant, rolling savannah, as we approach Segera, the luxury lodge at the heart of a 50,000-acre swathe of Laikipia wilderness owned by the German entrepreneur, conservationist and art collector, Jochen Zeitz.

We do a fly-over of the lodge, which occupies a pool of green, its limits defined by a thorny circle of acacia recalling the traditional Masaai bomas used to keep cattle safe from predators. The tropical gardens are an unlikely sight; they pop out of the savannah with the incongruity of a Jeff Koons puppy on a Venice canal. Covering some eight acres, the gardens are full of succulents and flame-red flowers, with palms that burst up like giant shuttlecocks from lime-green lawns. The grounds are peppered with low-key thatch-roofed, wood- and rock-walled villas – some stilted, the largest of them Zeitz’s home, looking towards Mount Kenya – and some curious sculptures. There is a 15ft-high effigy in aluminum wire, which looks like a man in a spacesuit (the



© David Crookes, courtesy Segera Retreat

Segera Retreat and the  
Sugeroi River that flows  
past it, seen from the air





Left, *Zumazela*, 2010, by Brendhan Dickerson. Below, Nandipha Mntambo's *uMcedo*, 2009

Yet he is disconcertingly down to earth. He prefers game walks to safari vehicles. He has clearly ploughed millions (he doesn't say how many) into the Segera project, but he doesn't want to be closed off in a rich man's cocoon. While Segera's interiors are of impeccable taste – weathered woods, pale colours that eat the light, locally-made recycled glass chandeliers that chime in the breeze – his own relatively modest bungalow occupies the exact same footprint of the original 1940s farmstead. He is obsessed with sustainability, keener to show me the water recycling plant than to talk about his high-profile friends who come and stay, from Cameroon-born footballer Samuel Eto'o (who is working on a new Zeitz Foundation football academy in Laikipia) to designer Vivienne Westwood (with whom he shares a vision for sustainable fashion).

He lives at Segera for four months of the year. He also has a ranch in Santa Fe, a home in Switzerland, and is currently developing Africa's first major museum of contemporary art. The Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, or Zeitz MOCAA, is a new non-profit institution occupying a Thomas Heatherwick-designed building in an iconic, 57m-tall grain silo on Cape Town's V&A Waterfront, due to open at the end of 2016.

When he was at Puma, he pioneered the sponsorship of African footballers and, he says, developed relationships that went way beyond business. 'And ever since I started working in Africa, I've been inspired by the creativity of the continent. I quickly saw a void. I'd go to the big fairs, to the Venice Biennale, and Africa was poorly



***'The last time Africa built a museum of this scale was in 1892, and it was the Egyptian Museum in Cairo'***

represented – no young artists, so few Africans. So I started collecting. I found a purpose. I wanted contemporary African art to be noticed more.'

He has been helped by South Africa-born Mark Coetzee, who curated the Rubell Family Collection in Miami. Under Coetzee's guidance, Zeitz has amassed thousands of works, and loaned to galleries including Tate Liverpool and New York's New Museum. He also sponsored the first ever large-scale show of African-American contemporary artists, *30 Americans*, which was launched at the Rubell Family Collection and has been touring the USA since 2008.

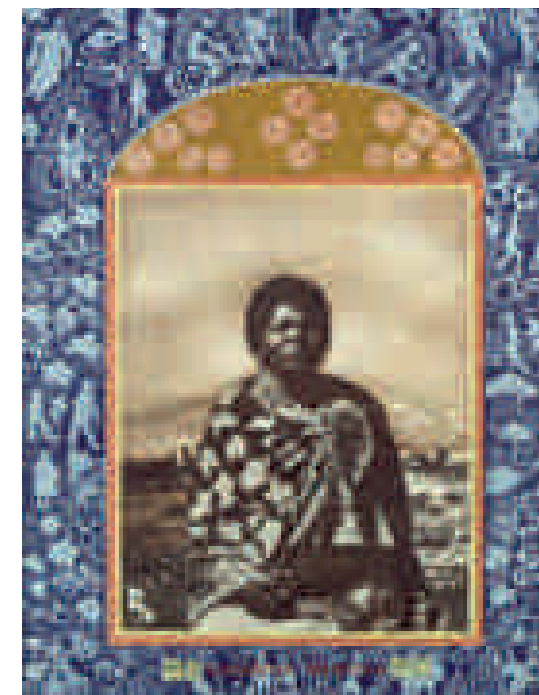
Over the last four years, Zeitz has put around 150 pieces into the grounds at Segera, including monumental bronze, stone and steel works, land and earth art, and outdoor projections. 'I think of Segera as East Africa's extension of Zeitz MOCAA, a hub for contemporary art,' he says. It hosts artists, in a residency programme. And Owusu-Ankomah, Marlene Dumas, Rashid Johnson, Wangechi Mutu, and Hank Willis Thomas are among the artists whose work is on show.

For guests, the effect is compelling. You wake up looking at art; you eat dinner in front of it; it's there when you hang out by the pool. The work is stimulating, sometimes challenging – there is, for example, a flickering video commentary by Kudzanai Chuirai on Mugabe's Zimbabwe, which loops on a screen near a table laid for two. Zeitz or Coetzee are in the mix, too, leading occasional week-long 'Friends of Segera' retreats with invited



Above, *Emabutfo*, 2009, by Nandipha Mntambo. Left, Sue Williamson's *Virginia Mngoma* from the series *A Few South Africans*, 1984

Following pages, giraffes near Segera



© Brendhan Dickerson; Nandipha Mntambo; Sue Williamson, courtesy of the artist and Zeitz Collection at Segera (Founding Collection, Zeitz MOCAA)

artists, bringing the energy of new ways of thinking into every conversation – at lunch, on game walks, even on the massage table.

'We have had guests leave us to go straight to galleries in South Africa to buy art,' says Zeitz. 'That excites me. The news channels are reporting all the bad things happening on this continent. Terrorism. Ebola. I want people to fall in love with Africa, I want to educate them about a different side.'

When I suggest that this shift in perception is only accessible to those who can afford Segera's US\$1,245 per person per night all-inclusive room rates, Zeitz sets me straight: the influencers are important, but so is the democratic vision of the new museum in South Africa. To ensure its success, Zeitz has committed his collection to the museum in perpetuity; he is underwriting MOCAA's running costs, and is also providing a substantial acquisition budget to allow the Museum to buy important artworks over time. Coetzee says that 'the last time Africa built a museum of this scale was in 1892, and it was the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. At Zeitz MOCAA, there will be an entire floor for educational programmes, a centre for curatorial »





Above, *Local Calm*, 2005, by Julie Mehretu. Below, *Untitled Europe*, 2003, by Marlene Dumas

Right, Villa 2 at Segera Retreat

studies, a centre for the moving image with six cinemas, and a centre for performative practice. It will be a mega-institution, with exhibition space twice the size of the old Whitney in New York.'

When Zeitz MOCAA opens, access will be free, which is already the case at the Zeitz MOCAA Pavilion, a museum-quality, temporary exhibition space, also on the V&A Waterfront, currently hosting three-month-long shows. Zeitz and Coetzee want the project to be as relevant to locals, including school kids, as it is to international visitors. 'So far it seems to be working,' says Zeitz. 'The temporary pavilion only has 150 square metres of exhibition space, but in the first nine months we had 215,000 visitors. We're building a community. We're partnering with local galleries and museums. And the message seems to be getting through. It is about more than art, about the social and environmental issues African artists are also engaged with.'

This is what really motivates Zeitz - the way he can bring together community, conservation, commerce and culture, which he brands 'the 4Cs'. Back at Segera I see another agenda, as he goes out walking the land. It's nearing midday; the African sun is high in the sky. In the distance are the tall necks of giraffe, grazing the tops of acacia. Zebra are moving through the long view. I can hear the tick of insects, the call of weaver birds. Zeitz walks at his own pace, comfortable in his own company, clearly glad to be out in wild. Then he taps me on the shoulder, and quietly asks me to stay still. He senses life before I hear it - a Cape buffalo in the gully below. He cocks his gun, ready to act if anything should happen; then, a few minutes later, he nods and we walk on, one behind the other, in this ancient land that thrums with something bigger than any of us, or any piece of art. ♦



*Sophy Roberts travelled as a guest of Journeys by Design (journeysbydesign.com). The Zeitz MOCAA Pavilion will continue to present changing exhibitions and educational programmes until the opening of Zeitz MOCAA at the end of 2016 (zeitzfoundation.com)*

© Julie Mehretu; Marlene Dumas, courtesy of the artist and Zeitz Collection at Segera (founding collection, Zeitz MOCAA)

