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Final frontier: the photographs of Cristina De Middel

The Deutsche Börse Photography Prize nominee Cristina De Middel blends fact and fiction to tell the story of Zambia's 1964 space project



'Hamba', one of the photographs from Cristina De Middel's book *The Afronauts* Photo: Cristina De Middel



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The vigorous debate provoked by the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize ever since its beginning has ensured that it remains emphatically topical.

'Photography has really exploded,' Anne-Marie Beckmann, one of the four judges and the curator of Art Collection Deutsche Börse in Germany, says. 'While there are still a lot of photographs taken classically, with a camera, it's exciting to see what young artists are doing with cross-media projects – perhaps working with found images.'

'I think the prize is quite controversial, but it is supposed to show new directions in photography, and this year it certainly does,' Brett Rogers, the director of the Photographers' Gallery in London, which will host an exhibition of the shortlisted artists, says. 'We're really testing the boundaries. We've never had people using imagery from Google Street View on the shortlist before.'



Untitled, one of the photographs from Cristina De Middel's book *The Afronauts*

Founded in 1996, the £30,000 prize rewards the living photographer who has made the most significant contribution to the medium of photography in Europe over the past year, in either exhibition or book format. Apart from Beckmann, the judges change every year, 'and with the background of the judges, the conversation changes too,' she says. 'Experts from different backgrounds mean it's always an exciting session.'

This year the other judges are the artist Joan Fontcuberta; Andrea Holzherr, the exhibition manager for Magnum Photos; and Karol Hordziej, the artistic director of the Krakow Photomonth festival. Brett Rogers retains her eight-year-long position as the panel's non-voting chairman.

The four shortlisted artists (from 80 nominated) are as follows: Chris Killip for his exhibition *What Happened – Great Britain 1970-1990* at Le Bal, Paris; Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin for the book *War Primer 2*; Mishka Henner for his exhibition *No Man's Land* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome; and Cristina De Middel for her book *The Afronauts*, a collection of photographs presented alongside drawings, letters and other ephemera, several images from which are reproduced here.

De Middel, 38, is half-Belgian, half-Spanish, and has lived in France, America, Spain and Belgium. Her work as a photojournalist has taken her to Haiti, India, Bangladesh and Senegal, but for now she is settled in London.

She studied fine art at university in Valencia, moving towards photojournalism as a means of making a living, but says, 'I didn't find it a good platform for the way I thought. So to amuse myself I began exploring a way of telling stories in which I deliberately played with fiction.'