

HIS BLISSFUL WORLD

**Illustrator Filipe Jardim on
Hermès, Louis Vuitton,
and global adventure with
his brush and board**

Illustrations & Photography by Filipe Jardim

The illustrator Filipe Jardim, whose work is sought after by dozens of luxury fashion brands around the world, is in Rio de Janeiro having lunch in a pretentiously cool restaurant, heavily adorned with religious decorations, called Da Graça. Bottles of cachaça – one of the most popular alcoholic drinks in Brazil – are dappled among images of saints and *Senhor do Bonfim* ribbons, hailing the Salvador church.

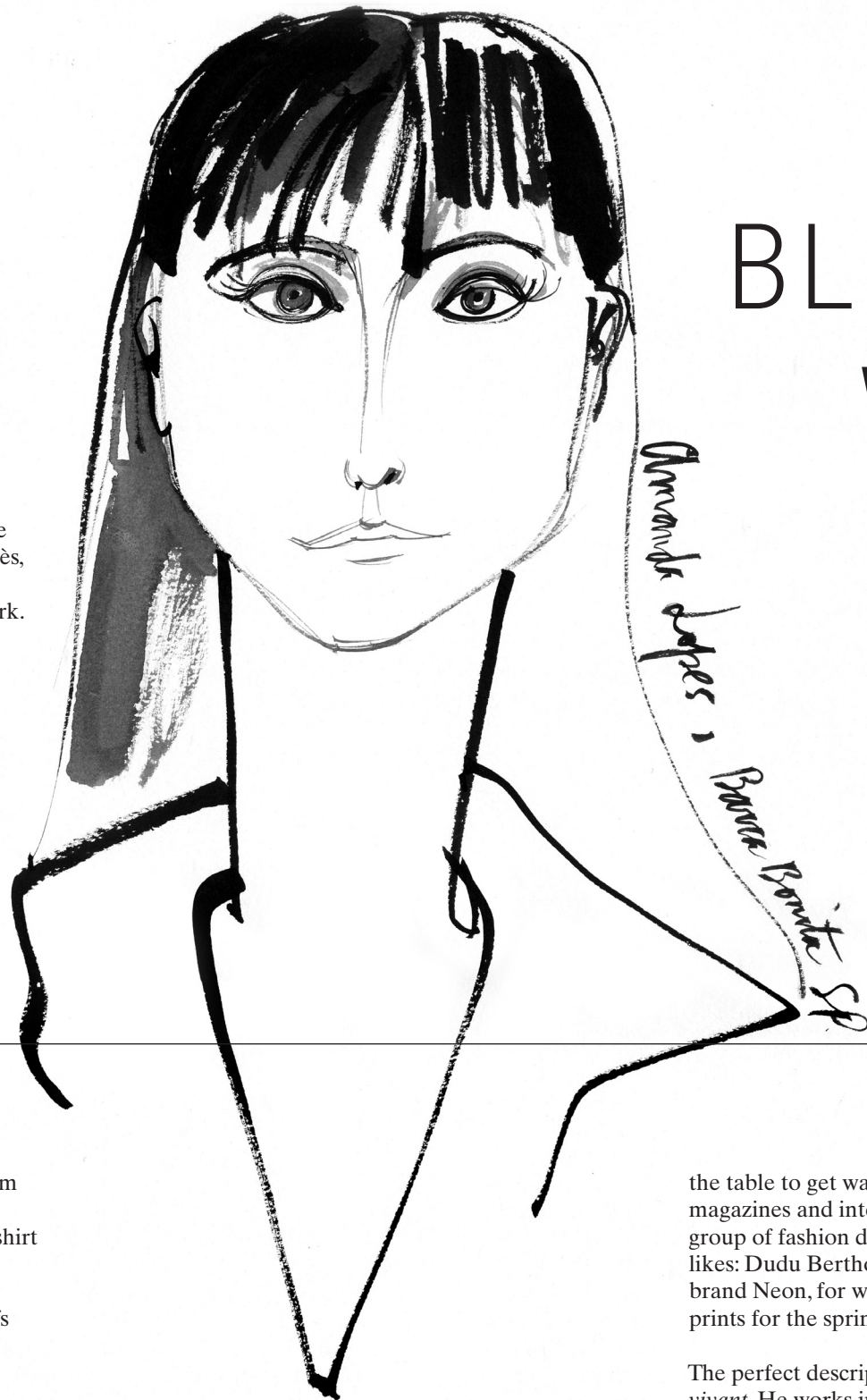
At the table is an architect, two designers and Filipe himself. Despite having worked for major brands such as Louis Vuitton and magazines such as The New Yorker, Filipe Jardim hasn't changed much over the years. He wears havaiana flip flops and speaks very much at will. Little vexes him and he doesn't dress in an over-the-top way, or one full of mannerisms. He is, essentially, a low profile figure, he could be just any passer-by in the street. Those around the table are having a relaxed chat. Then Filipe pulls a moleskin book out of his bag and starts to draw them all. Some days later, those same people receive a card made by him through their letterboxes. The item is a treasure, a micro-piece of art ready for framing.

He explains: "Seduction plays a big part in what I do and the way I relate to the world. We're always seducing people, be they friends, bosses, girlfriends or boyfriends, whoever you like. I don't send anything by email; sending a card by post is a form of seduction. When you receive a card through your letterbox, made by someone who has spent time designing it, it's a truly wonderful sensation."

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After that moment, Filipe's name began to pop up in magazines all over the world. One minute he'd be designing for the catalogue of accessories for Hermès, the next he'd be illustrating the campaign for the opening of Tiffanys & Co on Wall Street in New York.



Filipe Jardim is 40 years old, but you might guess him to be at the most mid-30s. His typical look is retro glasses (with two gems on each side), a Bermuda t-shirt and those omnipresent Havaiana flip flops. Tanned, slender and always ready to laugh, his light wavy chestnut hair is always blonder at the tips as he surfs almost every day when in Rio, or indeed any other city in which he can jump into the sea, the sun and saltwater bleaching his hair.

“I don’t go by any rule in my using flip flops. I don’t do style. I’m a true carioca, but Europeans sometimes become fascinated with this lifestyle, thinking it to be exotic, but to me it’s normal. When I turned up at Hermès for the first time, my character had preceded me. I was the tanned one that spent my life going around the world and who liked to design. So my reputation was sorted as this is indeed what I am: I live in Rio, travel the world and catch waves”.

He’s already lived in Lisbon, Geneva, and until last year was living in Paris. Today he’s back in Rio, in a spectacular apartment. It’s situated extravagantly in the middle of the forest, in one of the highest and most rustic points of the city. There from afar the view is magnificent, all the way to the beach of Barra. Out back aside lush grass there’s a pool in the shape of a jelly bean, embellished with large rocks and tropical plants. In one of his rooms that he uses as his office there are millions of postcards that he’s received from friends won over from all the places he’s been to.

Filipe hates the fact that his life is labelled as glamorous. “What is glamour? Everything that I live is real, it happens naturally. It *would* be glamour if I were to live in the world of fashion, in these parties, cocktails, etc. ‘Glamour’ is a derogatory word which incites futility. To go to Madagascar is not glamorous. It could be something out of the ordinary, it could be privileged, but it’s not glamorous.”

Upon his return to Rio pre-carnival 2008, exactly two years after the lunch at Da Graça, I meet with Filipe for this interview. Sat around a table covered in fashion magazines in the office of Tonho (a.k.a. Quinta-feira), conceptual designer and friend of Filipe, we begin to chat. Sat on the other side of the room is Kali, a stunning stylist from São Paulo, with the makeup of a model and long black hair contrasting her white skin.

During the interview, he is focused on what he responds, but if you don’t get to the point quickly he tires, gets up and starts to do any one of an array of other activities not necessarily related to what’s being discussed. He’s hyperactive, but friendly and thoughtful. He grabs his Leica camera to capture the chat, leaves

the table to get water, and then a biscuit. He reads magazines and interrupts to share an article about a group of fashion designers from São Paulo that he likes: Dudu Bertholini and Rita Comparato of the brand Neon, for which he has already worked creating prints for the spring/summer collection of 2007.

The perfect description of Filipe is one of the *bon vivant*. He works in an extremely professional way, but beyond finishing what he has to, he lives for pleasure. And without guilt. Even if he’s not living in Rio de Janeiro, he makes sure he spends carnival here. He’s always accompanied by a beautiful woman – and they are always giving him all of their attention, or falling in love with him. In 2007 he spent six months travelling the world. Naturally, a lot of his travel is for work, but he’s forever in Bali, the Galapagos islands, or French Polynesia, just to be on the beach and ride waves.

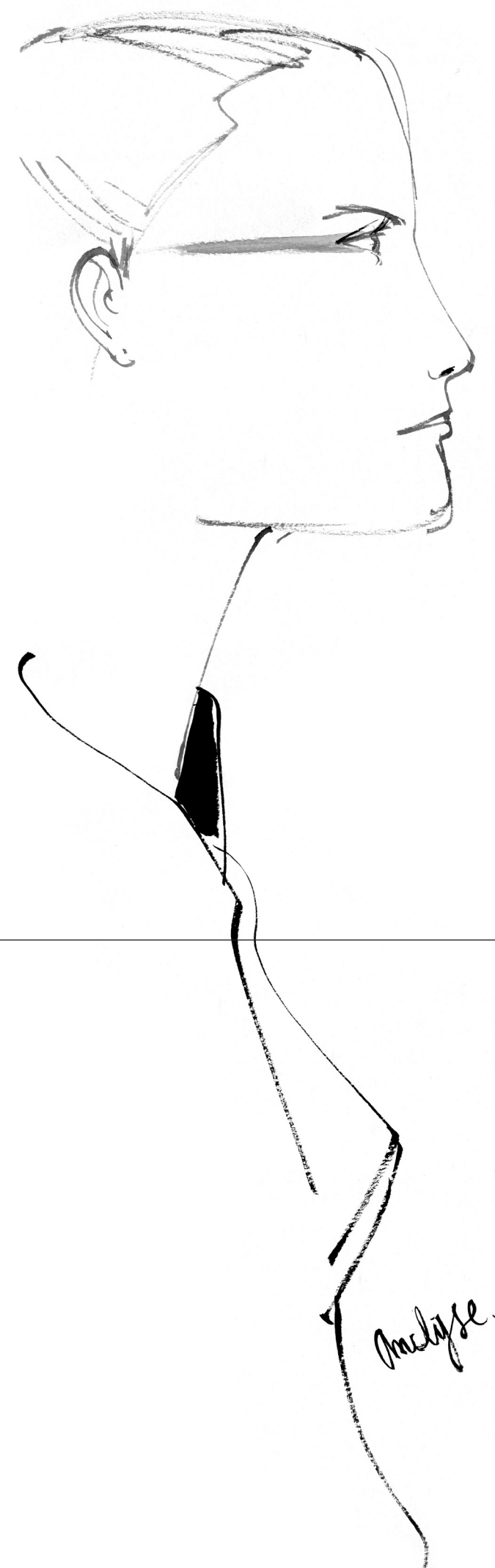
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To Europeans, he is the personification of eccentricity. But for sure, all this is an intrinsic part of his personality. “Once I had a meeting at the French Vogue and myself and Carol (one of his friends) were joking about posing as the “exotic” for the camera. We pretended that she was my extravagant assistant and we put on everything that we had that could represent clichés of the Brazilian world. We took some photos in which I was holding a packet of Globo biscuits”, told Filipe laughing all along.

In some respects, the more you infer his character, the more he makes the most of his fame. In the carnival of 2007, during one of the street processions, he answered a call on his mobile. It was Tiffanys & Co, calling to make a proposal. They wanted to know if he would do the illustrations for the inauguration of the shop in New York. Samba was playing really loud and he said to the person at the other end that he couldn’t talk at that moment because it was Carnival.

Filipe loves fooling around, but he knows how to appreciate that which he has achieved. “The sensation of getting to go to the French Vogue, one of the most important in the world, is really cool. But for such things to happen, you’ve gotta work hard for it. Your telephone doesn’t ring if you don’t move yourself”.

In the middle of the interview he begins putting the world to rights and theorising the image of Brazil and of the carioca (those born in Rio). “Our image is complete cliché. This is what we lived yesterday, the day before”, he says, referring to the carnival. “Rio de Janeiro is a mythical city of South America, in the same way that New York is a mythical city of North America. When you think of Latin America you don’t think of Quito, Buenos Aires or Bogotá. You think of Rio. It has a very strong image”.

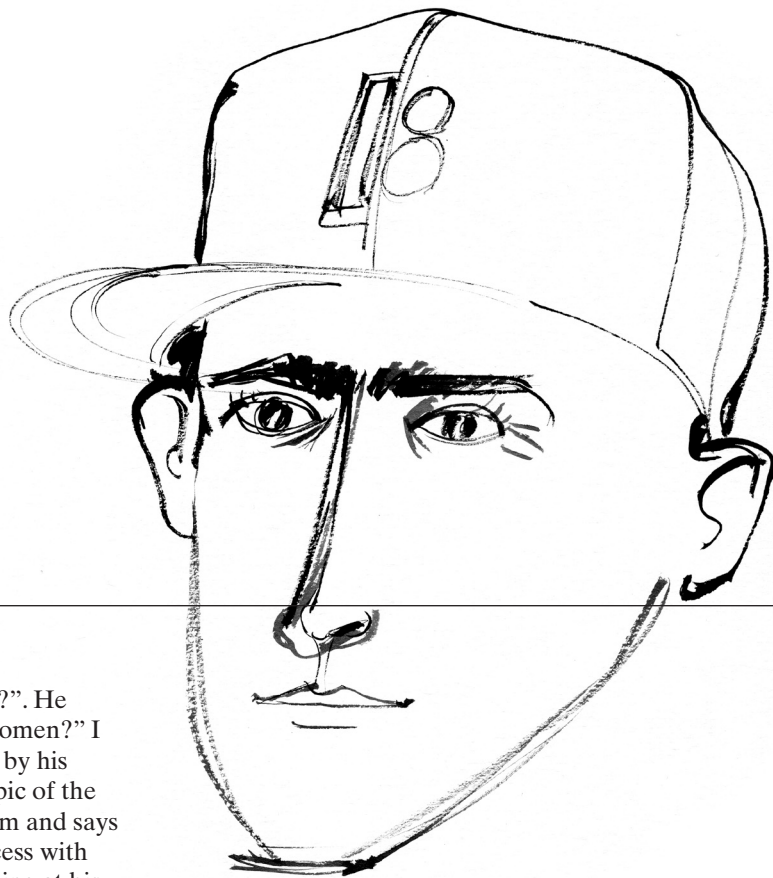


But for what reason do so many people look to Brazil with so much curiosity, I ask. “Rio always had an attractive history. We had cultural movements that we inspired, with Bossa Nova, Tropicália, samba. Numerous individuals of the intellectual world already came to live in Rio. Albert Camus fell in love with the city. And Rio continues to bear this sophisticated quality which attracts the fashion editors. We don’t want to be anglo-saxon. We want to be something else. This gives us authority and is the great aspect of this city. Brazil is seen a charismatic country by the whole world. The English and the French conquered the world with their mighty wars. Brazil conquers people through its charisma”.

“This is all because of the people that constructed the place. It was an imperial city; a European royal family moved here in a time when royal families still represented and held power. It was the only city in history to welcome its colonising king. And the high nobility was blended with the slaves. It’s all a cliché, but it’s real”.

He is spontaneous, but it's not this alone which has made him one of the most sought after illustrators in the world of fashion. Many of his steps have been a mixture of luck with elaborate strategies. You could say that he is forever creating his own *network*. The opportunity of work with Hermès, for example, almost came out of nowhere. With the chance in his hands though, he chased it and made things happen.

“I was in Madagascar on holiday, surfing in the middle of nowhere, staying at a really simple little place, primitive. In the bar there was this French family and by chance we got into conversation. The mother worked in fashion and her daughter, Felicie, at Hermès. A design of mine had already been published in *The New Yorker* for a perfume of the brand, but obviously we weren't chatting about work, we talked about life. This natural empathy is what is cool. But I don't do things in a non-genuine way. It was later on that I travelled to Bali and sent a card to Felicie with a drawing of her”.



During the interview I ask: “and the women?”. He replies: “what do you want to know about women?” I say that I want to know if they are attracted by his *bon vivant* style. He sidesteps: “is this the topic of the interview?” Of course, I say. But he holds firm and says that “it's a little ridiculous to talk about success with the ladies. Write that I'm gay,” he says, laughing at his own joke, and then after a minute amends, revealing only part of his secret: “in my life nothing is necessarily strictly professional. Everything gets mixed together and it's obvious that seduction plays a part in the game.” In Filipe's house, the shelves of his office, the bathroom and on the fridge door, there are no end of photos of his ‘muses’. Some were sent to him by those themselves in the picture, others were taken by him. Provocative and seductive messages and notes comprise this vast personal memoir. But Filipe is adored not just by women. He goes down extraordinarily well with gays too. They love Filipe (and when this is said so, it is slurred with slow and prolonged vowels: *Luuurve*), He's unphased, and quite enjoys this attention. It all sounds spontaneous. The day after the interview, he accompanied a group of stylists from São Paulo to a club located between the two most notoriously gay spots of Rio, on the street *Farne de Amoedo*. In the party, with the suggestive name of *69*, he spoiled his companions, dancing until the very end and taking photos. This aside, his preferences are well-defined: Filipe likes women.

Felicie works in public relations for the French company and became a good friend of Filipe following their casual acquaintance. “When I was returning from Indonesia, after six months travelling, I pit-stopped in Paris, gave her a call and she said “come on by”. I said that I wouldn't go as I was all scruffy with big hair, in need of a shave, with only my clothes from my travels. But she insisted we went for lunch. I passed by Hermès and met the guys from her department. Hermès is one of the chicest fashion houses in the world. It's anti-glamour. Real smart. They do fashion, not glamour. And they didn't seem bothered about my appearance. After lunch we went to her parents' house and I became friends of the family. But never, never did I or do I ask anything of anybody. I never said things such as ‘hey, you guys don't wanna contract me to do some illustrations do you?’”.

After the encounter in Paris, Felicie showed Filipe's work to the director of art. His portfolio was approved and he was invited to do the catalogues of accessories for the brand, which is edited twice a year. The work was so well received by the fashion house that he was summoned soon after to work on the window displays of Hermès in the UK.

The work he'd already done for Louis Vuitton was the fruit of his willingness to have a go. He read in *Vogue* that Louis Vuitton was choosing one of the cities of

the world to launch the product ‘*carnet de voyage*’, an illustrated notebook with some blank pages for the traveller to note things down about the city they're visiting. Being carioca, naturally he'd already designed reams of landscapes of Rio in old sketchbooks. So he decided to gather them all together and send them to the art director at Louis Vuitton to see what would happen. Rio de Janeiro hadn't yet been chosen as

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a capital to launch the *carnet*, but already with the almost-finished article up its sleeve, the city won ground with the company and was selected, leaving behind the competing cities.

“I don't think of myself as an artist. I'm not conceptual. I don't like the idea of the artist conceptualising their ideas, having to explain everything, to have a curator on their backs. I consider this academia idiotic. The way these artists occupy the market is regimented and dull. This idea that they like to propose that the artist is a free agent, that the market embraces them, this is a lie. This doesn't happen in real life. You have to get your name out there. The route is extremely conservative. I prefer people to adopt a totally commercial position rather than pretending, as some artists do, that they can create freely, without pressure or being tied down. The lobbying of such ‘free’ artists is detrimental and few have any more freedom than the guy that is working

for the market”.

In the middle of the interview, after his conclusions about the market, Filipe gets up again. He's hungry. “Let's go get a coffee someplace?”, he asks, suggesting that the interview was already nearing an end. The people in the room get themselves together and start debating where we should go for a bite to eat. “I wanna go to some place real simple”. We wind up going to a little snack bar in the neighbourhood not 200m from the office. It sure was a simple spot. And on the way there he spoke the whole time and always opened the doors and let others go first; a gentleman. In the bar he ordered an orange juice with papaya and a cheese sandwich. He doesn't smoke and rarely drinks alcohol.

He has a natural life and doesn't have much routine. Just one thing which is somewhat of a religion: his surfing. He rises between 6-7am come rain or shine, jumps in the car and hits the beach with his board under his arm. Before 10am he's already out and about. If he's got work, there he'll be sat with his brushes and acrylic paints.

His new interest is now photography. He doesn't have a digital camera. He likes to take photos with film and his Leica. “Illustration is strongly associated with work. I work for the pleasure of working, but sometimes it doesn't bring so much satisfaction. In my case I turned my pleasure into work, it became precisely this: work. So now I take photos to enjoy myself”.

The themes of the photos are bizarre, hilarious, or plain nonsense; scenes captured in a momentary situation, such as a real old car, falling to pieces, that he saw driving along the Avenida Sernambetiba in Barra. On the back window of the car was a sticker that read: ‘It was the Devil that gave me this piece of shit, and without its documents’!

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The last question of the interview required a little more focus: "At what stage of your career are you?" He reflects that he's in a crisis. He doesn't know what he wants because he's already achieved everything after its even having been an objective to strive for. "I would like an international career. I moved to Paris because I thought, at that specific moment in my life, that it was important. And in fact it was. To be in Europe helps you to meet people.

"But my objective was to reach a point where I could live in any place in the world and continue working for the big companies. I wanted to be mobile. And I've arrived at this point. If I want to live in Madagascar I can go, and I know that I will continue to be sought after to do cool work. I've already earned money and the network I'm now within suggests that I will carry on earning. But now I don't know what objective to choose, hence my crisis. I think that I might start thinking about holding exhibitions, but I still don't know."