

# SHIELD AND SPEAR

A Film By Petter Ringbom

**World Premiere  
2014 Hot Docs**

**European Premiere  
2014 Sheffield Doc/Fest**

**African Premiere  
2014 Durban International Film Festival**

**U.S. Premiere  
Film Society of Lincoln Center  
2014 Sound + Vision**

**TRT: 89min**

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## SHIELD AND SPEAR SYNOPSIS

### Logline

An artist paints a caricature of South African president Jacob Zuma that provokes a lawsuit, death threats and a massive street protest. Around this incident, SHIELD AND SPEAR explores a constellation of stories about identity, art, race, and freedom of expression in South Africa, twenty years into democracy.

### Synopsis

An artist paints a caricature of South African president Jacob Zuma that provokes a lawsuit, death threats and a massive street protest. An Afrikaans musician devises a stage character based on an archetypal African dictator to more freely comment on his community and his country. For a group of designers in Soweto, their fashion creations and style are manifestations of freedom. A photographer dedicates her life to documenting the LGBT community and exposing hate crimes that go unnoticed by the government and mainstream media. While one Johannesburg-based band is overtly political, another band makes a conscious decision to not deal with politics. SHIELD AND SPEAR explores a constellation of stories about art, music, identity, race, and freedom of expression in South Africa, twenty years into democracy.

The film documents what it's like to live and work as an artist in this new democracy. It's a story about what comes after the jubilation and celebration of a newly won freedom when you're faced with the real complexities of being a "Rainbow Nation." SHIELD AND SPEAR explores the areas where art and politics intersect. It's a film about creative identity in a place where issues of race, class and history are impossible to ignore.

In SHIELD AND SPEAR, music and art are a gateway through which to open dialogue about social and political issues of South Africa that resonate in countless other countries around the world. A theme of the film is how the apartheid system still affects younger artists, black or white, working in South Africa today. Given South Africa's history, it's only natural that issues of race, identity and cultural heritage impact the work of artists and affect the ways their work is perceived by an audience. Brett Murray, who is white, made a caricature of the black President Zuma and depicted him in what some would judge to be a stereotypical way – thus accusations of racism were inevitable. Indeed, the artists and musicians in this film tackle stereotypes in various ways; some use humor or shock to play with their racial identity; some revolt against their heritage; while others embrace and celebrate it.

SHIELD AND SPEAR features the contemporary South African artists and musicians; Brett Murray, BLK JKS, Zanele Muholi, Gazelle, The Brother Moves On, Yolanda Fyrus, Fokofpolisiekar, and The Smarteez. With appearances by Ferial Haffajee, DJ Invizible, Motel Mari, Lloyd Gedye, Milisuthando Bongela, Iman Rappetti, and Charl Blignaut.

*"A rebuilding process needs to take place and this country wants to act, to rest of the world, like we're done rebuilding when we got holes in our ceilings."*

– Siyabonga Mthembu, *The Brother Moves On*

## SHIELD AND SPEAR PRESS COVERAGE

### **The Hollywood Reporter**

“Introducing outsiders to a creative scene seemingly far more vibrant than most of us realized, Petter Ringbom’s Shield and Spear finds post-Apartheid South Africa brimming with art, music and activism despite widespread disappointment with those leading its government.”

– John DeFore

### **NOW Magazine**

“Ringbom finds fascinating subjects, among them a culture-bridging Afrikaans musician, a lesbian activist photographer and a politically motivated visual artist, each of whom deserves his or her own film.” (4 of 5 N’s)

– Julia LeConte

### **New York Post**

“Hipsters flock to Lincoln Center for Shield and Spear.”

– Page Six Team

### **Nonfics**

“10 Best Music Documentaries of 2014.”

– Andy Markowitz

### **Unseen Films**

“The film is a wonderfully alive portrait of various artists, musicians and activists in South Africa. who are working to keep the country free.”

– Steve Kopian

### **Toronto Film Scene**

“The art, photography, music, and fashion represented in the film is incredible — more so when we’re shown the passion, motive and risk behind it.”

– Nadya Domingo

### **OkayAfrica**

“Ringbom has allowed his accomplished cinematography to tell one story, leaving the rest up to the earnest dialogue of his subjects.”

– Rob Scher

### **Twitch Film**

“He’s got a fascinating group of interview subjects here and the handling of the content looks absolutely top notch.”

– Todd Brown

### **MusicFilmWeb**

“Apartheid is dead and South Africa is democratic. But how truly free is it?”

– Andy Markowitz

**'SHIELD AND SPEAR' EXAMINES POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA THROUGH ITS EXUBERANT,  
PROVOCATIVE AND SOMETIMES FRACTIOUS ARTS COMMUNITY**

In May 2012, a six-foot-tall painting ignited a firestorm of controversy in South Africa when the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg mounted an exhibit of artist Brett Murray's politically inspired work. The show included "The Spear," a cheeky portrait of scandal-plagued South African president Jacob Zuma, which prompted a landmark lawsuit, death threats against the artist and massive street protests.

The passionate debate surrounding the painting inspired filmmaker Petter Ringbom to explore South Africa's vibrant, exuberant and sometimes fractious community of artists in his feature-length documentary. Coming exactly 20 years after the country's historic first democratic elections in 1994, the film explores a constellation of stories about art, music, identity, race, and freedom of expression in South Africa by examining the lives and work of a diverse group of artists.

From bustling international metropolises like Capetown and Johannesburg to the traditional townships of Soweto and Khayelitsha, Ringbom observes what it means to be an artist in a fledgling democracy and finds the indomitable creative urge burning brightly. In cafes, clubs and galleries, and at all levels of society, politically charged words and imagery fill the rooms and the streets of South Africa, and spill over onto the international stage.

"Whenever we play music, whenever we tour the world, being South African artists, the politics of South Africa are there by default," says Mpumi Mcata of BLK JKS, the South African band that performed at the opening ceremony of the 2010 World Cup alongside Alicia Keys and Black Eyed Peas. "Whether we are talking about it or not, we are addressing it simply by being."

In an innately conservative country that still bears the scars of almost a half-century of apartheid, the brutal state-sponsored system of racial segregation, Ringbom discovers that everyone—black, white or colored, Afrikaans or English speaker, affluent or poor—is struggling to find their place in the new South Africa.

Ringbom interviews a wide array of visual artists, designers and musicians, starting with Murray, whose provocative portrait launched the filmmaker's odyssey. A renowned social satirist, Murray, who is white, has addressed issues of race and politics in his work since the early 1980s. His work is collected by art lovers worldwide, including, recently, rapper and hip hop impresario P. Diddy. Murray recounts with some disbelief the furor that his exhibition created as the dominant political party, the African National Congress, sued to have the painting removed from the show, and others called for burning the painting and even publicly stoning the artist.

The irreverent picture of a politician literally caught with his pants down became a symbol of the deep divisions that remain in the country's cultural landscape. In his film, Ringbom highlights the volatile fault lines that still zigzag across boundaries of race, economics, gender, class and sexual orientation while also celebrating the joy of the creative life in a "Rainbow Nation."

Ringbom's subjects have transformed their hard-fought freedoms into highly personal, nuanced and complex commentary that they hope will alter the future of their young democracy. Many are involved in activism that aims to bring about social and political change in big and small ways.

"We didn't get here because someone was good to us," says Siyabonga Mthembu, the charismatic front man of The Brother Moves On, a performance art ensemble and band based in

Johannesburg. “We got here because we fought for something. That’s what Mandela kept trying to say. His whole thing that he was stressing was that you need to take ownership.”

The Smarteez, a fashion design collective based in Soweto, sponsors joyful community-oriented events like a flash mob fashion show featuring models recruited from the street, as well as a free daily school program in an Internet café owned by the group’s stylist Teekay Makwale. Without any outside funding or government assistance, they provide disadvantaged youngsters help with basics like reading, math and English, as well as computer literacy skills.

In the vast Khayelitsha township outside of Cape Town, Yolanda Fyrus hopes to inspire local youth with her success as a singer and dancer, performing with musicians as diverse as Gazelle, a 10th generation white South African who adopts a stage persona based on an archetypal African dictator, and Spoek Mathambo, an internationally known artist whose music blends hip hop and the uniquely South African genre of quaito.

As Fyrus gazes out over the sprawling township, she explains her decision to stay in the crowded shacks outside Cape Town. “Khyelitsha is the best place for me. I want the teenagers who are growing up to understand that they can also do what I have done. I want to be a role model for them.”

Ringbom also profiles photographer and activist Zanele Muholi, whose art documents the lives of the LGBT community in South Africa, where they are often ostracized and live in constant danger of violence. Her work has been exhibited in Europe and North America as well as in Africa. In 2013, Muholi won the Index Freedom of Expression Award for Arts, an honor for which the Russian collective, Pussy Riot, were also nominated.

“I do what I do to present a visual history that speaks to us and to inform generations to come,” she says, adding, “I’d be lying to you if I said I was just taking photographs for fun. Photography is not a hobby to me. Photography is about politics. Whatever I am producing is to make sure that I push the political agenda. I’m paving the way for the next person who comes after me.”

In addition to creating sensitive portraits of gay and transgendered men and women, she has founded Inkanyiso (“one who brings illumination”), an organization dedicated to exposing the multitude of hate crimes against women and the LGBT community that are ignored by the government and mainstream media. “We document our history and provide a platform for LGBT individuals to tell their stories without being judged,” Muholi says.

As singer and storyteller Mthembu observes, “The seeds are under the ground and eventually they sprout if there’s enough sunshine and light. We are trying to be that kind of light. I think we have the human capacity [in] our culture to build something amazing.”

Interviewed in SHIELD AND SPEAR are some of contemporary South Africa’s most innovative artists, designers and musicians including Brett Murray, photographer Zanele Muholi, musicians BLK JKS, Gazelle, The Brother Moves On, Yolanda Fyrus, Fokopolisiekar and design collective the Smarteez, with appearances by Ferial Haffajee, DJ Invizable, Motèl Mari and more.

Filmmaker Petter Ringbom is a New York-based director of documentary and narrative films. His debut feature documentary, *The Russian Winter*, a film about American musician John Forté, premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2012 and screened at IDFA, Moscow International Film Festival and Gothenburg International Film Festival. His short film, *May Fly*, premiered at Stockholm International Film Festival and screened at festivals around the world. Ringbom’s video

collaboration with the artist Karl Haendel, *Questions for My Father*, has been shown at Harris Lieberman Gallery, Susanne Vielmetter Projects, Utah Museum of Contemporary Arts, and Wexner Center for the Arts. *Questions for My Father* was selected for the Art Video program at Art Basel Miami in 2012. He was a Film Independent Fast Track Fellow for 2013.

Filmmaker Alysa Nahmias is founder and executive director of Ajna Films. *Unfinished Spaces*, her feature directing debut, won a 2012 Independent Spirit Award, numerous film festival prizes, and was selected for Sundance's Film Forward. Her producing credits also include *Afternoon of a Faun: Tanaquil Le Clercq* (dir. Nancy Buirski, New York Film Festival 2013, Berlinale 2014) and *The Listening Archive* (dir. Laura Foxman, 2012). Her work has been shown at festivals and competitions worldwide, including the Venice Biennale, the Los Angeles Film Festival, the Palm Springs Int'l Film Festival, the Miami International Film Festival, and many others.

Filmmaker Marquise Stillwell is the founder of Openbox, a design consultancy that provides talent and resources for ambitious and innovative ventures. Marquise has previously collaborated with director Petter Ringbom on three short films and was featured in Ringbom's short film, *Questions for My Father*. Marquise is an advisor to the filmmaker Paul Devlin (*SlamNation*, *Power Trip*, *Blast!*) and has strategized for the poet Taylor Mali (featured in the film *SlamNation*). He has contributed to various programs at the Joyce Theater, the New Museum, and MCA Denver. He currently sits on the board of the Andrew Goodman Foundation and the Lowline Underground Park.

SHIELD AND SPEAR is directed, written and shot by Petter Ringbom. Executive producers are Marquise Stillwell and Christophe Charlier. Producers are Alysa Nahmias and Ringbom. The film is edited by Ringbom.

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## SHIELD AND SPEAR DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In March 2013, I went to the Mayibuye Archives outside of Cape Town with the South African artist Brett Murray to locate some of his anti-apartheid work from the eighties. While there, Brett showed me a collection of Swedish stickers from that era. The stickers were calling for boycotts against companies doing business with the apartheid regime. I realized then why I was compelled to make this film, which I had begun shooting six months earlier.

I grew up in Sweden during the last two decades of South Africa's apartheid era. Perhaps more than any other nation outside of Africa, Sweden was deeply involved in the anti-apartheid struggle. I remember the boycotts, the pins, the posters, and sitting on my dad's shoulders at rallies. From an outsider's point of view, the struggle had a mythic quality to it that I, along with countless others around the world, was drawn to. There seemed to be a such a clear distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, black and white. When apartheid was over and Mandela was elected president, the struggle had a perfect storybook ending. The problems were solved and the "rainbow nation" could live happily ever after.

I think we all wanted the story to end there. But, if you've kept up with news coming out of South Africa during the last twenty years, it's clear how incredibly complicated it is to turn a nation that has endured centuries of oppression into a flourishing democracy. It's a long, messy, fascinating, frustrating, and at times inspiring process. I'm exploring a slice of that in SHIELD AND SPEAR.

When I first approached Brett Murray about being in the film, he said no. At that point, he had not talked to anyone about the events around his scandalous painting "The Spear." He had declined interview requests from many of the world's largest news organizations, and he was still in shock over what transpired. Only days after he said no, however, he changed his mind and agreed to be in the film. I believe part of the reason he ended up trusting me is my own background in the arts. I think he realized I wasn't "out to get him." Rather, he sensed my genuine curiosity about his art and his country.

I've spent most of my life in the art world, in various capacities. My dad was an artist and the dean of an art school; I went to art school myself, and as a filmmaker I've continuously collaborated with artists and musicians. My previous films, *The Russian Winter* and *Questions for My Father*, are good examples of that.

I feel comfortable around artists, and I think they're generally good subjects because of their candor and emotional wiring. They often have an ability to "come across" on camera, and that's certainly true with the subjects in SHIELD AND SPEAR. What I've always found unfortunate about the fine arts world, however, is that it can be very hard for the outside world to engage with. So, I find it incredibly invigorating when art breaks out of the white boxes of galleries and museums and affects everyday life, as with Brett Murray's "The Spear," Zanele Muholi's art activism, or even the fashion of The Smarteez. These moments are worth exploring in a film.

- Petter Ringbom

## SHIELD AND SPEAR PRODUCTION NOTES

### Style

In SHIELD AND SPEAR, I combine interviews with vérité style filmmaking. At times the interviews almost become like voice over for the observational footage. I worked alone in the field for most of the production. This was partly by necessity and partly by design. I gravitate towards documentaries where you can sense the presence of the filmmaker behind the camera. I wanted to try an approach where the subjects address the camera directly, and that only works if there's no one else around for the subjects to address. So, I directed, shot, and captured the sound myself. For the interviews I would set up two cameras, and sit behind the main one while asking questions.

The film was shot using two Canon 5D cameras with Rokinon cine lenses.

### Production

Production took place between October 2012 and September 2013. I made three trips to South Africa, each lasting about a month. I shot primarily in and around Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Editing took a year and a half, starting right after my first trip to South Africa, and ending just weeks before our premiere at Hot Docs.

Beyond being instrumental in making this film happen as an executive producer, Marquise Stillwell took a very hands-on approach to his job. He joined me for two of the trips to South Africa for moral and creative support, and to help make the connections needed as foreigners making a film in a different country.

### The Artists

I consider the artists in SHIELD AND SPEAR as my collaborators in the truest sense of the word. Most of them are well established in their fields and didn't need me to make this film about them. The generosity and openness they've shown me is something that I've never experienced before, and doubt I'll ever experience with a film again. They welcomed me into their lives, and let me shoot in their communities, homes and studios. We've shared countless meals, drinks, and stories. They helped me with ideas, connections, assets, and even security during the making of this film.



## SHIELD AND SPEAR SUBJECTS' BIOS

### **Brett Murray**

Referred to by critic Brenda Atkinson as “the dark prince of South African pop (art)”, Murray is one of the country’s most popular artists, often using easily recognizable media images with the addition of a subversive and bitterly funny twist. In 2012, Murray exhibited a painting at the Goodman Gallery of President Jacob Zuma with his genitals exposed. The African National Congress announced its intention to sue him for defamation for the painting and to force the gallery to remove it from exhibition, its website, and printed materials. Many public figures expressed outrage at the painting, and one church even called for Murray to be “stoned to death.”

### **Mpumi Mcata, BLK JKS & Motèl Mari**

Mpumi Mcata plays guitar in the Johannesburg based bands BLK JKS and Motèl Mari. The BLK JKS have become one of the most recognized bands out of South Africa in recent years. They performed at the opening ceremony of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa alongside Alicia Keys and Black Eyed Peas. The BLK JKS has never claimed to be a political band, but media and audience alike, can’t help to view them as such.

### **Zanele Muholi**

Zanele Muholi is a photographer and activist who documents the LGBT community and together with her organization Inkanyiso, she exposes hate crimes that are ignored by the government and mainstream media. The minister of Arts and Culture, Lulu Xingwana walked out of an exhibition that featured Muholi’s photography and publicly called it immoral, offensive, and going against nation-building. Zanele was the 2013 recipient of the Index Award, a freedom of expression award described as “an extraordinary celebration of the courageous and determined individuals around the world who have stood up for free expression, often at great personal risk.”

### **Xander Ferreira, Gazelle**

Hailing from a small town near the border of Mozambique, Xander Ferreira has devised a stage character based on archetypal African dictator to more freely comment on his conservative Afrikaner community and his country.

### **The Smarteez**

The Smarteez is design collective based in Soweto that has garnered world wide recognition for their style and fashion creations. The core members are Thabo Tsatsinyane, Floyd Avenue, Sibuh Sithole and Teekay Makwale. Fed up with the quality of education in their community, they also run a free, daily after school program for kids.

### **Siyabonga Mthembu, The Brother Moves On**

Siyabonga Mthembu is the charismatic and openly political frontman of, what many have dubbed as, the next big band coming out of South Africa – The Brother Moves On. The Mail & Guardian describes them as “an experimental collective that mixes rock, Xhosa funk, jazz, folk, electronic, dance and spoken word for the post-apartheid age.”

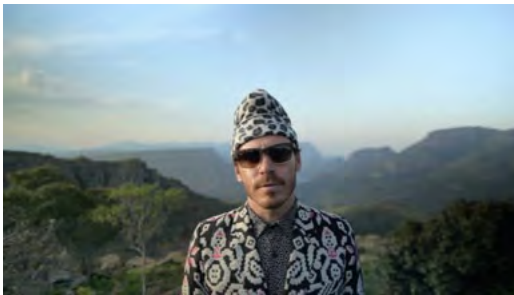
## SHIELD AND SPEAR SUBJECTS' BIOS (CONT'D)

### Yolanda Fyrus

Yolanda is a singer and dancer who performs with Gazelle and Spoek Mathambo. She lives in the vast Khayelitsha township outside of Cape Town and is in the process of launching her career as a performer along with producer Aviwe Koti.

### Fokofpolisiekar

One of the most popular bands in South Africa, Fokofpolisiekar (Fuckoffpolicecar) has been embroiled in controversy since its inception. Much outrage has been expressed by the conservative Afrikaans community over the use of allegedly “anti-religious” lyrics in many of the band’s songs.



### Pictured clockwise from top left:

Xander Ferreira, aka Gazelle, in the Drakensburg mountains.  
Mpumi Mcata of BLK JKS in his livingroom in Johannesburg.  
Floyd Avenue of the Smarteez in his studio in Soweto.  
A portrait by Zanele Muholi from the Faces and Phases series.  
Brett Murray's "The Spear."  
The Brother Moves On rehearsing in Melville, Johannesburg.

## SHIELD AND SPEAR FILMMAKER BIOS

### **Petter Ringbom, Director, Producer & Cinematographer**

Petter Ringbom is a New York-based director of documentary and narrative films. His debut feature documentary *The Russian Winter*, a film about American musician John Forté, premiered at Tribeca Film Festival in 2012 and screened at IDFA, Moscow Int'l Film Festival, and Gothenburg Int'l Film Festival. His short film *May Fly* premiered at Stockholm Int'l Film Festival and screened at festivals around the world. Petter's video collaboration with the artist Karl Haendel, *Questions for My Father*, has been shown at Harris Lieberman Gallery, Susanne Vielmetter Projects, Utah Museum of Contemporary Arts, and Wexner Center for the Arts. *Questions for My Father* was selected for the Art Video program at Art Basel Miami in 2012. After studying at the Cooper Union School of Art in New York, Petter partnered in the creative agency Flat, where he served as an art director for clients like MoMA, Red Cross and ESPN. He has taught at Parsons School of Design and New York University and served on the board of the American Institute of Graphic Arts. Petter is a Film Independent Fast Track Fellow for 2013.

### **Alysa Nahmias, Producer**

Alysa Nahmias is founder and executive director of Ajna Films. *Unfinished Spaces*, her feature directing debut, won a 2012 Independent Spirit Award, numerous film festival prizes, and was selected for Sundance's Film Forward. Her producing credits also include *Afternoon of a Faun: Tanaquil Le Clercq* (dir. Nancy Buirski, New York Film Festival 2013, Berlinale 2014) and *The Listening Archive* (dir. Laura Foxman, 2012). Her work has been shown at festivals and competitions worldwide, including the Venice Biennale, the Los Angeles Film Festival, the Palm Springs Int'l Film Festival, the Miami International Film Festival, and many others.

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**SHIELD AND SPEAR  
CREDITS**

AN OPENBOX PRODUCTION

SHIELD AND SPEAR

DIRECTOR, CINEMATOGRAPHER & WRITER

Petter Ringbom

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Marquise Stillwell

Christophe Charlier

PRODUCERS

Alysa Nahmias

Petter Ringbom

EDITOR

Petter Ringbom

MUSIC

Xander Ferreira

João Orecchia

Tshepang Ramoba

Mpumi Mcata

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Cnristopher Koch

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Steven Dubin

Kim Miller

Pam Allara

Emma Bedford