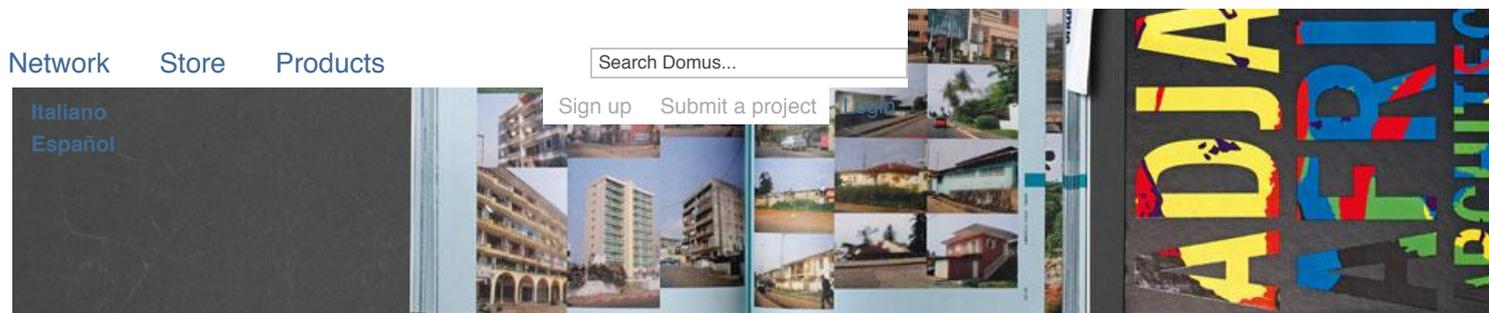


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Africa, looking beyond the clichés—

Via the lens and pen of two European architects—David Adjaye and Antoni Fokkers—two books offer a close encounter with architecture and urban development on the African continent. A book review by Iolanda Pensa

Adjaye · Africa · Architecture: A Photographic Survey of Metropolitan Architecture

David Adjaye. Thames & Hudson, London, 2011 (7 volumes, 576 pp., 75.17€)

Modern Architecture in Africa

Antoni Fokkers. SUN, Amsterdam, 2010 (256 pp.)

One day, the artist Jean Katambayi Mukendi started recording the repeated blackouts that were disrupting life in his home city of Lubumbashi. He carefully noted them down in a book and, after several weeks, established a direct link between the blackouts and how the government was faring. Lubumbashi is a city with a population of 1.5 million in the interior of the Democratic Republic of Congo, over 2,000 kilometres from the capital Kinshasa. What can people do, from such a distance, to understand what is happening and feel like they are part of the system? This issue of penetration seems common to the Lubumbashi artist—who started listening in to electric sockets—and the authors of two books on African architecture: David Adjaye and Antoni Fokkers. How do you portray buildings and cities that are not just floating on an Africa-shaped island in the middle of the sea, but rather say a great deal about our shared contemporary times?

David Adjaye armed himself with a camera and travelled to all 53 capitals on the continent; Antoni Fokkers moved to Africa to work as an architect and urban designer for 25 years. The results are very different, but, in a world dominated by collections of rainbow essays, the central role and responsibility shouldered by the authors give these two books a voice on the knowledge of architecture and urban development on the African continent.

It is hard not to start out with a positive prejudice in their favour. David Adjaye is an architect who is gaining acclaim and increasing

Section

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Author

[Iolanda Pensa](#)

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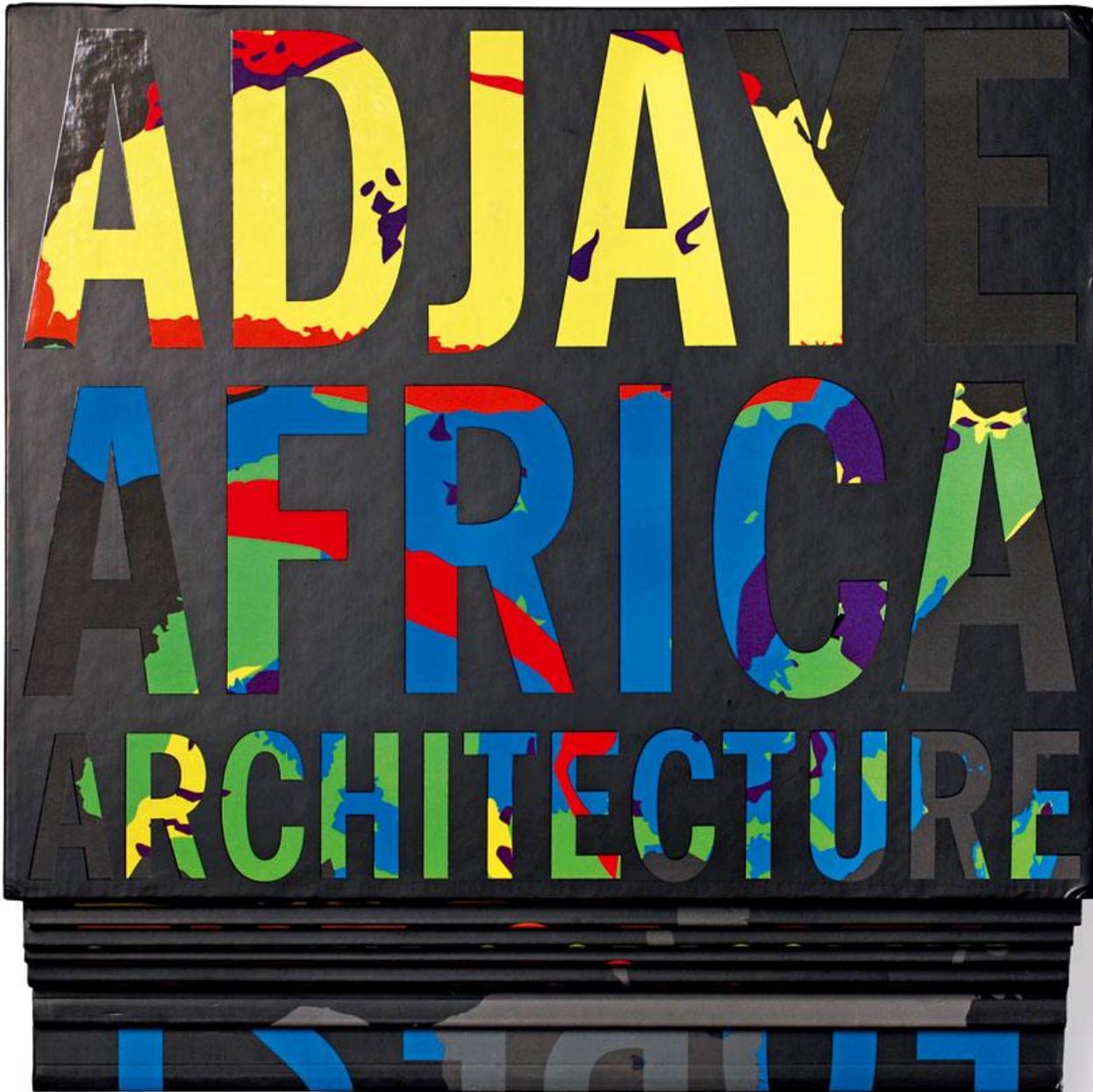
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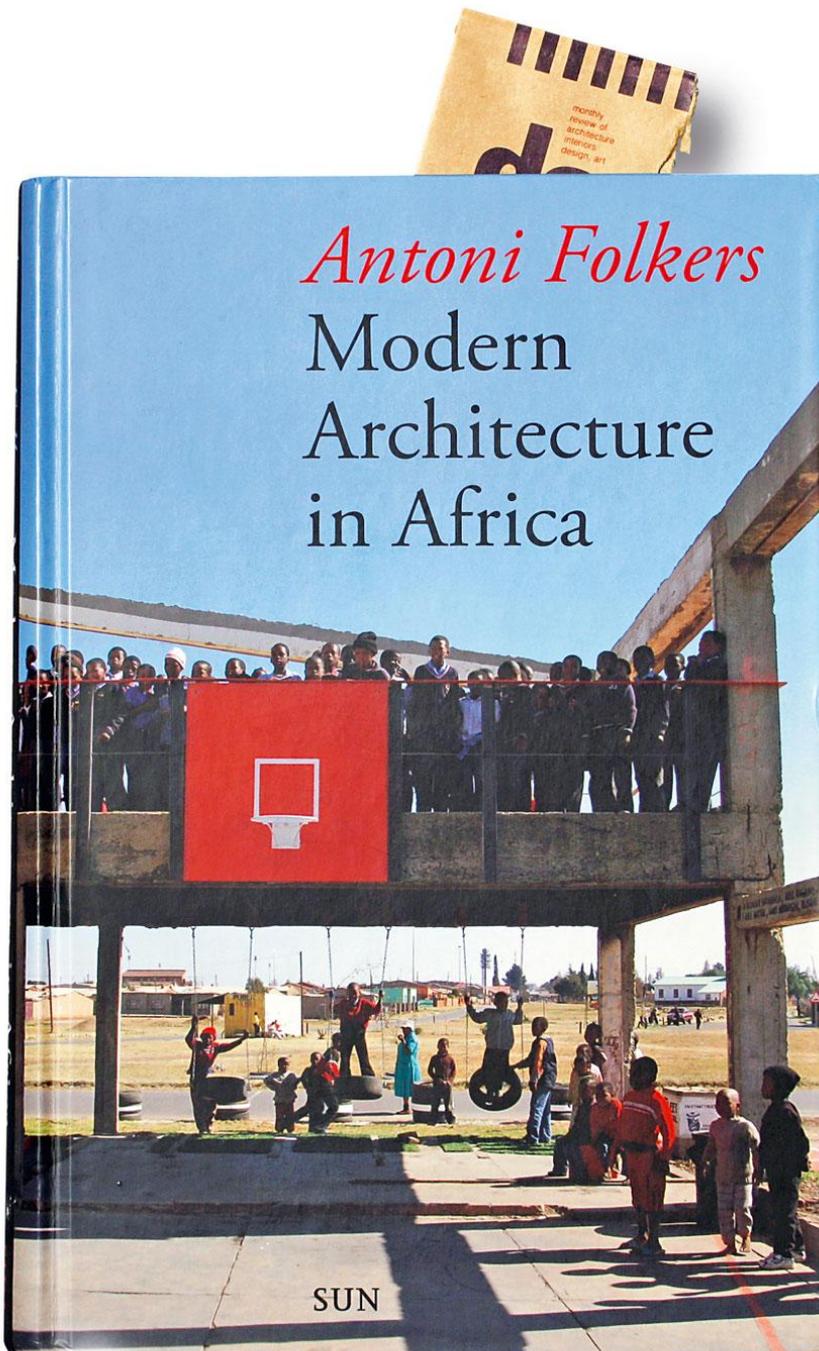
international appreciation for both his public and private buildings as well as his involvement in art and design. The book is closely linked to his personal experience as a photographer and observer, showcased at London's Design Museum in 2010 and since then a traveling exhibition.



↑ Cover of *Adjaye Africa Architecture*

Antoni Folkers is an architect and urban designer who started working in Africa in the 1980s and formed a company in Utrecht in 2000 with bases in Uganda and Tanzania. Although his work is not in the public eye like Adjaye's, it has made a major impact on the creation and support of a network of African architects. Folkers is the initiator and one of the founders of ArchiAfrika, which organised the international African Perspectives conference in Casablanca. The slipcase containing David Adjaye's seven volumes entitled *Adjaye Africa Architecture* is a

systematic collection of photographs organised by city and published in a series of volumes, each one focusing on a different climate zone (Maghreb, Desert, The Sahel, Forest, Savannah and Grassland, Mountains and Highveld). The 3,500-plus photographs are interspersed with brief introductions and the odd comment. Indeed, this whole array of pictures of civil buildings and shopping/ residential areas seems to be asking readers to do exactly what Adjaye did—to look. But it's not that simple. The slipcase is a glossy invitation to leaf through volumes of rough, opaque paper, pausing to decode forms, rhythms and colour assonances, landscapes, vegetation and sand.

Cover of *Modern Architecture in Africa*

Modern Architecture in Africa is packed with information, sources and

bibliographic references, and its rational structure is subdivided into the architectural disciplines: urban design, building technology, building physics and conservation. Personal research and experience have been converted into an unusual manual that focuses on architecture but also speaks about politics, and does not shy away from scathing comments.

Books on African architecture all share a number of problems, such as identifying what information can be taken for granted. The word *Africa* in the title and plenty of maps help to clarify the subject, but once the problem of coordinates has been resolved we also need a historical, political and climatic background before confronting misunderstandings and prejudices, blame and responsibilities, before and after. Leaping from the macro to the micro scale, David Adjaye and Antoni Folkers successfully overcome the dichotomies and, through their eyes and experiences, forge a link with real-life African urban situations.

Meanwhile, after starting out with a notebook recording the blackouts in Lubumbashi, the artist Jean Katambayi Mukendi is now producing cardboard electrical devices.

Iolanda Pensa

"The word Africa in the title and plenty of maps help to clarify the subject, but once the problem of coordinates has been resolved we also need a historical, political and climatic background before confronting misunderstandings and prejudices, blame and responsibilities, before and after."

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Disorder creates social encounter and infiltrations at the lively Contemporary African Art Biennial in Dakar — its porosity offers space for new languages and tools, allowing a possibility to rethink the world, and the materialization of new, incisive questions. An art report from Dakar by Iolanda Pensa



Public Art and Urban Change in Douala—

While the doual'art association works on the third edition of SUD, the public art event which aims to transform the capital of Cameroon, an itinerant exhibition exports the event to Europe, passing through Rotterdam, Nantes, Ghent and Milan. An art report from Douala by Iolanda Pensa



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