



**remember**  
**saro-wiwa**

The Living Memorial

[www.remembersarowiwa.com](http://www.remembersarowiwa.com)



Serge Matti © Friends of the Earth, April 2005

### Remember Saro-Wiwa: The Living Memorial

**The Living Memorial to Ken Saro-Wiwa is a landmark public art project for London. Landmark in that it addresses the under-representation of people of colour in the London cityscape. Landmark in that it puts the issue of environmental justice directly in the public gaze. Landmark in that it activates the debate about London's ethical relationship to the wider world. Landmark in that it raises the stakes on innovations in 'public art'. The winning commission, announced on the 10th anniversary of Ken's execution on November 10th 2005, will be placed in five temporary sites across London before being installed in its permanent home in 2008. The whole project will be animated by a programme of education and publications.**

**This catalogue and accompanying DVD by video artists Judy Price and Andrew Conio explores the five shortlisted artists' proposals and the wider context for the project. It features the work of artists Sokari Douglas Camp, Siraj Izhar, Emmanuel Jegede, Emily Johns and Frances Newman/Jeff Jackson/Knott Architects, with texts by Ken Wiwa and PLATFORM.**



Ken Saro-Wiwa with his sons

*'The geology of Nigeria is burnt in the streets of London and in the skies above it...'*

In our interconnected and economically globalised world there should be nothing unusual about putting up a memorial to an African in the streets of London. After all, the cultural landscape is a reflection of the economic terrain. But historically, memorials and statues don't speak the language of cultural justice – they inscribe the narrative of colonialism on our visual world.

The great memorials of European cities tend to honour the individuals who brought home the spoils of war and, contrary to biblical wisdom, these prophets are honoured in their own country.

They are even honoured beyond their borders; in Africa many memorials still stand to the colonizers, the men (and it is usually men) who forcibly opened up the continent for the business of empire. The very names of many of our countries and cities, of Africa's rivers and waterfalls ring with their memory.

Statues especially speak the language of conquest. And as they watch over the skies of Europe, these august figures mock the present with the dead weight of a history that installed a world order built on expropriation and exploitation.

Another world is possible. One that cherishes the men and women who have dedicated their lives to building a just world order.

So a memorial to my father, Ken Saro-Wiwa, is this departure, an African honoured in the heart of London, a Living Memorial that champions a man who died for the hope of a just future.

That he follows in the footsteps of Nelson Mandela as the second African to be officially honoured in this way is a tremendous source of pride for my family, my community and my country. We hope it will prise open a window of hope that we really can build a world based on mutual respect and the recognition of our shared destiny.

**Ken Wiwa**



First RSW coalition meeting, March 2004

Ten years on, how to find words for the executions of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight colleagues?

Outrage simmers because the wound is still bloodily open. In the Niger Delta, gas flaring continues day and night, farmland remains saturated with spilt oil, and the Ogoni, Ijaw and other Delta communities are among the poorest in Nigeria. The oil companies will not acknowledge their role to the families of the dead.

All too predictably, Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues were murdered under a veneer of 'due process' – the absurd charges, the 'court', the executions. As the story unfolded before the world's media, many watched horrified as Mandela's 'quiet diplomacy' failed, and the hangmen succeeded.

Many of us remember the moment we heard news of the executions on 10th November 1995. PLATFORM was in Glasgow, ironically at an event on the legacy of Joseph Beuys – how art plays a vital role in social change, a subject Ken often talked about:

*'My art should be able to alter the lives of a large number of people, of a whole community, of an entire country... It's not now an ego trip, it's serious, it's politics, it's economics, it's everything, and art in that instance becomes so meaningful.'*

For us, as for many, Ken's words were a wake-up call: know what is being done in your name, hold your corporations and governments to account. He put it: 'My mission has been to inform the West of the truth of what is happening in Nigeria... If they knew, they'd stop this robbery and murder' His appeals were so eloquent, his peaceful rallying so successful, that the Nigerian Government, for one, needed him silenced.

For some of us, our lives could never be the same again. In PLATFORM we began a long-term initiative, '90% CRUDE', to investigate the culture, psychology and impacts of the oil industry. Ken's ideas have pervaded the work, from Azerbaijan and Iraq to the USA.

Returning from a conference in Pittsburgh in late 2003, Dan had the idea



First gathering of all the shortlisted applicants, August 2005

of a memorial to the Ogoni Nine. He'd been re-reading Ken's book 'A Month and a Day' and, jet-lagged on the Piccadilly Line, this passage struck home:

'... this is why the Ogoni environment must matter more to me than to Shell International ensconced in its ornate offices on the banks of the Thames... But I cannot allow the company its smugness because its London comfort spells death to my Ogoni children and compatriots'.

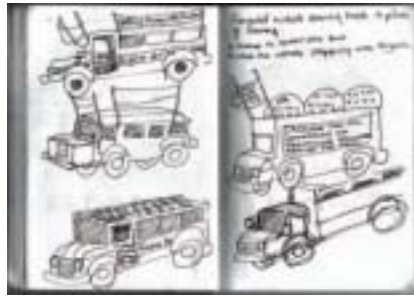
It suddenly seemed obvious – a memorial in London, a permanent living tribute to a vital struggle, announced on the 10th anniversary of the executions. The idea was canvassed, work began, and in March 2005, we held the official launch of the Living Memorial at City Hall, hosted by Ken Wiwa, Ken Livingstone and Anita Roddick. Supported by a strong and diverse coalition, the team today consists of five people covering the curatorial aspect, education, communications, campaigning and strategic relations.

John Berger states that 'the historic role of capitalism is to destroy history – to sever any link with the past and orientate all effort and imagination to that which is about to occur.' The oil corporations would like nothing better than to have Ken Saro-Wiwa's name erased from the collective memory, the debate to 'move on'. But, through the Living Memorial, and numerous associated initiatives, the reverse is happening – the powerful message of the Ogoni Nine is now reaching a new generation.

BARIBOR BERA  
SATURDAY DOBEE  
NORDU EAWO  
DANIEL GBOKOO  
BARINEM KIOBEL  
JOHN KPUINEN  
PAUL LEVURA  
FELIX NUATE  
KEN SARO-WIWA

London remembers you.

PLATFORM



Sokari Douglas Camp, Memorial Impression, 2005

### Sokari Douglas Camp: The business of oil

In memory of Ken Saro Wiwa I would like to make a sculptural object that conveys some of the tensions in the Delta.

Being a Kalabari woman from Rivers State, I am afraid for myself and my family who are living in the Delta Region. The cost of living in the Delta is very cheap and yet so much conflict thrives there. Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, is booming with densely packed people trading and making a living. Rivers State does not have enough public transport so people are resourceful and determined. There are small business people with private vehicles catering for the public, and families crowd onto recycled motorbikes, 'okada'. Vehicles of all descriptions burst with people and things. Exhilarating, but the atmosphere is very polluted because the fuel used is not treated and engines are old.

I am particularly drawn to transport; I see a parallel with Nigeria's development through the congestion and the traffic. Everything from cars held together with bad welds to brand new status symbol 4x4s driven by rich cult boys. I would like to bring this contemporary picture to London because it is through transport that Nigeria will change. The transportation of oil, goods and people.

My Living Memorial will be fabricated in the form of a large state bus going to a wake-keeping, overloaded like the lorries that carry goods across the deserts.

The vehicle would be made of stainless steel, inscribed with words from Ken Saro Wiwa's 1993 interview, cut in directly and also onto metal banners hung on the frame. The names of Ken's companions would be included. A spectacle created through the words and form. My structure would become a signature tune direct from Rivers State using Ken's words 'I accuse the oil companies of practicing genocide against the Ogoni people....'



Siraj Izhar, Memorial Impression, 2005

### Siraj Izhar

My works are active social processes, which are completed by the ongoing activity of others.

They are generators of activity like the former Public Life project [www.publiclife.org](http://www.publiclife.org).

My projects are always autonomous, sometime anonymous and usually take place over a 3-year cycle consisting of phases which emerge out of each other. The concept of the ecosystem is central to my working process in that it describes the way the works work in real living contexts. I do not produce exhibitions as such but engage with the city directly to produce autonomous working realities. Through the 1990s my work was produced through a charity called strike foundation that I set up to promote and produce work that operates purely in civil society without the mediation of art institutions. Many artists based at strike have become well known nationally.

*Strike* is essentially a consciousness strike which plays itself out in real theatres; theatres which are constructed and don't exist by themselves.

My project for the Living Memorial to Ken Saro-Wiwa is a continuation of this working philosophy around a creative picturing of the city based on a visual eco-system.

In this, every autonomous community is distinctive in its functioning and its ideology – its core belief systems. This is differentiated for different communities even in a large city like London. Mainstream society may be pictured as state-centred consumer 'monoculture' flowing in a uni-direction. Autonomous communities are more like concentric circles, creating complex eddies and ripples in the cultural landscape which collide and expand.



Emmanuel Jegede, *Memorial/Impression*, 2005

### Emmanuel Jegede

#### In the face of fire, petals of light – Ken Saro-Wiwa

My research into this project has increased my awareness and deeper knowledge of the secret global wars to control world oil reserves and to perpetuate human suffering. The 'GREAT GAME' of the past between Great Britain and Tsarist Russia has resurfaced into a fiercer struggle among industrial countries and multinational companies resulting in a battlefield of human tragedy. This new trend is now exported to oil producing countries like Congo, Venezuela, Sudan, Middle East, Caspian states and Nigeria. This has resulted in corruptive empathy, political oppression, military suppression, economic decline, gangsterism and civil war.

The slaughter and destruction of environmental existence in Ogoni and the Delta region of Nigeria by oil companies, security agents and the police runs parallel with the fear, torture and destruction imposed by rival gangs fighting for control of oil-bunkering and control of oil contracts using unemployed frustrated youths – a 'Mafia-style' organisation. The corrupt self-indulgent chiefs and politicians created a political philosophy of 'divide-rule-dictate-destroy' and was enough to destroy the spirit, souls and existence of the people. They fell between several destructive posts.

It is my aim that my artistic and poetic declaration will create a path and open the inner eyes of the world to see the beautiful world created by nature for us all. But we have turned it into a new order where some people continuously dance on gold while others are forced to dance on in mud, yet nature is kind to everyone.

I am placing my vision in the same perspective as people in Ogoni, the Delta region and the oppressed people of the world who have had their pride, dignity and existence stolen from them. Their journey is my journey, their faith is my faith, the waves that overshadowed their human expectation is beyond the word of a pen, beyond a sculpture, but still I create.



Emily Johns, *Memorial/Impression*, 2005

### Emily Johns

The heart of this proposal is that Ken Saro-Wiwa was a writer who used the printed word to change the world.

For the initial mobile form of the memorial I have designed nine cenotaph-like structures surmounted by a simple printing press, each set up with the printing block for a campaigning poster which anyone can take a pull from.

Each poster relates a different aspect of Ken Saro-Wiwa's life story. Quoting from his own writings, and incorporating images, each will examine an issue important to him, such as the role of transnational corporations and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Visitors may print as many posters as they wish to be displayed and used in their own homes and communities, as a resource to help shape our common future. Each poster leaves space for individual additions. For the activist, these are practical materials for grassroots campaigning, using Ken Saro-Wiwa's story to continue his struggle.

The imagery that is developing for the posters comes from nature spirits and political demons. There is a cast of characters growing in my imagination who walk from one image to another and for me this reflects the beautiful way in which one follows the people in Saro-Wiwa's books from one story to another. As I am working on the proposal I can feel the richness of the subject spilling beyond the nine images on the presses.

The permanent memorial incorporates the relief images into bronze slabs set into the pavement. And again visitors can make their own copies by 'brass rubbing'. These slabs are a link between the Ogoni tradition of fine bronzes and the British tradition of using bronze slabs for memorials, the London tourist tradition of brass rubbing.



George Knott / Frances Newman / Jeff Jackson, Memorial/Impression, 2005

## Frances Newman, Jeff Jackson, Knott Architects A forest of flowers

The Living Memorial takes an iconic symbol of the contemporary industrially developed landscape, the petrol station forecourt, and 'covers' it with African plants. This creates a direct and pertinent statement, not only about the life and death of Ken Saro-Wiwa but also about the ongoing need of humanity to address the necessity for globally sustainable energy policies in the face of seemingly intransigent multi-national corporations.

The memorial will be easy to interpret but it will also create the basis for a complex, cross-cultural, ongoing, multi-disciplinary, living memorial to Ken Saro-Wiwa. It can organically evolve into a memorial shaped by those with whom it engages and interacts and those who participate in its broadly defined development.

The 'mobile' memorial will be based in vacant petrol stations around London. Each site will be 'planted' with transportable beds that will camouflage and 'reclaim' the stations' urban structure, as if nature were calling the viewer to pay witness to the damage that unbridled petroleum consumption is wreaking on the planet generally and the Niger Delta specifically. This responds to Ken Saro-Wiwa's message that 'if people knew; they would do something about it'.

The open structure of the forecourt allows potential for posters, digital matrix 'messaging', garden landscaping, video, audio & web-based projects, and street theatre. The station building will allow for readings, displays, exhibitions and meetings. The structure can crucially facilitate many diverse and engaging on-site educational and art projects. We see this proposal not as our own, but as the development of a platform for others to participate in the project as it gathers momentum.

The overall possibilities of the project also contain the seed of a far more complex and exciting contemporary, permanently living, memorial to a man whose actions and words strove to make the world a better place to live.

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*Remember Saro-Wiwa* is partner to Africa 05

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Front cover: Sokari Douglas Camp © 2002  
Back cover: Ken Saro-Wiwa, speaking at Ogoni Day demonstration, Nigeria © Greenpeace/Lambon





remembering the past, shaping the future