

Turtle 1

Building a Car in Africa

Melle Smets
Joost van Onna

Exhibition, Book





Melle Smets (1975)

is a researcher, artist and critic, specializing in issues related to public space. He examines the relationship between man and his environment. His previous projects include: *Radio Homo Ludens*, *Highway Stories* and *P-Travel*.

Joost van Onna (1976)

studied social psychology and criminology. He is fascinated by the functioning and strength of informal self-regulating (economic) systems. Onna is currently working on his PhD thesis about criminal development and factors contributing to (non-) compliance laws.

Exhibition Installation with photographs, drawings, videos and 3D objects.

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Paradox documentary projects

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Turtle 1

Turtle 1 is not the product of a multinational company which develops software to hide its true emissions. Nor was it designed by lifestyle gurus, its futuristic looks intended to seduce customers, who don't even know how to change a tyre.

The majority of the world lives in a Do-It-Yourself environment. Intrigued by the functioning of these communal spaces, artist Melle Smets and sociologist Joost van Onna travelled to Suame Magazine (Ghana) where cars are disassembled and their parts traded. They collaborated with local artisans and workshops to create a truly African car in only 12 weeks: *Turtle 1*. The design grew out of analysis of the local circumstances, as well as the accessible infrastructure. The concept was based on flexibility: the car was constructed with parts from different brands that happened to be available.

Turtle 1 became the first Ghanaian car to be exported to the West. It toured motor shows, where it flanked the fully electric Tesla S. Early in 2015 the African vehicle was shipped back. Yet, expectations turned out to have diversified: whereas Smets and Van Onna saw potential in a low-tech small production line, partner SMIDO was longing for a large robotised manufacturing plant. The orange dream car thereby became another tragic example of African-European misunderstandings.