SONIC MMABOLELA

5th Annual Workshop/Residency for sound artists & composers at Mmabolela Reserve, Limpopo, South Africa

16-29 November 2017

Conceived and directed by **Francisco López** (www.franciscolopez.net)
Coordination and logistics by **Barbara Ellison** (www.barbaraellison.com)

THE WORKSHOP/RESIDENCY:

'**Sonic Mmabolela'** is a 2-week workshop/residency for professional and semi-professional sound artists and composers with previous experience in the area of sound experimentation and sound recordings. It takes place at Mmabolela Reserve, in the Limpopo province of South Africa, right at the border with Botswana. It involves field work, studio work and theoretical/discussion presentations. The workshop/residency has a special focus on creative approaches to the work with environmental sound recordings, as well as the role of listening, through an extensive exploration of natural sound environments. It does not have a technical character but is instead conceived and directed towards (i) the questioning of canonical conceptions of so-called 'field recordings', and (ii) the development and realization of projects of sonic creation by the participant artists/composers with the recordings gathered and through the experience of dedicated listening in natural environments.

'Sonic Mmabolela' draws from previous experience of an equivalent workshop / residency, also conceived and directed by Francisco López, in the Brazilian Amazon ("Mamori Sound Project" 2005-2011), which has been attended by 70 artists from all over the world, who have produced to date dozens of releases, sound installations, exhibitions, films, publications and public presentations worldwide, based on the sound materials and experience gathered during that workshop / residency.

The activities of the workshop/residency include:

- Introductory theoretical/discussion presentation sessions on environmental recordings and sound creation, with a historical / philosophical / critical perspective.
- Field trips (both diurnal and nocturnal) for extensive listening and recording of sound environments.
- Sessions of studio work (with laptop) using these materials.
- Artists' presentation / discussion sessions on sound creative work / environmental recordings.
- Development and realization of a sound piece by each participant with some of the original sound materials gathered in the field work.
- Presentation of the finished pieces by the participant artists.

All these activities are organized in a daily schedule according to the changing sonic environments of Mmabolela Reserve. This typically involves many hours of field and studio work but there is also flexibility to allow participants to choose from several schedule options. The language for the workshop/residency is English. The director also speaks Spanish and has conversational levels of French, Portuguese and Italian.

The 'Sonic Mmabolela' team:

Francisco López, director of 'Sonic Mmabolela', is internationally recognized as one of the major figures of the experimental music and sound art scene. He is also a Ph.D. ecosystem biologist, with more than twenty years of teaching experience in Spain and Latin America. His experience in the field of sound creation and work with environmental recordings spans over a period of almost forty years. He has collaborated internationally with hundreds of artists and his work has been released by nearly 400 record labels worldwide. He has been awarded four times with honorary mentions at the competition of Ars Electronica Festival and is the recipient of the Qwartz Award 2010 for best sound anthology. He has realized hundreds of field recording projects, commissions, live performances, sound installations and workshops, as well as research in entomology and ecosystem dynamics, in over seventy countries of the six continents, with a particular emphasis on tropical and sub-tropical areas in the Americas, Africa and Australasia.

http://www.franciscolopez.net

Barbara Ellison, project coordinator of 'Sonic Mmabolela', is an Irish sound and visual artist whose recent work explores perceptual ambiguity and our propensity and desire to find meaningful patterns in our environment, even when none exist. Her performances often play with ritualistic forms giving rise to sonic structures emerging through a hypnotic repetitious exploration of simple sound-producing actions. Her projects manifest in diverse and often unexpected media and platforms involving long intense working periods of practical and theoretical research. Her work has been performed and exhibited worldwide, and her artistic research has brought her in recent years to Baffin Island, Nunavut, Arctic (2010), Amazon, Brazil (2011), Svaneti, Georgia (2012), Danum Valley rainforest in Borneo (2012), Cardamom rainforest, Cambodia (2013), Mmabolela, South Africa (2013), Iceland and Australia (2013), Japan (2014), Chile and Bolivia (2014), Nepal (2016). She has a PhD from the University of Huddersfield, UK ('Sonic Phantoms') and is currently teaching at the Institute of Sonology at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, The Netherlands.

http://www.barbaraellison.com

Neil Lowe is an IT consultant by day and an ambitious home cook whenever he gets the opportunity. A repenting MasterChef SA 2013 finalist with a passion for creating delicious food based on the scientific understanding of the cooking process, Neil likes to fuse modernist cuisine with various ingredients and techniques from modern and traditional South African, North African, Mediterranean and Asian cuisine.

An integral part of the 'Sonic Mmabolela' team since its inception, his culinary prowess and ability to think on his feet in an often-challenging environment has kept participants eagerly looking forward to every meal.

Comments from previous participants:

'Sonic Mmabolela was one of the most amazing, interesting, inspiring, exhausting and fun experiences of my life. It was great and I can advise everybody to participate in the residency.' -Stijn Demeulenaere (Belgium)

'What an incredible and hypnotic aural feast! [...] another listening session is offered, down by 'the bridge', for the sunset concerto. I can not point out enough how profoundly engaging this activity is [...] the moment we sit down distant hyena sounds enchant our aural senses. In awe we hear the surrounding night live and breathe into our ears. Sonic Mmabolela was much more than i could ever have hoped for. It was outstanding from the first day to the last. An invaluable treasure of experiences, a unique and inspiring (but also exhausting) school that will resonate, on and on.' -Dave Philips (Switzerland)

'Stunning scenery, awesome conversations, fantastic people; after three years of attempting, to finally be able to come along was worth every cent. A very unique and inspiring opportunity that created memories and experiences I wouldn't trade for anything.' -Hannah Gilmour (New Zealand)

'Gorgeus, amazing, incredible, enriching, enlightening, inspiring, intense and sometimes exhausting. Organized and directed in an impeccable way and seasoned with Neil's [the chef] delights. Sublime moments in the field listening sessions... A must!!' -Rubén García (Spain)

'Sonic Mmabolela was an enchanted place and ideal frame for deep listening, reflection, discussion, exchange, writing, composing, inspiration, breathing, seeing, awakening and of course: recording! Brilliant organization and guidance, amazing food and care. One of the best experiences I had since very long time.' -Angelica Castelló (Mexico / Austria)

'I came to Sonic Mmabolela with quite a simple goal, to record ambient soundscapes of the Southern African savanna in summer time. But I left with far more than that: a much wider appreciation of the act and art of field recording. To my own surprise, Sonic Mmabolela gave me insight into how to find the musicality in sounds emanated by nature.' -Daan Hendriks (Holland/UK)

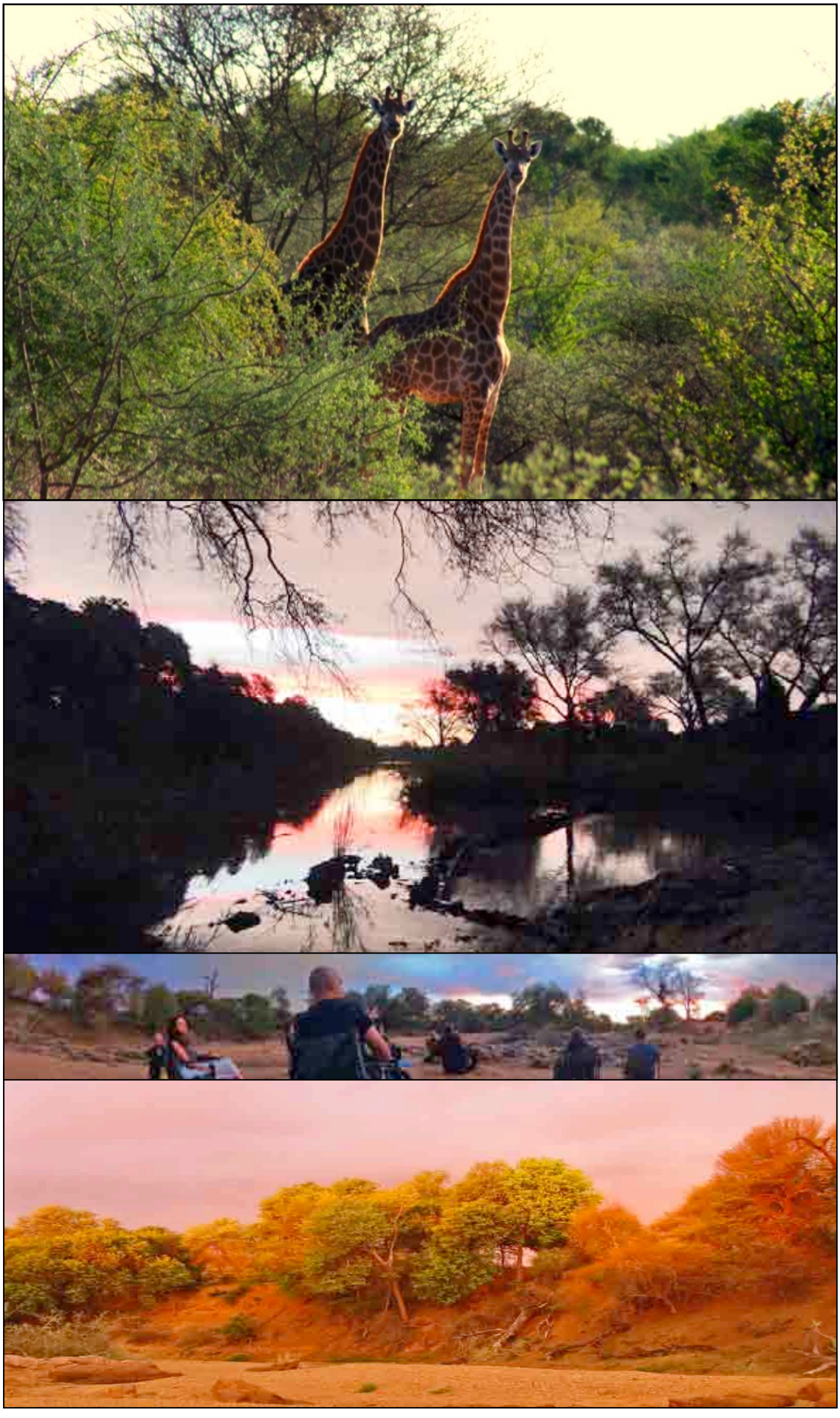
'Truly inspiring.' -Robert Schwartz (Austria)

'Exceptional moments from the first day to the last.' -Jean-Baptiste Masson (France)

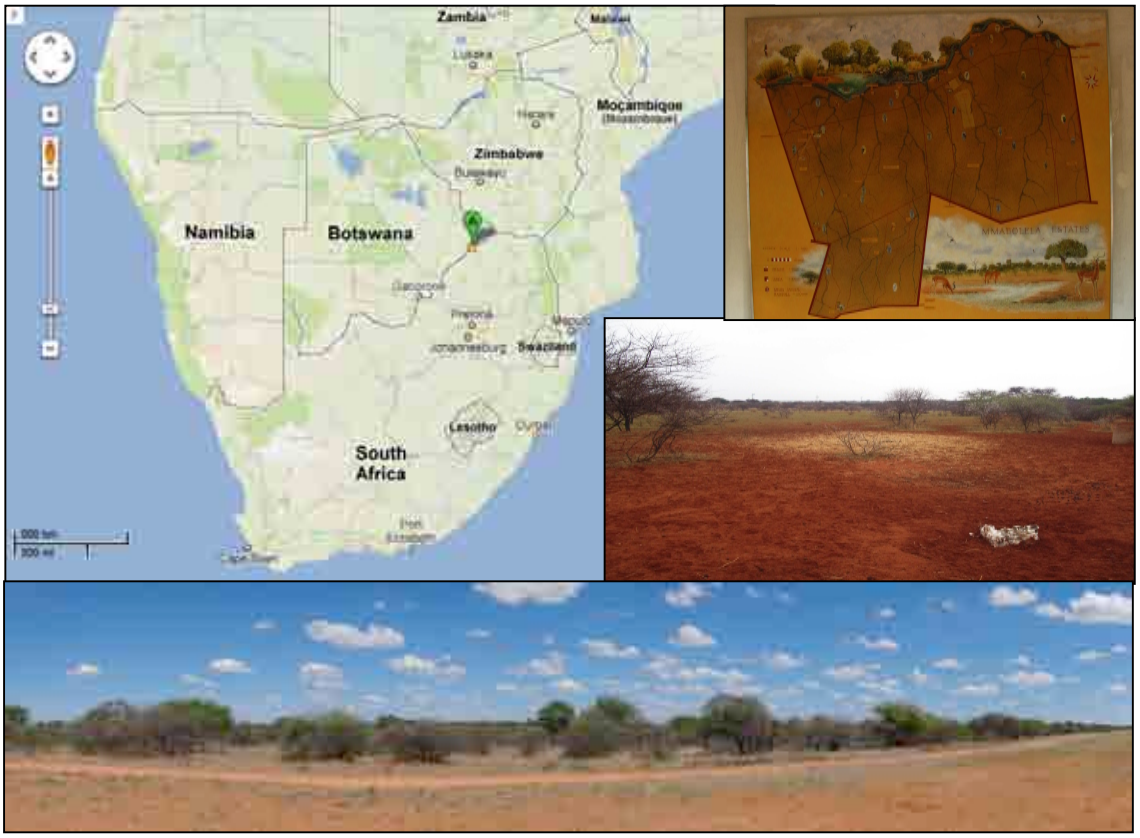
'Sonic Mmabolela was an invaluable experience that I will continually reflect upon.' - Christopher Fleeger (USA)

'The most inspiration I've ever had in two weeks and the warmest musicians I've met in a lifetime.' -Matthew Aidekman (USA)

'Mmabolela was a truly amazing and inspiring trip in excellent company. It's difficult to express just by using words, photos or even recordings how much I enjoyed it.' -George Vlad Cancea (Romania/UK)



MMABOLELA RESERVE:



Mmabolela is a private nature reserve located in the Limpopo Valley Bushveld, northern Limpopo province, South Africa, right at the border with Botswana (approximately 7-8 hours drive from Johannesburg) (http://goo.gl/maps/4g3zW). This 6500 Ha reserve is a Natural Heritage Site rich in wildlife and home to a variety of plains game, hippo, crocodile, leopard, jackals, bat-eared foxes, and many species of small carnivores.

The area, with its beautiful riparian woodland and permanent pools, is renowned for its abundant and diverse birdlife, especially migrants. It has extensive pristine Limpopo River frontage, including the famous Mmabolela Rock and Hippo Pool.

Mmabolela has no recent history of agricultural spraying or dipping, or electronic pollution (microwave or cell phone towers), and consequently has a bountiful insect population which provides food for many species of birds, rodents and small mammals, all of which contribute to the biodiversity of this ecosystem.

During the summer months (October - March) the Limpopo Valley has average day maximum temperatures close to 30ºC (85ºF) with night minima around 17ºC (60ºF). The period of November-December is the first half of the rainy season, although given the overall dry climate of the region, that translates into moderate registers of 40-60mm/month, with an average of 8-10 days of rain per month during that period. Daylight hours go approximately from 5:30AM until 7:30PM.

LOGISTICS / WHAT TO BRING:

For the realization of the workshop/residency we hire the entire Mmabolela reserve for the whole duration of our stay. There are two original fully-equipped farmhouses in the property at our disposal (the "Tuli" house and the "Weederdooper" homestead), with several double rooms, which can accommodate a total maximum of 14 guests. One of them has electricity and the other one is solar-powered. They are 5 minutes away from each other by car. Both houses overlook water holes frequented by game and have their own plunge pools.

All transportation is booked and organized for participants from the very arrival at Johannesburg airport (individually), all the way to Mmabolela reserve (group minibus). Hotel accommodation in Johannesburg is also booked for participants on arrival and departure dates.

Although Mmabolela is normally a self-catering, self-drive operation, for this workshop/residency we hire a chef and kitchen staff, as well as local guides/drivers for all daily field recording trips (day and night) and any other logistic needs, including the necessary 4x4 vehicles.

Like most wilderness areas in Africa, Mmabolela reserve is home to a large number of wildlife species, some of which might be hazardous. There are no lions in the reserve and leopards -as it happens in virtually all areas where they are present- are an extremely rare sight. Unbeknownst to most people, however, hippos can be dangerous animals, particularly at dawn and dusk when they go out of the water to graze.

Naturally, during our field work, we take all necessary precautions and take no risks whatsoever with these or any other potential hazards. Activities such as hiking, biking and fishing are regularly carried out by visitors at Mmabolela. Despite this, and solely for reasons of safety, there are some obvious restrictions to individual, un-guided movements in the reserve. All participants are asked to sign a standard liability form for outdoor activities of this kind in a wilderness area of this type.

There is no malaria in the region. Vaccinations for hepatitis, yellow fever, typhus and rabies are customary for travellers in the African wilderness in general; you should visit your doctor for advice on these. Every participant is responsible for taking proper health travel insurance.

Here is a list of necessary/useful things to bring to Mmabolela:

[Most common things, such as sunblock, batteries or toiletries can obviously be found and bought in Johannesburg, prior to the trip to Mmabolela. To prevent wasting time and last-minute rushes, however, we always recommend to arrive in South Africa with all the necessary things.]

- **Sound recording gear**: Participants should bring their own portable field recording gear. Windscreens are strongly recommended, as windy conditions are quite common. An umbrella can be occasionally useful to protect equipment from both direct sunlight and rain. There are opportunities for hydrophone recordings in the Limpopo river. Each one of the possible several daily field recording trips (which are made as a group – see note below) might typically produce about 1-2 hours of recorded material. In addition, there are also opportunities for optional overnight recordings (leaving recording equipment overnight, secured with wire or cable ties, in selected locations), which might produce many hours of recordings. All of this has to be considered in terms of batteries and memory cards / memory drives.

[Note: Although there are opportunities for all modes of recording (including short hikes and overnight recordings), a typical group field recording trip consists of: driving to an interesting area in terms of the sound environment, leaving the equipment there recording for a relatively long period of time (typically 1-2 hours) while we wait somewhere else, and then collecting the equipment. This strategy prevents interferences in the recordings among the different people in the group, and, even more importantly, serves to capture all the animal sounds that would otherwise remain silent with human presence around.]

- **Studio equipment**: It is absolutely necessary that each participant brings his/her own studio equipment; that is, a laptop computer with audio software that the user knows how to use, as well as headphones, any external memory drives he/she might need for copies/back-ups, and all the necessary cables. For the workshop/residency we bring a professional monitoring speaker system, as well as a beamer, for presentations and group listening sessions / screenings.
- **Adaptors**: Voltage in South Africa is 220-240 Volts. The electrical plugs/sockets are spectacularly large: http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets/m/

  so you will need adaptors for your equipment plugs; e.g.:

  http://www.adaptelec.com/wa10l-travel-plug-adapter-for-south-africa-type-m-large-15-amp-bs-546-p-9.html

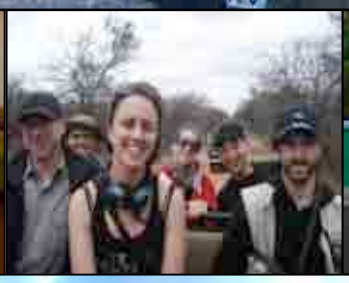
  A small power strip for all your plugs is a must and reduces the need for adaptors. We normally bring some extra adaptors, to have at least one per participant.
- **Flashlights**: Although there is electricity in the farmhouses, some occasional power restrictions might take place. In addition, we have field recording sessions at night almost every day. A flashlight is thus one of the most-commonly used tools in Mmabolela. Head flashlights are very practical during field work. Bring plenty of batteries or rechargable ones with charger.

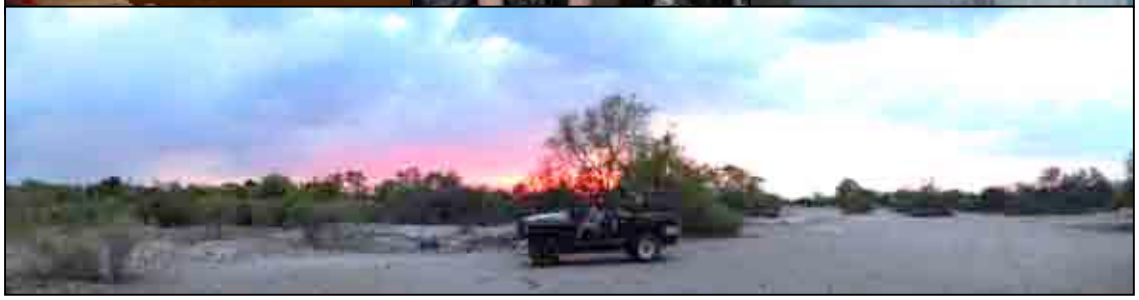
- **Clothes**: For the field recording trips and on relatively cooler nights you might prefer to wear long pants and a long-sleeve shirt -also to prevent insect bites and scratches from thorns, etc. For all other situations, shorts and T-shirts are the most comfortable. Bring a bathing suit, since we do have plunge pools. Bring a jacket/sweater, as some nights/early mornings might be considerably chilly. Rain is very likely to happen, sometimes torrentially. Bring proper rain gear and a small umbrella (some people also use it for the sun).
- **Shoes**: Comfortable hiking boots/shoes are recommended for the field recording trips and short hikes. For the houses and surrounding areas, sandals/flip-flops are perfect.
- **Sunblock and hat**: During the day it is typically sunny and it might get occasionally quite hot. Sunblock, a hat and a sun scarf are very advisable.
- **Medication**: Every participant is responsible for taking proper health travel insurance. Bring all your necessary medication. If any participant suffers any particular ilness or disease, he/she should inform the organizers beforehand and bring all proper specialized medication.

SERVICES, RATE AND APPLICATION/REGISTRATION:

The workshop/residency includes:

- Hiring of the entire Mmabolela reserve for exclusive use by the participants during the whole duration of the workshop/residency.
- Daily working sessions with field recordings, studio work, and collective theoretical/discussion presentations (total of 8 to 12 hours a day, with optional activities and flexible schedules).
- Full accommodation: 2 nights hotel (arrival/departure) in Johannesburg (double room) + 13 nights in private farmhouses in Mmabolela (double rooms with beds, separate bathrooms, shower/toilets, dining/studio working room, electrical system with 220V power sockets, monitoring speaker system, beamer, kitchen, plunge pools).
- All meals and beverages in Mmabolela as well as all meals in Johannesburg for arrival and departure days.
- Transportation from/to the airport in Johannesburg.
- Transportation to/from Mmabolela by minibus (approx. 7-8 hours).
- Daily transportation in Mmabolela by 4x4 vehicle to field recording sites (day and night).
- Local guides/drivers, chef, kitchen/maintenance staff, and logistics manager.





Rates:

Workshop/Residency 2-week rate per person: 2,750 euros

(Includes all of the above. Does not include flight to Johannesburg from participant's departure location nor medical insurance.)

'Sonic Mmabolela' is a non-profit, independently-run project. Each participant artist/composer must seek funding for his/her workshop/residency costs, as well as the flight to Johannesburg and his/her medical insurance. To this end, after the application process (see below), we provide formal invitation letters to prospective participants.

Dates workshop/residency:

The 'Sonic Mmabolela' workshop/residency will take place in:

16 – 29 November 2017

The group needs a minimum of 6 participants for the workshop/residency to take place.

Application:

The capacity of the workshop/residency is limited to a small group: currently a maximum of 10 participant artists/composers.

Artists/composers interested need to send an application (only email, no post), consisting of: (i) updated CV, and (ii) examples of their sound work on mp3 or –preferably- through internet links, to the following email address:

E-mail: franciscolopez@franciscolopez.net

Registration:

The artists/composers selected after the application process will receive a formal invitation letter from the director of 'Sonic Mmabolela' to help them in seeking funding support. To join the workshop/residency they will have to pay the registration fee and fill in the registration form that will be later provided by the organizers.

Deadline for registrations: 15 July 2017

[Note: If the maximum capacity of 10 registered participants is reached before the deadline, the workshop/residency will be therefore complete. If the minimum number of 6 registered participants is not reached by the deadline date, the workshop/residency will not take place.]

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