



Prisoners of Love: Affect, Containment and Alternative Futures



Thank you to our project friends & partners:

Imagining Futures
Compound 13 Lab, Mumbai
The Horniman Museum and Gardens
Department of Archaeology, University of Ghana
Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford
Mootookakio'ssin Project, Canada
Hastings Museum and Art Gallery
The Economic Botany Collection, Kew Gardens
Rolina Blok at OPENing Gallery
Loyane Bianchini, Capture Lab at Central Saint Martins
Andy Brooks & Jacob Hall, Foundry at Winchester School of Art
Ekow Eshun, Hayward Gallery
Judy Willcocks and Sarah Campbell, CSM Museum & Study Collection
Adjoa Armah, Auto Italia



Contents

Introduction

Narrative Report - Esi Eshun & Louisa Minkin

One Escaped - Louisa Minkin

Visits

Compound 13 Lab, Dharavi, Mumbai, India
& The Horniman Museum & Gardens

Mootookakio'ssin Project, Alberta, Canada
& Hastings Museum & Art Gallery

Dept of Archaeology, University of Ghana
& Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

Out of Time- Lennon Mhishi

Workshops

Virtual Visit Technologies:
The Horniman Museum and Gardens

Scanning and Casting:
Central Saint Martins and Winchester School of Art

Reflectance Transformation Imaging and Photogrammetric Capture Workshop:
The Economic Botany Collection, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Bitter Harvest - Esi Eshun

Exhibitions

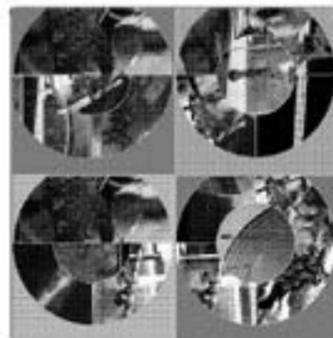
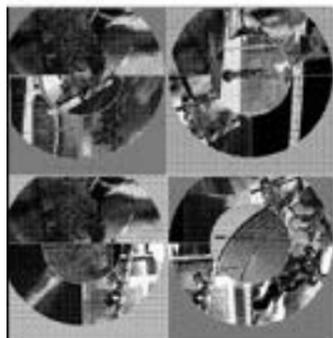
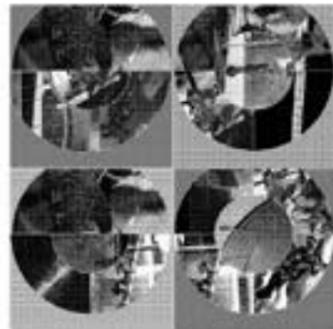
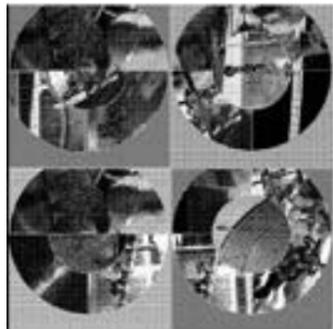
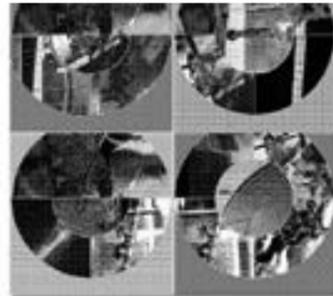
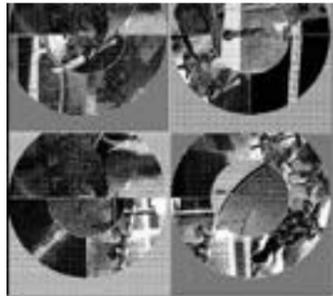
January 2023 Prisoners of Love: Affect, Containment and Alternative Futures
Lethaby Gallery, Granary Square, London.

August & September 2023 OST
Project residency and concluding show at OPENing, Bank, London.

October – November 2023 Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Space Time
developed in partnership with the Indigenous Art Program at UoL.

January 2024 Agents of Deterioration
A collaborative detournement of museal structures. An anarchival project.
Sideshow, Lethaby Gallery, Granary Square, London.

Excerpts from a Conversation Kathryn Yusoff & Esi Eshun



Introduction

Prisoners of Love: Affect, Containment and Alternative Futures (PoL) was a Phase 2 Commission Project of the AHRC GCRF *Imagining Futures through Un/Archived Pasts*. PoL ran from October 2022 until January 2024, led by Louisa Minkin (Reader in Visual Art Practices, Central Saint Martins) and Esi Eshun (Associate Lecturer, CSM) Lennon Mhishi (Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford) and Ian Dawson (University of Southampton). Project technics were handled by artist Thomas Allison (CSM).

PoL project partners included Mark Seyram Ameny-Xa and students from the Archaeology Dept. of the University of Ghana working with Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford; Compound 13 Lab, Dharavi, Mumbai and Sarah Byrne at The Horniman Museum and Gardens; the *Mootookakio'ssin* project on Blackfoot Territory at the University of Lethbridge (UoL), Canada and Jack Guy at Hastings Museum and Art Gallery (HMAG). The project aimed to connect museum collections with members of home and diasporic communities through the deployment of digital technologies in virtual and real-life visits and to build opportunities for extracurricular learning by project participants including PhD, MA students, artists and graduates in UK, Ghana, India and Canada.

The project partnership between *Mootookakio'ssin* and Hastings developed upon the work of the 2020-22 AHRC Network *Concepts Have Teeth, And Teeth That Bite Through Time: digital imaging and Blackfoot material culture in UK museums*, extending capacity to work creatively with Indigenous Art Program students and Blackfoot researchers at UoL in relation to HMAG collections.

Our work with Pitt Rivers Museum was led by Lennon Mhishi, Esi Eshun and Mark Seyram Ameny-Xa with students from the Archaeology Dept. of the University of Ghana. Students in Ghana and UK chose collection items and shared research in live sessions online in the museum. Work made in response to these events was exhibited in project shows. An engagement and education resource for PRM was also fabricated.

Our work with Compound 13 Lab, was led by Ian Dawson and the AHRC GCRF *Rethinking Waste* Project as part of their broader remit focused on the knowledge politics of the informal waste management industry in Dharavi. Our project aimed to connect members of the Lab with collection objects via virtual visits with Horniman Museum, to capture and share digital files enabling these objects to be materialised and disseminated in Dharavi via 3D prints and augmented reality. As a result of our work with the Horniman we were invited to the Economic Botany Collection at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew to make test photogrammetric and reflectance transformation captures of key items from their collection.

The PoL project resulted in four exhibition outputs; *Prisoners of Love* at *Vestibule*, Lethaby, London; *OST* at *OPENing*, Bank, London; *Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Space Time* [UoL] and *Agents of Deterioration* at *Sideshow*, Lethaby, London. A booklet/zine was produced for *OST* and all project activities were documented on a publicly accessible blog. This publication aims to set out how PoL proceeded, outlining its initial intentions and documenting its outcomes. Rather than a comprehensive record of activities, it is more a gathering of data that gives an impression of work as it unfolded through the course of the year. It is divided into four main sections. The first brings together writings and reflections on the project as a whole. Included are short outlines by Lennon Mhishi of the project as it relates to questions of restitution. Louisa Minkin provides a meditative account of the changing ontologies of digitally remade objects, reflecting on their skeuomorphic capacities in relation to the decolonising endeavour at the heart of the project, while Esi Eshun contributes to a narrative report on some of the wider pedagogical aspects of the project and an essay on the Columbian exchange. The second and third sections summarise project visits and workshops. The final section runs through project exhibitions. As *OST* is documented in a separate zine, this section focussed on the final iteration *Agents of Deterioration*.



Narrative Report Esi Eshun & Louisa Minkin

Louisa Minkin CSM, Esi Eshun CSM, Thomas Allison CSM, Lennon Mhishi PRM, Ian Dawson UoS; Dawn Codex, Charles Nyiha, Rihanata Bigey, Joseph Ijoyemi, Rabiya Nagi, Adanma Nwankwo [UK]; Mark Seyram Amanyo-Xa, Mame Afua Mensah UoG; Deserae Tailfeathers, Darby Herman, Serene Weasel Traveller [Mootookakio'ssin project]; Compound 13 Lab, Mumbai; Hastings Museum and Art Gallery; Pitt Rivers Museum; Horniman Museum and Gardens; Economic Botany Collection, Royal Botanic Gardens.

Our 2022-24 project, *Prisoners of Love: Affect, Containment and Alternative Futures* (PoL) aimed to bring material collections lodged in UK museums into proximity with dispersed home peoples - in the process, enabling participants from UK based diasporic communities, First Nations, Canada, Ghana and India, to respond to complex colonial and settler colonial histories, linking Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia. Throughout the project, we aimed to explore how participating artists, curators and researchers might work together to revitalise relations with objectified and sequestered museum items, through a range of material, digital, affective and discursive responses. We asked what types of knowledge exchange might be facilitated through virtual and real-life museum visits? What forms of cultural and creative repair might result from such visits, and how might the status of archival objects be transformed by 'thinking history differently' and by envisaging alternative futures outside of conventional museum contexts?

At the heart of the project was the contention that UK archives and museums are repositories of colonial violence and appropriation, embodiments of sustained cultural destruction and dispossession supported and obfuscated by complex bureaucratic systems. [Wambu, O. et al, 2022] By inviting members of home and diasporic communities to view items held in storage, our intention was to play a small part in a movement aimed at affirming the intricate ties between such items and wider cosmologies, in contrast to the carceral logic of museums which serve to constrain such items within categorical frameworks and linear temporalities.

Framing our methodology primarily around ‘virtual visits’, we aimed to bring remote and local participants into museum collection stores, to develop techniques to better experience virtual interactions, and to facilitate the circulation of knowledge and distributed art practices through conversation, research and reflection, and through responsive artworks, story and theory. By digitising, 3D printing and working with augmented reality alongside more traditional forms of making, we were able to explore the mutable, translocational and iterative nature of digital objects, conceiving of them, as avatars or digital ghosts of collection objects, which, in their new forms and settings, could be liberated from museum confines - their altered contexts sparking new ideas, connections and meanings. In a manner analogous to Yuk Hui’s idea of cosmotechnics (Hui 2017, 2021), we sought also to position archival material within past and present interrelated technological and cosmological frameworks reflective of the complexity of the thinking and technical processes embodied in their making and uses.

Examples/Methods

Highlighting our commitment to collaborative working, we brought together Hastings Museum and Art Gallery & the Blackfoot Mootookakio’ssin Project, Canada; Horniman Museum and Gardens & Compound 13 Lab in Dharavi, India; Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford & The University of Ghana Archaeology Department - with each virtual viewing session aimed at examining archives, technical experimentation and conversation. After an initial visit to Horniman Museum, we were invited back to share knowledge and technics in preparation for virtual visits with communities working on the repatriation of Benin collection items. Similarly, at the Economic Botany Collection at Kew, we were invited to demonstrate computational photography techniques in relation to items of Blackfoot and Zimbabwean origin. The meetings helped facilitate networks that in future might assist us to further develop on the ideas explored in the four process-based exhibitions [listed below] we curated in the UK and Canada during the project period, each of which folded in further participants.

Each of our visits with museums adopted a method whereby project participants and remote collaborators preselected collection items for viewing. Sessions were focused around an intensive process of looking, listening, talking and showing, while selected items were recorded and produced as web ready digital models and print files, intended for broad based sharing and distribution. Each of the visits responded to different circumstances and audiences, and while our ethos was to work flexibly in each environment, making use, as far as possible, of open-source software, at-hand portable hardware such as mobile phones, or improvised structures such as a 3D printed automated turntable, each item called to be handled and looked at [or not] in different ways. Often a sense of material properties was conveyed by movement and sound, while scale was evoked by measuring against a hand or gesture, and perception of colour shifted according to lighting, movement and other variables.

On occasion, as with a session at Hastings Museum involving Blackfoot items contained within the museum’s Clare Sheridan collection, the camera was able to zoom in on fine detail, revealing making processes that would not otherwise be visible without technological assistance. As such, we used the technology almost as an extension of the virtual visitors’ bodies, enabling them to see and feel their way around the objects with enhanced precision. In this case, the visitors were able to examine and learn from dress making techniques previously unfamiliar to them, while on a more specific note, one participant was able to identify and closely inspect an item historically belonging to a member of her family. As such, while the sessions were not intended as a replacement for in-person visits, they, and the associated digital modelling processes, acted as a means to test out new ways of interacting, intersecting and learning across national and disciplinary boundaries.

Activities

For UK participants, the project provided a transient, experiential, social space to focus and develop decolonial strategies for their work. As mentored by Esi and Lennon, one intent was to avoid the instrumentalization of young artists in responding to colonial collections and to empower them to shape debate and to forge their own structures for working critically and collaboratively. One early project activity involved a group visit to the Hayward Gallery exhibition *In the Black Fantastic*, accompanied by a scheduled conversation with curator, Ekow Eshun, during which participants were provided with the opportunity to broaden their experience of contemporary art practices based in speculative and fabulist approaches to decoloniality. Events taking place during the Vestibule exhibition included a round-table discussion *Decolonising Museum Practices* and a workshop on rethinking museum labels with Marenka Thompson-Odlum at PRM and Elisa Adami at Afterall journal. Esi Eshun presented a performed reading of her essay *The Quiet Object*, published later in the OST booklet, in which she mixed auto-theory based around analysis drawn from Tina Campt’s book *Listening to Images*, with the story of her visit to PRM.

During the later six-week residency at the OPENing project space in the City of London, informal workshops on using Reflectance Transformation Imaging took place, alongside guided historical walks around the City, and introductions to theories centred around new materialisms and new animisms, providing further means for participants to position their work within wider theoretical, artistic and technical frameworks. Additionally, in both the OST and AOD exhibitions, participants looked to reconsider museum practices by offering opportunities for audiences to interact with exhibits by touching or taking away elements, or by entering into, where possible, detailed discussions with the artists about their work. The OST residency exhibition was documented as *Bank Sequence*, a 25min video by Helen Robertson and produced OSTzine with essays by Lennon Mhishi and Esi Eshun. Work developed at OPENing was subsequently exhibited at the Hess Gallery, University of Lethbridge, Canada. The exhibition *Mootookakio’ssin: Creating in Spacetime*, was developed in partnership with the Indigenous Art Program at UoL. This exhibition explored creating in relationship to historical cultural material housed in British museums and featured physical and digital artwork by UoL Indigenous Art Program students as well as artists living in the UK and in Ghana. Expanding from the *Mootookakio’ssin* research project, the exhibition spans the gap in space and time between contemporary artists and historical cultural material that is separated from homelands.

Our final exhibition, *Agents of Deterioration* was effectively a collective artwork bringing together contributions from UK, Canada and Ghana participants, articulated through fragments of process and practice. Methodologically, this set of enchained, anarchival projects used notions of collection, combination and ramification as structures to bring ontological and epistemological concerns into play, with the exhibition serving as prompt for engaged discussion and reimagination of responses to digitised and material colonial an/archives. The last project event held at Lethaby Gallery involved a public conversation between Esi Eshun and Kathryn Yusoff, Professor of Inhuman Geography, and author of *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2019) and the forthcoming book, *Geologic Life: Inhuman Intimacies and the Geophysics of Race* (2024). The event raised parallels between Yusoff’s academic, archival and creative practice and ongoing research interests pursued by PoL participants, suggesting the possibility of developing relations in the future.

References:

- Campt T., *Listening to Images*, Duke University Press, (2017)
- Hui Y., *Art and Cosmotechnics*, University of Minnesota Press (2017)
- Wambu, O., et al, *Return of the Icons: Restitution Debate - Where are we now?* [Panel discussion] Afford-UK, SOAS, London (2022, November 14th)
- Yusoff K., *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* University of Minnesota Press (2019)
- Yusoff K., *Geologic Life: Inhuman Intimacies and the Geophysics of Race*, Duke University Press (May 2024)



One Escaped

Louisa Minkin

Luc Bresson's 1956 film *A Man Escaped* was on Screen 1 at the BFI as lockdown softened and this project was germinating. Bresson's film is focussed on the material interactions of a prisoner within the present violence of a control regime. He sharpens tools from the poor remnants of his life in the cell, clandestinely disassembles and re-works the structures of his incarceration, splinters wood and pokes holes to enable his escape. Things take on new shapes, forms and uses through whittling, plaiting, joining. He understands time by the measured routine of the guards, counting moments for a gap when he may be unheard, finding blind spots in the passing of a spotlight. He distrusts all. He steals, substitutes, and works in the shadows to deceive. His subterfuge and preternatural vigilance within the hollow, terrifying regime produce heightened anxiety and tension in the audience. Call it feelz. It's bodily. We gape at his tricks and feints, knuckles clenched, holding our breath as he seeks to cover his traces: damping sound, slipping paper under the door to catch the dust of splintering wood, working away to disintegrate the structures of his containment against his own imminent extermination. He operates like a pest in the stores, an agent of deterioration.

The microcosm of this prison narrative somehow mirrors the intensity of each meeting we have had over the duration of our project with an 'object' within the museum collection stores and visitor rooms. We are reading the film within Lennon Mhishi's framing of 'containment' and of the carceral institutions of the modern: the pivotal nineteenth century moment where the Western episteme whets a knife to separate knowledge domains cleanly, births the conjoined twin of 'commodity fetishism' and slams the door to make us all solitary conscripts of modern racial capitalism in an expansive and poorly clad prison-industrial complex. We are thinking with Garuba (2012) whose reflections on *Animism, Modernity/Colonialism and African Order of Knowledge* provides insights into alternative ways of understanding agency and resistance, and Wynter (1984), whose critique of humanism challenges conventional notions of the subject within Western epistemology.

Our project encourages critical reflection on the intersection of digital technologies, representation, and power dynamics. It emphasizes the need to interrogate the underlying assumptions and implications of digital practices, particularly within the context of museums and cultural institutions. In making 3D digital models, skeuomorphs, or container-forms, of museum items, we are conjuring, presencing or liberating ghosts while, in dilemma, we locate with Seb Franklin (2021) the deep history of digitality in the development of racial capitalism. Computational photography with its own origin story in the 1860s (Galloway, 2012) is just another teleologically deployed technology within the broader socio-cultural, socio-colonial, structures of modernity: power, com-modification, addiction and domination. What we learn from Bresson's film however, is to think with processes perverse to a dominant regime and to work heuristically with remnants and transient spaces counter-extracted from carceral institutional routine.

Spit and Image

Skeuomorphs don't only reference or trade on the past. They are intended for some future them/other-selves. Yes, to recognise a skeuomorph, we must reference a past (or parallel (im)material world); they, however, by their (material) production/instantiation, implicate a (new) future - and the future is always immanent - a cusp. Archaeologists talk about the past in the past, but skeuomorphs remind us about the (intended?) past in the future. Skeuomorphs are (re)remembered or found, before being recognised, contrasted, and (re)presented and exhibited - they were/are intended material memories in the (re) making. Memories intend to be remembered.

Paul Reilly, Visiting Research Fellow in Archaeology, UoS, personal correspondence, 2024.



In a sustainable economy, repair draws out the life of for example, a garment, a pair of trousers, and with it the indices of the bodies it held and holds. It does this through a process of knowledge application: responsive unpicking and re-stitching, grafting substitute fabric into worn patches, darning holes, over-dyeing, embellishing. As a hand-me-down the garment marks time back and forth through tucks and seams, letting out, taking in. The worn-out body of the garment itself becomes material loved and worked into other contexts: as comforter, patches, rags. The skeuomorph by contrast, whether material or digital, gives up the ghost, pushing a thing, a gourd say, into an entirely new mediality. Paint, string and incised surface here share the same materiality. A screen-based or virtual understanding of texture and qualities is mapped through physically based rendering. A 3D digital model is fungible, scalable, combinable, iterative, remade with each interaction, circulating promiscuously.

Bresson's 1969 film *Pickpocket* has an extraordinary sequence as a man has his wallet lifted at the Gare de Lyon. The wallet is slipped by accomplices with practised technique through a whole choreography of seamless, close-up, passes. All in a single shot: a packet on the stream. It is a virtuoso collective transaction of economic redistribution. Petty crime staged as a high stakes gamble of flippancy or ennui rather than need.



Our project frames a collective set of questions around the politics, ethics and histories of collections, what it means (or feels like) for an artist to make work in this context and what it means to have the work they make exhibited, disseminated, acquired or accessioned – becoming property.

The relation between matter and property is political. Art can function as a technology of extraction, or it can, as Duchamp's work did, destabilize the moment of matter's becoming-property in ways that are historically specific and aesthetically engrossing. Such destabilization may address a variety of pressing questions including the legacy of slavery (the human becoming property), economic injustice (labor becoming property), and the persistence of colonial relations in the museum (race becoming property). But what are the aesthetics of such incomplete, or traumatic, or sensual, or enraged passages of matter into property and property into matter? Joselit, 2021

We have questions too about distributed art practice where works may be created collaboratively and exist in multiple locations, both physical and virtual. What are the conditions of a 'work', its mediation and dissemination as it moves from 'studio' or 'cult' into the world or 'exhibition'? How does collectivity and collaboration get marked up in accompanying metadata or paradata? Can we use visual methodologies from museum practice to think in the studio together? How does transdisciplinary knowledge production operate as practice? Technologies encompass not only the physical materials and techniques used in the creation of the artwork but also the social and cultural contexts in which it is produced and experienced.

Taking a note from Kathryn Yusoff's conversation with Esi Eshun, the last event of our project in January 2024, we need to attend to the history of our disciplines. Our future lies in our ability to negotiate our pasts. Artists have been and are actors in settler colonial narratives: sidekick, amanuensis, author, engaged in purposeful extraction, inscribing, capitalising and re-mythologising ideas of progress and modernity. Yusoff's project [2024] is moving discourse around race from ideology and identity politics into discussion about materiality and material relations, rather than reinforcing colonial separations between people and environments.

Hook, line and sinker

Bresson's prisoner can fashion a bedspring and blanket into a grappling hook, a passive support into an active prosthesis. Crafting is a practice of residuality and survivance. Artworks too assemble materials in transformative ways, making links and bridges between people and things, place and time, technology and ecology [Jimenez & Claudel 2019]. Hooks and lines assemble bait and bodies, predator, prey, materials and knowledge practices. Gell in *Technologies of Enchantment* conceives the artwork an active agent, proximate to a trap, possessing agency and exerting influence over human behaviour and social relationships.

A trap refers simultaneously to a specific material interface (a trap) and to an analytical description of mutuality (entrapment)...Traps give material form to a hunters knowledge of habit and terrain and put this knowledge to work in autonomous, animate technologies – ingenious, poetic, deadly. Jimenez & Claudel 2019

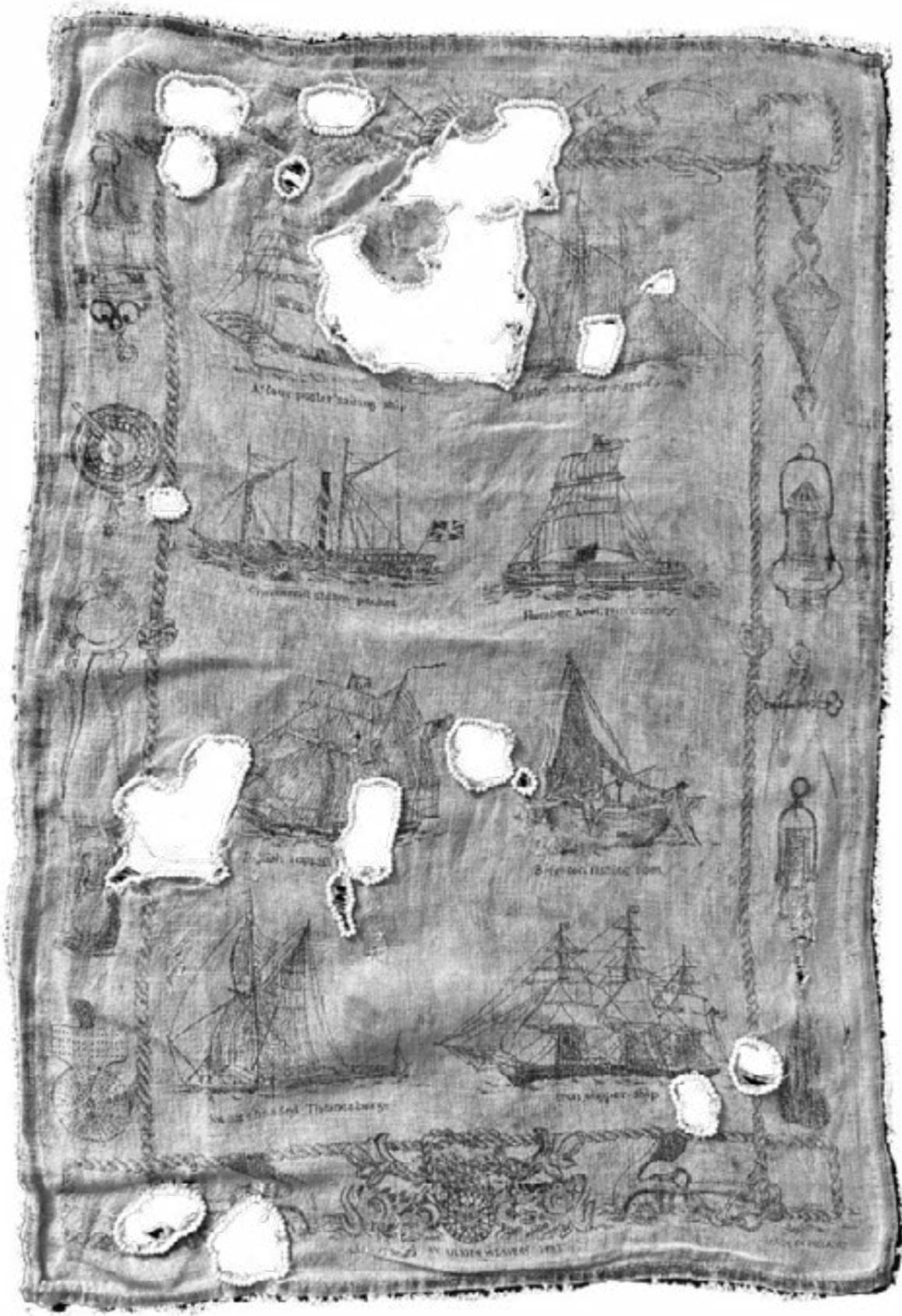
When we think with the trap and entrapment — they help us to see how engagement, complicity and exchange, or their reversals – deception, domination, operate via material and ecological vectors. We can think about and experience an artwork as a set of intra-active components, with site and visitor implicated in the assemblage: apparatus, site, bait and decoy. A set of variable, vestigial pieces set in relation with qualities that are operational: balance, weight, movement, exchange, correspondence. Reading Simondon, we can infer the work and its environment to be “a network of privileged points of exchange between the being and the milieu” through which humans are directly integrated with the world. These key points are “places of contact and of mixed, mutual reality, places of exchange and of communication because they form a knot between both realities”. For Vine Deloria, (2Bears 2012) a theory of place and sacred geography is land specific, and therefore events or moments become something distributed and dimensional rather than chronological and temporal. In other words, ancestry is not bound to temporality, but rather could be thought about as interconnected experiences and memories that interact in a field of spatial relationality.

Hal Foster in *An Archival Impulse* (2004) discusses the move to turn “excavation sites” into “construction sites”. He speculates that “even as archival art cannot be separated from “the memory industry” that pervades contemporary culture ... it suggests that this industry is amnesiac in its own way ... and so calls out for a practice of counter-memory. “ This counter-memory is situated within a society of control (Deleuze, 1992) which surveilles, archives and predicts.

Perhaps we can elide Foster's title to produce an an/archival impulse to challenge traditional modes of archiving and historicizing. Instead of adhering to linear narratives or fixed categorizations, Prisoners of Love artists have embraced fragmentation, discontinuity, and instability in their work.

References:

- 2Bears J., *Mythologies of an Undead Indian*, PhD Thesis, University of Victoria (2012)
 Deleuze, G., Postscript on the Societies of Control, *October*, Vol. 59. (Winter, 1992), pp. 3-7, The MIT Press
 Foster H., *An Archival Impulse*, *October*, Vol. 110 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 3-22, The MIT Press
 Franklin S., *The Digitally Disposed: Racial Capitalism and the Informatics of Value*, University of Minnesota Press, (2021)
 Galloway A., *A sum of the profiles*, Seminar AMT Research Group, Winchester school of Art, 2012
 Garuba H., On Animism, Modernity/Colonialism, and the African Order of Knowledge, *eflux* Issue #36 (2012)
 Gell, A., The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology, *The Art of Anthropology*, Routledge (1999)
 Jimenez A.C., Nahum-Claudel C., The anthropology of traps: Concrete technologies and theoretical interfaces, *Journal of Material Culture*, Volume 24, (2019) Sage
 Joselit D., NFTs, or The Readymade Reversed, *October*, (April 2021) The MIT Press
 Simondon G., On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects [Trans: Mellamphy N., Mellamphy D., Mellamphy N.B.] *Deleuze Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2011), pp. 407-424
 Wynter S., The Ceremony Must be Found: After Humanism, *boundary 2*, Vol. 12/13, Vol. 12, no. 3 - Vol. 13, no. 1, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism (Spring - Autumn, 1984), Duke University Press
 Yusoff K., *Geologic Life: Inhuman Intimacies and the Geophysics of Race*, (May 2024) Duke University Press



Louisa Minkin, I wish that, 2023
Worn linen tea towel printed with ships, beading.
Digital extrusion.



Visits

Compound 13 Lab, Dharavi, Mumbai, India & The Horniman Museum & Gardens

Mootookakio'ssin Project, Alberta, Canada & Hastings Museum & Art Gallery

Dept of Archaeology, University of Ghana & Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford





Compound Terra Plastik ka Mela: Repair, Recycling, and Restoration: an interactive exhibition of social and environmental works from Compound 13 Lab, Maharashtra Nature Park, Dharavi, Mumbai, India, 10th April - 13th April 2023

Compound 13 Lab is situated close to one of Mumbai's main recycling hubs, where each week thousands of tons of hard waste are sorted, cleaned, and processed. Tens of thousands of people work in this industry: they make a huge contribution as unrecognised 'green collar workers' to cutting the amount of waste that goes to landfill and incineration, and reducing the region's carbon footprint. Compound 13 Lab, hosted by ACORN India, explores livelihoods and alternative futures, working closely with people engaged in repair and recycling work across the neighbourhood. At the Lab, knowledge and learning is shared through art, design, music, media and citizen science.

Compound 13 Lab, Dharavi, Mumbai & The Horniman Museum and Gardens, London

Collaborative Learning: Photogrammetry, 3D print and AR.



Members of the Compound 13 Lab from Dharavi selected a number of familiar, functional objects for viewing. Each object was recorded using photogrammetry. Throughout the process, we saw the new digital objects as co-creations with the Lab with the conversation and insights arising from the sessions influencing the ways in which the models were recorded and built. Compound 13 works with an ecosystem of plastics. We opted to experiment by sending them the files to print, with the Dharavi team materialising surrogate objects and subsequently producing a kind of portable museum, items from which were included in Plastik ka Mela in Mumbai and in Vestibule in London. The events deployed our 3D models from Horniman artefacts within different contexts and materialities, moving the museal forms into community. Objects made by the Compound 13Lab/Horniman Museum strand were distributed back into the wider community of Dharavi.



Mootookakio'ssin Project, Canada & Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, East Sussex: Reconnecting with Ancestral Material



Hastings Museum and Art Gallery's First Nations and Native American material comes from four main collectors: Edward Blackmore, Colin Taylor, Clare Sheridan and Archibald Belaney, also known as Grey Owl. Unique among these collections is the material deriving from Clare Sheridan's visit to the Reiss brothers' artists' colony in Glacier Park, Montana and the Kainai Reserve in Alberta in 1937-8 where she lived with the Tailfeathers family.

Sheridan was a privileged member of elite British society, a cousin of Churchill, who leveraged her encounters for self-promotion and collected voraciously. She was viewed by the establishment as dangerous and subversive, an admirer of Communism and a critic of British Imperialism who was vocal in her condemnation of the residential school system. ¹

Sheridan's visit is narrated in her 1938 travelogue. Items in the Sheridan collection find context and stories through associations with individuals named in her book. It is unusual for material culture from North America to be documented in this way, most items having been severed from context with little or no recorded provenance. The individuals named in Sheridan's book who gave and sold to her have living relatives on Blackfoot homelands including members of the Mootookakio'ssin team.

This project begins to re-connect people with their ancestral material and its immanent, intangible culture. Work with these groups and broader publics aims to connect and strengthen links between people and things geographically separated but culturally related, past ancestors, present day and future generations.

1. Carter, S. Clare Sheridan, British Writer, Sculptor, and Collector in Blackfoot Country, 1937 in *Object Lives and Global Histories in Northern North America*, Lemire B., Peers L., and Whitelaw A. [Eds.] 2022, McGill-Queen's University



HASMG:1983.78.1 Necklace of Eagle Claws
under Reflectance Transformation Imaging



Department of Archaeology, University of Ghana & Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford:

Researching Collections Together

Mark Seyram Amanyo-Xa and his students from the Department of Archaeology, University of Ghana joined us online from Accra along with film maker Fofo Gavua to discuss collection items they had selected from the Pitt Rivers catalogue. We were joined in person by Benjamin Busenze Balagadde from the Horniman Museum & Gardens, Joanna Cole and Philip Grover from PRM who helped out with object collections, provenance and photograph collections. PhD candidates and other students from the University of Ghana joined virtually to share their research on items selected from the museum's collections, eliciting informative conversations with the museum's own researchers. Key among the objects chosen were several Akan gold weights - small figurative objects in brass, bronze or copper, used in colonial and pre-colonial Ghana to weigh the gold dust that served as the local currency.

In response to the PRM visit, and in relation to digital workflows, a follow-on in-person scanning workshop was organised for London participants, enabling them to scan objects of their own choosing. These were 3D printed and later run through an experimental foundry process to produce bronzes subsequently included in the OST and AoD exhibitions, a process documented and reflected upon in accompanying exhibition booklets. At both exhibitions, large quantities of 3D printed gold weight peanuts were put on display alongside an invitation for audiences to help themselves to individual nuts, a suggestion which served as a tactic for sharing the [anti] transactional proposition of the work.



Installed works:
Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Space Time,
Hess Gallery, University of Lethbridge, Canada

Lennon Mhishi

Out of Time

I am considering carceral logics and institutional processes as out of time, in the same vein as one can think of Africa as being in the future. This is significant in two ways. In the first sense, subject-objects extracted through colonial violence and deceit are already placed outside their temporal and cosmological circulations. As such, the institutions that contain this material can be regarded as inhabiting spaces of temporal entanglement and cosmological rage, where many ancestors and material that seeks at least rest, and in other ways reactivation, are imprisoned.

The turning of African art and culture into caricature, myth and legend and superstition, and the concomitant objectification, are all sheltered in the ethnographic project. The gaze and exhibition of Africans, the presence of African ancestors as objects of display, the idea of 'other' cultures on display and the 'universal' on some raced-based, pseudo-scientific bases is out of time.

Material that belongs to African communities and other dispossessed peoples is always theirs, even when they have been subjected to legal and regulatory frameworks that claim them as the inalienable property of museums and other institutions. In effect, the task of restitution is not of gifting but of giving back and giving up, of yielding to a historical fact that endures. Colonial ethnographic collecting does not emerge victorious in exchange for 'modernity, science and knowledge', and whatever other trappings of civilisational life are dragged along with coloniality as an extractive project.

There is no adversarial or gladiatorial contest for me in demanding what should be rightfully returned. The moral-ethical and legal conundrum exists along the continuum of the hegemonic attempts at holding in place a version of the world where justice is not possible.

Rather than a post-ethnographic framing, the struggle, in the way artist Belinda Kazeem Kaminski's 2023 work 'uMoya: The sacred Return of Lost Things' challenges us, is what it means to have an oppositional gaze. It also means seeing and looking at these histories differently, outside the colonial ethnographic lens. A sounding and visual practice not geared towards producing a type, tribe or hierarchy and unencumbered by the demands of taxonomy and imperial fashionings.

Chivanhu, or Cutting Traces of Being Human in the World

I have returned to one particular object at University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum, described as a sword. This bakatwa, as it is called in what we understand as Shona, occupies an interesting space for me as evidence of some of the materialities of museumisation that emanate from the oppressive colonial regulatory frameworks. In a colonial setting where this object, described as a ritual sword, is also read as a weapon and disarming the local population is a necessary process of extraction and domination, the knife references, in addition to the weapons in the museum, the intersections of cosmology and imperial materialities. What is contained here are also the traces of lineage and ancestral worlds.



The qualities of a subject-object are thus understood not on the basis of what material exists in context but out of it, out of time. There is, of course, challenging work underway at the Pitt Rivers that is making these connections and recognising the multiple meanings and uses that material that has been museumised has to different communities worldwide.

The task or the demand for reanimation comes when there is a wider reckoning of what it has meant for countries to sustain histories of cultural destruction and what attempts to reconstitute might look like. Material that has become transformed over time, acquiring new qualities and energies — chemical and toxic, spiritual and symbolic — might not be reanimated but disposed of. Ancestors and other human parts kept in museums may need rest and dignity, decent burials and mourning.

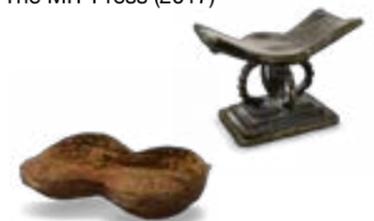
What is technology in the realm of the sacred?
Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga

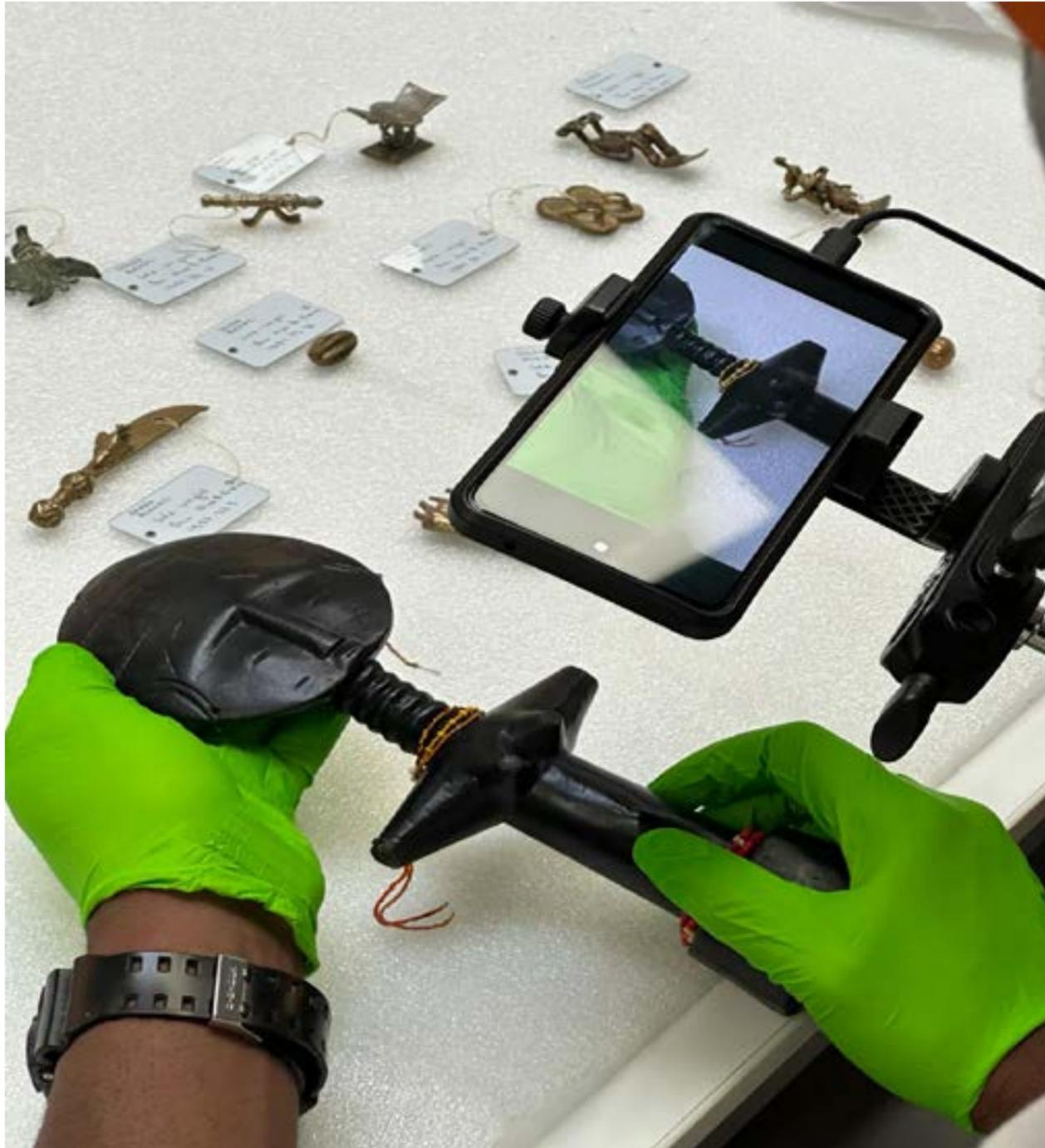
The history of material that ‘sits’, in the way we reference a certain stasis in how the material is kept in place, simultaneously holding the sometimes violent and at times stultification- is also a history of connections that ensue to those places that the material has been, or passed through. The challenge is to think of the object not as an end in itself but as what it means to rethink what knowledge is held in this materiality. We become custodians of material in different ways, who accesses and uses it, and how various indigenous and counter-epistemologies and cosmologies can become part of how we understand this material.

Inviting different communities into the archives/storage/catalogue and the spaces where this material is contained is fraught. On what and whose terms access is provided, the possibilities thereof are not a process of absolution or a resolve. Various African and African diaspora institutions and individuals are playing an indispensable part. Numerous museums, archives, film and other cultural and heritage institutions and their workers tirelessly (they do, of course, get very tired) enable access and are open to reimagining these spaces. This is not the work of a singular institution or individual, and the collaborative and transformative potential also lies in yielding away from investments in routine, custom and convention (this is how things have always been done) to opening our work to different possibilities (this is how the work can be done).

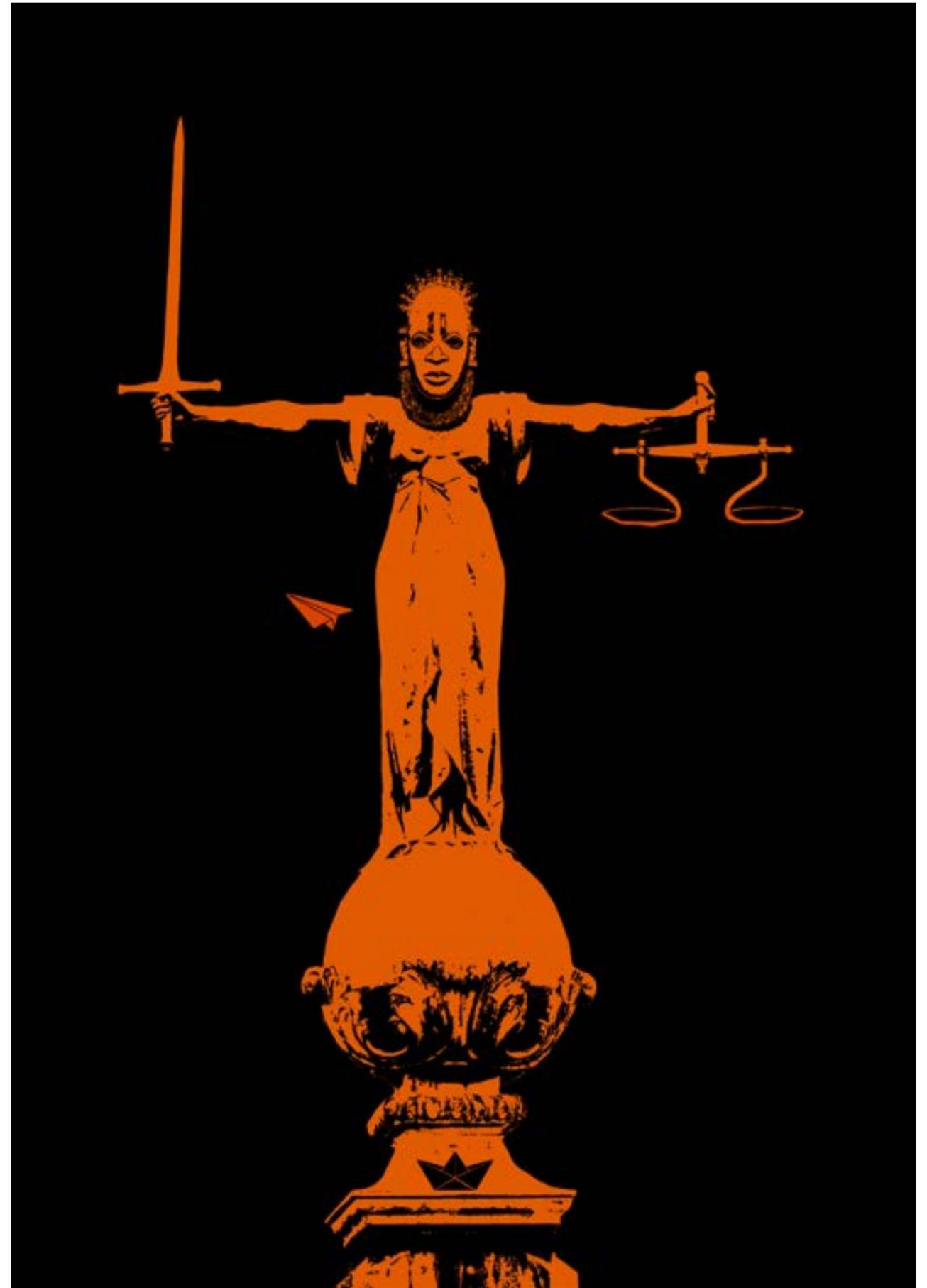
In a conversation I had in Berlin with Ambuya Stella Chiweshe, she argued that if the material comes from histories of colonial violence and deceit. It is heavy with the mourning and loss that accompanied its entry into the museum, and then it couldn't be returned as it was. It needed to be ritually cleansed, and the spirits of those who toil in these subjects-objects appeased so that restitution can fully occur. Are our current legal, institutional and infrastructural technologies alert to these hauntings, the voices recorded, the films made and kept, the anguish they hold, and the peace sought? Acknowledging that the material contained was part of technologies of everyday life means being responsive to the possibilities that restitution can take, as with Indigenous rituals and ceremonies.

Mavhunga C.C., [Ed.] *What Do Science, Technology, and Innovation Mean from Africa?* The MIT Press (2017)





Live Stream with Mark Ameyo-Xa and students in Ghana, Pitt Rivers Museum 2023



Free the Obas, Joseph Ijoyemi, 2023

Project Workshops

Virtual Visit Technologies:
The Horniman Museum and Gardens

Scanning and Casting:
Central Saint Martins and Winchester School of Art

Reflectance Transformation Imaging and Photogrammetric Capture:
The Economic Botany Collection, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.



Virtual Visit Technologies Horniman Museum Collections Centre

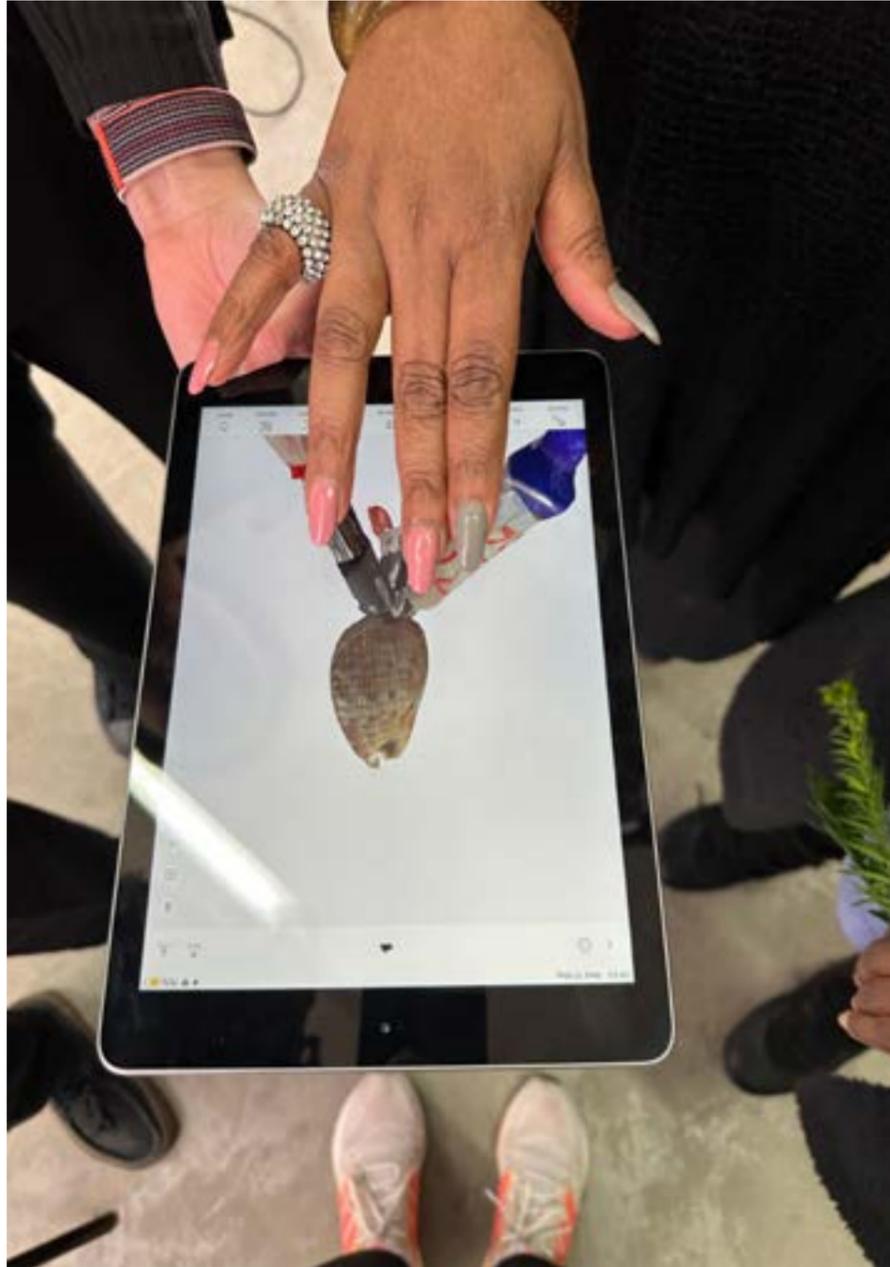
Visiting is a highly valued social activity and offers opportunities to renew relations and transfer of knowledge. Visiting a place, such as sites of ceremony, maintains ancestral connections through the telling of stories, singing songs, and sharing food, knowledge, and laughter. Out of necessity over the pandemic period we developed technologies for virtual viewings with Blackfoot colleagues both in museum collections and between artists. We have continued to work on the technical aspects of connecting people and spaces to make remote collection visits a useful and culturally grounded tool in building relationships. This model for interaction encourages conversation, co-creation and sharing of lived experience, bringing together narratives and imaginative experiential dialogue.



We were invited back to Horniman to share knowledge and train the team in virtual viewing techniques in preparation for their virtual visits with the Benin bronzes. The Horniman has recently returned ownership of 72 items to the Nigerian Government. They are working to make it easier for community members to engage with collections.

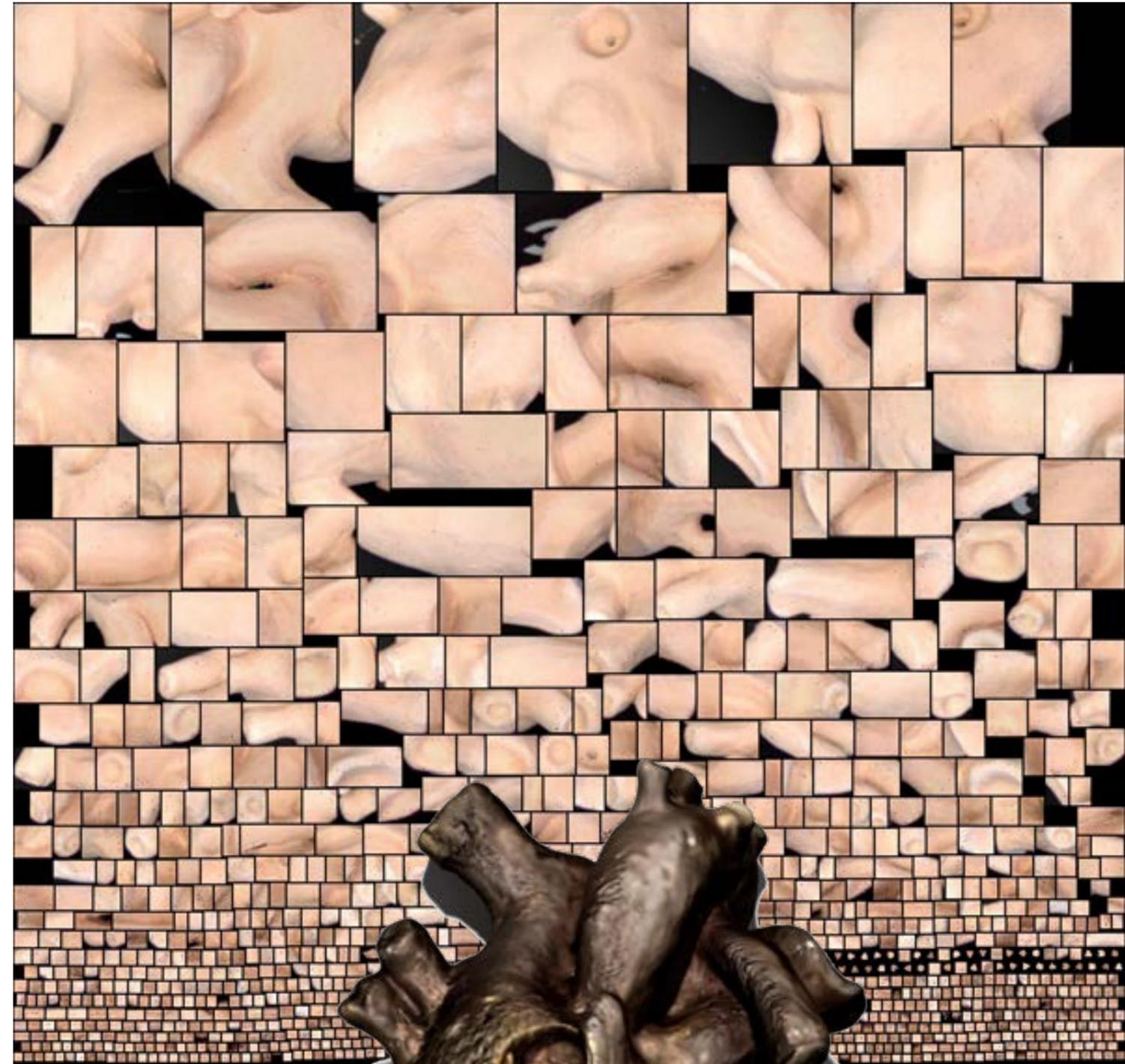
Gold weight from the Pitt Rivers Museum collection visiting with relatives at the Horniman Collections Centre via augmented reality.

Scanning and Casting Workshops Central Saint Martins and Winchester School of Art



Responding to the Akan weights at Pitt Rivers Museum helped by Loyane Ticianelli Bianchini in the capture lab at CSM and Andy Brooks and Jacob Hall in the foundry at WSA. Loyane led a full day workshop in the CSM Capture Lab. We spent a day working with white-light scanning, photogrammetry and had a look at the realsense kit. Project participants scanned objects they had brought along and made captures with polycam and metascan apps.

Testing new workflows, scans were printed and cast in bronze at Winchester School of Art. Bio-plastic prints of the student project objects were included with prints of the gold weights for an education resource at Pitt Rivers Museum.



Skin file and scan of Adanma Nwankwo's modelled heart of clay, cast in bronze.

Reflectance Transformation Imaging and Photogrammetric Capture Workshop Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Economic Botany Collection.



The files linked below all derive from the Economic Botany Collection, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew with their kind permission.

Best viewed in Chrome or Safari for AR.

Models were scanned and built by Thomas Allison as part of the Prisoners of Love project funded by AHRC GCRF Imagining Futures.

[79833 Cinchona bark with lichen](#)

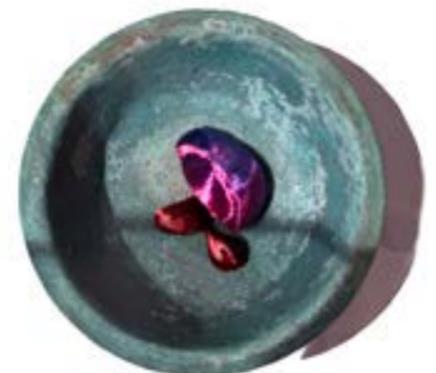
[44789 Matrices of dead tree \(Loranthaceae, related to mistletoe\)](#)

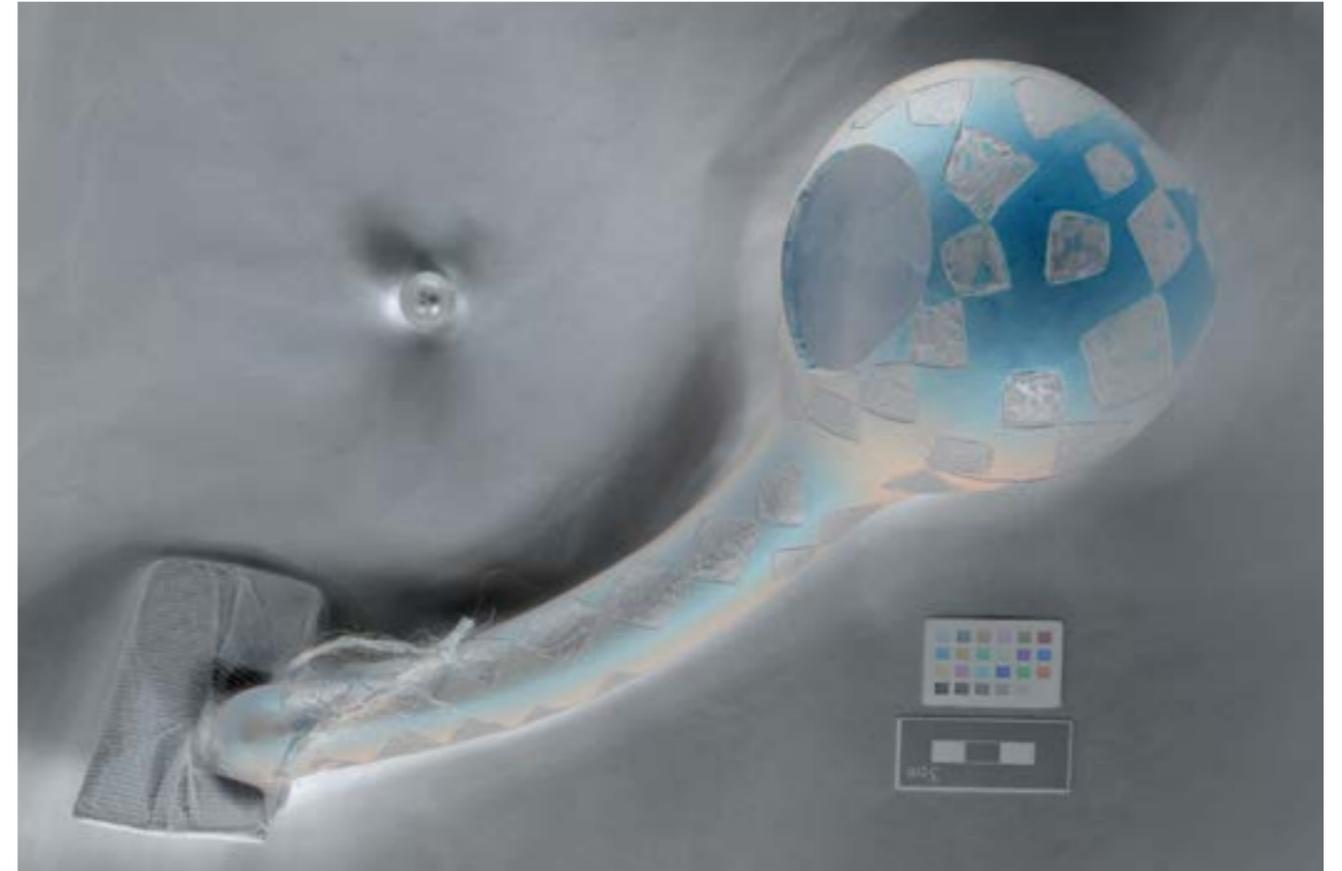
[54663 Gourd Beer ladle \(Collected by Thomas Baines\)](#)

[35581 Palm nut from Southern Nigeria](#)

[35553 Palm kernel from Gold Coast](#)

[67762 Shield from Brazil \(Spruce Collection\)](#)





Ian Dawson. Economic Botany Unit, Kew. Catalogue Number: 54663. 75.00 CUCURBITACEAE
Lagenaria siceraria: a beer ladle made from a gourd, under reflectance transformation imaging.



Thomas Allison, Digital Shebeen, fluid simulation, Digital Video, 01.20



Lennon Mhishi

The Cup from Which We Drink

This gourd, mukombe, carries and quenches.
 It is plant, of the earth, use, reuse, to come with the hands, the lips, the being-body
 into contact with the sorghum, and the millet, and the maize, and the keys of the
 mbira, and the thump thump thump of the drum in our hearts.
 Even within computation, other Shebeens are possible.



Bitter Harvest

Esi Eshun

The transnational nature of the Concepts Have Teeth and Prisoners of Love projects has opened up opportunities for exploring historical processes linking Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia. One area of enquiry relates to the global translocation of plants that formed part of what is known as the Columbian Exchange. Referring to the mass migrations of plants, animals, humans, microbes, technologies and cultural beliefs and practices in the wake of Columbus' arrival, on behalf of the Spanish crown, in the Caribbean in 1492, the term encapsulates a vast expansion of global trade set in train by new colonial and imperial networks that led to devastating consequences for Indigenous peoples and unprecedented wealth for colonising countries.

Following visits to Kew Gardens and the Pitt Rivers and Horniman Museums, we have been investigating ways in which peanuts, corn and cacao, and to a lesser extent, squash and oil palm, participated in social, cultural and environmental transformations as a result of the trade, with some of the graver repercussions continuing to reverberate on international and planetary levels today.

Thought to have evolved in the Amazon regions in and around Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Brazil, corn, cacao, peanuts and squash later spread - as a result of human cultivation some 3,500 years ago - to other parts of South and Central America and the Caribbean. Among the pre-Columbian Olmec, Mayan and Aztec peoples, some of these plants were endowed with sacred status, with cacao - a word derived from the Nahuatl (Aztec) word 'xocolatl' or 'bitter water' - considered a food of the gods, a belief reflected in the subsequent Latin translation, Theobroma Cacao, given to it by the 18th century founder of the botanical naming system, Carl Linnaeus. Consumed as a drink or medicine by Aztec royalty, merchants and warriors, the plant was considered important enough for the beans to be used as a currency, a practice which continued in the Yucatán region of Mexico until the last century.

Although peanut plants may not have been held in as high esteem as cacao, they were nonetheless widely distributed across the Americas where they served as ingredients for food, drinks, soap and medicine. In Peru, where it is thought that peanuts were reserved for the exclusive use of the nobility, they were consumed in ceremonial feasting and ritual burial settings. Archeological evidence for such ceremonies dating from around 750-500 BC reveals the presence of handfuls of nuts and other foods buried in terracotta jars alongside the mummified remains of the dead.

For the Spanish and Portuguese colonisers, the dreams of mineral riches believed to be recumbent in the body of the earth spurred the initial impetus for exploration and settlement in the Americas. In the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, now Haiti and the Dominican Republic, where Columbus established his first colony in 1492, he instituted a system of territorial ownership known as the encomienda, whereby land, persons and other 'natural resources' were taken into the possession of the Spanish crown. The system, in stark distinction to the local people's eschewing of ideas of individual land ownership, resulted in their enslavement. Under threat of brutal reprisals, they were forced to work in newly created silver mines and plantations, and while the system was later deemed illegal, its replacement, although not technically considered slavery, continued to involve the forced servitude and displacement of rural populations to newly created urban towns engineered for the purpose of acquiring a disposable labour force who could also be compelled to convert to Christianity.

The arrival of colonising forces in the Caribbean in particular was so catastrophic for the Indigenous peoples that it is estimated that by 1610, 90% of the original population had died, most succumbing to imported diseases such as smallpox, to which they had no immunity, while others died from forced labour conditions and still others died from attempts to resist their servitude. By 1502, the coloniser's solution to the population crisis - the four centuries' long practice of replacing the deceased workforce with millions of enslaved Africans - had already been established.

And yet, another less well known consequence of the population extinction can be seen in the profound changes to rural ecologies experienced in the region. While the Columbian Exchange brought significant new plant and animal species to the Americas - oranges, bananas, rice and wheat, and the horse, cattle, pig and sheep, being important examples - just as striking was the impact of now derelict farmland on the environment. As deserted farms underwent reforestation, they brought about a decrease in levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, with the year 1610, providing evidence for what has been termed the Orbis Spike, hypothesised as the first observable marker of anthropogenic climate change in history. According to geographers and climate scientists, Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, the date marks the effective beginning of the age of the Anthropocene, one which ties it irrevocably to the darker side of the colonial enterprise.

While agricultural production in the Americas quickly proved more lucrative than mining, elsewhere, the plants exported to Europe, Africa and Asia, met with differing fortunes. Corn was widely embraced, becoming the world's most populous grain and staple food crop, with its ability to adapt to the hot, dry conditions in Africa believed to have played a part in helping bring about sustained population growth and the consolidation of internal empires within the continent.

Meanwhile, peanuts, transported to West African coastal countries by Portuguese traders in the 1500s were readily embraced by local people, who, recognising their close resemblance to an existing legume, quickly adopted them as a staple part of the diet. Such was their value that peanuts are said to have been introduced to North America on board slave ships where they were exported as food for African captives. Once in North America and the Caribbean, the enslaved grew them in the small provisions gardens they were sometimes allowed to maintain for feeding themselves and for trading on a limited level on the black market. For all these reasons then, it's perhaps not surprising to learn that peanuts were shunned by the wider American population, who saw them as a food fit only for slaves and for use as pig fodder.

Across the Atlantic in Europe meanwhile, the trade in peanuts began to flourish with the expansion of the Industrial Revolution in the early 1800s. A worldwide shortage of ingredients for use as fuel and machine grease brought such an increase in demand for peanut oil that the nuts became one of the continent's most valuable commodities, with France its largest importer. In its West African colony of Senegal, a vast tract of land known as the Peanut Basin was dedicated exclusively its cultivation, with demand driving a partial revival of the slave economy, years after it was officially made illegal.



In the United States, peanuts began to find favour only after they introduced as a nutritious food for troops during the Civil War and successive world wars. Advances in shelling technologies, together with their sale as snacks during baseball matches and at PT Barnum's famous circus, also played a part in their popularisation, as did the work of scientist George Washington Carver, born into slavery c.1864. Carver demonstrated 105 possible uses of the plant, helping, as a consequence, to bring about a shift from the American South's over reliance on soil-degraded cotton plantations, to a more diverse peanut based agricultural economy. Meanwhile, in the 1890s, the inventor of the cornflake, John H Kellogg, is reputed to have been one of several people likely to have invented the now ubiquitous peanut butter.

In Mexico, cacao had been traditionally drunk mixed with cold water, corn and spices such as chilli peppers. But once transported to Spain, it became a luxury item, drunk mainly by royalty and other elites, who replaced the corn with sugar, and the chillis, with cinnamon and vanilla. In the 1600s in Britain, the drink was enjoyed by the wealthy in fashionable Chocolate Houses, where it was consumed hot with added milk. In the 19th century, Quaker families such as the Cadburys, Frys and Rowntrees, began to manufacture chocolate as a confectionery, and it was promoted by them and other abolitionists and temperance campaigners as a morally sound product and a wholesome alternative to alcohol. However, since chocolate, as we know it, was produced with copious amounts of sugar, its manufacture continued to facilitate the plantation system it ostensibly set out to challenge. To serve increases in demand, cacao came to be planted more widely across the colonised world - primarily in Brazil, the Caribbean, the Philippines, Indonesia, and in what is now Ghana and the Ivory Coast. By the early twentieth century however, the largest base for its supply could be found on the Portuguese colonies of São Tomé and Príncipe, located off the coast of West Africa. Known as the 'Chocolate Islands', they were the site, in the 1900s, of a scandal relating to the slave-like working conditions of indentured labourers in which Cadburys found themselves heavily embroiled.



Project Exhibitions

Prisoners of Love,
Vestibule, Lethaby Gallery, London

OST,
OPENing, Bank, London

Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Space Time,
Hess Gallery, University of Lethbridge, Canada

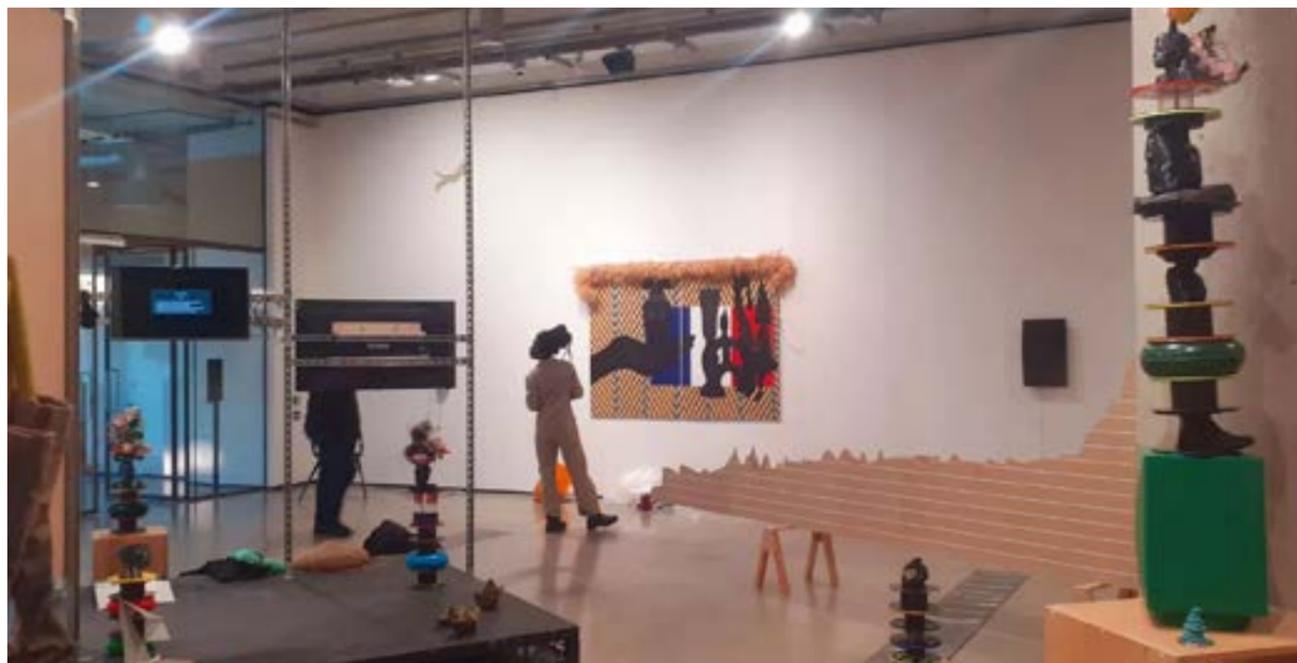
Agents of Deterioration,
Sideshow, Lethaby Gallery, London



**Prisoners of Love, Vestibule, Lethaby Gallery, London
January 2023**

A public exhibition bringing together UK artist participants within a set of discursive contexts, preparing for expanding the project to explore collaborations with project partners.

Prisoners of Love, Vestibule, Lethaby Gallery, London January 2023



Rihanata Bigey, Joseph Ijoyemi, Dawn Codex, Adanma Nwankwo, Compound 13 Lab & Ian Dawson, Louisa Minkin, Rabiya Nagi, Charles Nyiha, Esi Eshun,



Rihanata Bigey, Allons! Enfants de la PatrieX2,
Acrylic on canvas 150 x 100 cm (60x40); 2023

Events:

Disruptions: power dynamics of acquisition.

Anjalie Dalal Clayton, Sara David, Esi Eshun, Lennon Mhishi, Louisa Minkin, Raksha Patel, Judy Willcocks, Siyan Zhang

This conversation explored the power dynamics of acquisition in museums and galleries. From researching existing collections to surface bias to working with acquisition selection panels, commissioning new work and working for restitution and reparation. What is a collection? What does it mean to have your work accessioned? We reflected on the power dynamics of selecting student work for the UAL collection and how they have been overturned as well as situating this work of disruption within its broader, urgent and ongoing political context.

The Quiet Object, Esi Eshun, a performance reading.

Invocation Charles Nyiha

“Invocation”, an ambient piece of music composed by Charles Nyiha, invites you to explore the relationship between institutionalized objects and their longing for freedom. This musical work subverts the traditional boundaries of inanimate objects by envisioning the emotions and desires of archived recordings in museums. Through the use of intricate soundscapes and emotive melodies, the listener is led on a journey to contemplate the meaning of objecthood and the power dynamics of preservation and representation within the museum context.

How do you caption smoke? #1 & #2

Elisa Adami & Marenka Thompson-Odlum

Artist Name, Title of Work, year, material, dimensions, provenance, credits. Few things are as rote and conventional as the captioning of artworks. And yet, in spite of their apparent neutrality and objectivity, captions fundamentally determine the ways we access (or don't access) artworks. What if we were to rethink and expand the space of the caption? What if the writing surrounding the artwork became a new portal or a vestibule – a space for lingering on and reimagining at the threshold of the artwork? How do you caption smoke? comprises two workshops of caption writing aimed at rethinking how we write around artworks so that we access them otherwise.

During workshop #1, Marenka Thompson-Odlum discussed museological conventions of captioning and labelling, and the taxonomies of coloniality that shape and sustain them. We tested and tried out forms of writing that criticise and undo these conventions, while opening up space to tell new stories.

During workshop #2, we considered the practice of alt-texts (or image descriptions for non-sighted audiences) as a space of translation that generates new possibilities of engagement and interaction with artworks and audiences. Looking at the work of artists like Khairani Barokka and Christine Sun Kim, we experimented with forms of captioning that radically expand access and transform our relationship with artworks.

OST, OPENing Project Space, Bank, London Residency: August and September 2023

In September 2023 UK project participants shared a residency at OPENing, the CSM Art Programme artist-led space in Bank, London. The OST residency exhibition was documented as a 25min video by Helen Robertson and produced OSTzine with essays by Lennon Mhishi and Esi Eshun.

OST was documented in OSTzine, appended.

OST, OPENing Project Space, Bank, London Residency: August and September 2023



We are ghOSTed.

Reflectance Transformation Imaging makes visible the timespace of the erased and overlooked. We are haunted in this old underground bank at the heart of the City of London by hOSTs of ghOSTs. The building is a shell holding itself up by memory, being prepared for regeneration. Lost rivers echo in the basement. Traces of past occupation point to the future, divining by acronym:

Open Source Threat,
Outer Space Treaty,
Observed Survival Time.

For the past year we have been working and talking, thinking about material culture, cultural capital, power and estrangement. We've visited with entities in museum stores, jumped time zones and calibrated calendars to make connections.

We present here actions, images, sounds and objects.

On Second Thoughts..
Original Sound Track...



Dawn Codex Installation and performance
OST exhibition.

Here the City of London is reimagined as a future indigenous site powered by artificial intelligence, inhabited by different versions of herself. Exploring ideas of technomancy and psychogeography, this installation is a cyber-invocation of her future alter-ego (Six), creating a divinatory performative presence both in situ and on a public dating site. Combining found objects, handmade oracle cards, moving image and sound, Dawn invites the visitor to engage with Six in an embodied performance based on the aisle and the altar. This work seeks to excavate the colonial history of the City of London, disrupting our ideas of linear time and consumerist thought; for Dawn it is also a mechanism for retrieving the lost rites of her personal ancestry.





Rhihanata Bigey installing at OST, 2023

Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Space Time
Hess Gallery, University of Lethbridge
November - December 2023

Work developed at OPENing was subsequently exhibited at the Hess Gallery, University of Lethbridge, Canada. The exhibition Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Space-time, was developed in partnership with the Indigenous Art Program at University of Lethbridge.



Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Space Time
Hess Gallery, University of Lethbridge
November - December 2023



Alyssa Gault, Ang Crandell, Christina Douvis, Haley Platt, Isabel Nielson, Kathy Medicine Crane, Michaela Kozak, Myah Sluik, Tatiana Weasel Moccassin, Walker English, Zoe Buckskin, Helen Robertson, Ian Dawson, Dawn Codex, Compound 13 Lab, Esi Eshun, Mame Afua Mensah, Rabiya Nagi, Rihanata Bigey, Louisa Minkin, Michael Curran, Joseph Walsh, Adanma Nwankwo, Joseph Ijoyemi, Charles Nyiha, Deserae Tailfeathers, Darby Herman, Thomas Allison

This exhibition explored creating in relationship to historical cultural material that is housed in British museums and featured physical and digital artwork by University of Lethbridge Indigenous Art Program students as well as artists living in the UK and in Ghana. Expanding from the Mootookakio'ssin research project, the exhibition spanned the gap in space and time between contemporary artists and historical cultural material that is separated from homelands.



Walker English (Piita-Kyatsis) In(hair)itance Digital video, sound, 10:49, 2023

Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Spacetime is an exhibition as process, an exhibition that experiments with what an art gallery can be, and whom it serves. Students enrolled in Indigenous Art Studio (Fall 2023) at ULethbridge created their works in the gallery space, transforming the gallery into a Collective Studio. Over several weeks of discussion, self-reflection, study, and consultation, Indigenous Art Studio students chose projects that were personally meaningful to them. Critique of museum practices, healing from generational trauma, reimagining of culturally important stories and materials, the search for comfort and interactivity in the art gallery: these among others are topics which the Indigenous Art Studio classroom has taken on in this exhibition. While these themes are not always easy to engage with, it is the hope that by creating in spacetime around these stories, we can bring knowledge and healing to our many communities. Students expanded their project ideas from this with the support of the ULethbridge Art Gallery staff and visiting artist Louisa Minkin. Prisoners of Love project artists zoomed in from Accra, Ghana and London UK during the installation of the show.

“This exhibit addresses Indigenous peoples’ right to determine their own cultural expression and unique relationships to traditional objects and material practices,” says Migueltzinta Solís. “It’s also an important platform for intelligent and creative critiques of colonial and Western museum practices.”



Mame Afua Mensah, Keteke, Digital Print, 2023

Adanma Nwankwo, Rings of Time, tracing paper and pen, bronze cast, 2023

Joseph Ijoyemi, Free the Obas, Digital Print, 2023

Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Spacetime bridges gaps between historical cultural material housed in museums and contemporary artists. For the past few years, Blackfoot Elders, artists, scholars, and museum professionals living on Blackfoot Territory and in Britain have been working together, talking, and thinking about material culture, cultural capital, power, and estrangement. We’ve visited with historical cultural material in museum collections, survived the pandemic, jumped time zones, and calibrated calendars to make connections. Always guided by the Blackfoot principle that we have a responsibility to share and to care for knowledge, teaching and learning is at the core of our work.



Rabiya Nagi, Ravens, Banks and Museums, paper and ink, 2023



Thomas Allison, Digital Shebeen, fluid simulation, Digital Video, 01.20

Louisa Minkin, Shifts and Expedients, dimensions and materials variable, ongoing.

Installed at Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Space Time,
Hess Gallery, University of Lethbridge, Canada.



Shifts and Expedients

This apparatus is an improvised balance. A stick covered in cloth, a hook, pivot and a bronze weight, in this case, Adanma Nwankwo's heart. What is in the balance? A 3D print of an abducted gourd vessel, a shabby ill-made pair of trousers. Keeping the balance depends on keeping the items apart. As a viewer moves, air currents cause the apparatus to rotate and shudder, destabilising the equilibrium

Variable materials:

bioplastic prints -corn cob, cacao pod and peanuts.,

copper, pivot, bean bags and clothing sewn from plant-dyed cloth.

mugwort and sticks from Burgess Park, Southwark, London

watercolour of a Quagga, from the series Extinct, 2009

3D print from a scan of Catalogue Number: 54663. 75.00 CUCURBITACEAE

Lagenaria siceraria: a beer ladle made from a gourd collected by artist Thomas Baines in Zimbabwe and now in the Economic Botany Collection at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew.

In 1858 Baines accompanied David Livingstone on his expedition along the Zambezi.

In 1869 he led a gold-prospecting expedition to Mashonaland.

He died in Durban in 1875 aged 54.

Latitude 19°42'10" South

08-Aug John Fontein shot a quagga, the meat was slightly strong. Jan Vrei had worn the same trousers from Maritzburg, but there were no spare, so Baines cut out a piece of duck and by evening they were completed.

25-Oct Trekked early before halting at Biles' Pool to fill water casks and cut a log of baobab wood for Kew and other museums.

21-Nov Inyassi begs for some trousers, but as there are none, Baines cuts out a piece of duck for him and by the afternoon he has the trousers.

From: *The northern goldfields diaries of Thomas Baines*, edited by J. P. R. Wallis, London, Chatto & Windus, 1946

**Agents of Deterioration,
Sideshow, Lethaby Gallery, London
January 2024**

Agents of Deterioration invited contributions from all project participants.



AOD Logo materialised from Esi's misaligned scan of a compass and a yew sprig.

... thinking with pre twentieth century Ghanaian gold weights and Soul Washer's discs which also express meaning and stories through their forms, and in the case of the discs through ritual enactments. The discs are gold plates worn across the chests of members of a Ghanaian chief's retinue, intended to cleanse the atmosphere around him. With no access to gold, what might a future degraded version look like and what might it be used to purify?

Esi Eshun

AGENTS OF



DETERIORATION

ESI ESHUN, DAWN CODEX, CHARLES NYIHA, IAN DAWSON, DESERAE TAILFEATHERS, ADANMA NWANKWO, DARBY HERMAN, LOUISA MINKIN, SERENE WEASEL TRAVELLER, THOMAS ALLISON, MAME AFUA MENSAH, RAYYA KHURI, HELEN ROBERTSON, JOSEPH IJOYEMI, RABIYA NAGI, MIGUELTZINTA SOLIS, WALKER ENGLISH, KYLIE FINEDAY, RAINE CRANDALL, RIHANATA BIGEY, FUNGAI MARIMA.

WORKS FROM THE CSM MUSEUM STUDY COLLECTION:

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON: BIRDS OF AMERICA

CORNELIA PARKER, MARK WALLINGER, YINKA SHONIBARE: BUGS, A PORTFOLIO

10TH - 12TH JANUARY 2024

OPEN 11AM - 6PM

**SIDESHOW, LETHABY GALLERY,
1 GRANARY SQUARE LONDON N1C4AA**

PV: WEDS 10TH JANUARY 6-8PM

ARTISTS CONVERSATION: THURS 11TH JANUARY 1-2PM

LIVE PERFORMANCE: CHARLES NYIHA FRI 12TH JANUARY 5PM

Agents of Deterioration

Louisa Minkin

When applying risk management strategies to museum collections, risk is broken down according to ten agents of deterioration that pose threats to collections. Nine of these risks are physical (physical forces, fire, water, criminals, pests, pollutants, light, incorrect temperature, and incorrect humidity) and the tenth is custodial neglect, for example where a collection item may be disassociated from provenance. Museums generally suspend objects from use, touch and intervention in order to freeze or hold things in a state of torpor, preventing interactions in order to preserve. Many Indigenous peoples challenge the idea of preservation as a greater good, instead affirming the right to renew and use, enliven and care for objects as part of community life.

In this exhibition we are thinking about the erosion of colonial structures, for instance by directly drilling holes into the vitrines breaking the meniscus between viewer and exhibited items, but also in asking how can we engage publics directly in projects of recuperation and accountability? We encouraged visitors to examine and touch exhibits, actively engaging with the material.

Agents of Deterioration grew from an expansive, process-based methodology. The project is part of a rich ecosystem of work reconnecting UK museum collections with Indigenous knowledge via participatory methods and technological innovations. The Lethaby exhibition provided a meta-structure where works made over the course of the project and its exhibitions were re-assembled, reflecting back upon each other, some travelling digitally or materially from partners in Canada, India or Ghana. In being gathered together, a new collective work took shape, opening out resonances and connections. The spaces of the project as a whole (workshops, exhibition events) are moments of intersection and interaction between different processes and practices, creating new connections and insights that would not be possible through a single discipline or stakeholder group. The complexity of authorship, collectivity and relationality is literally put on the table, demonstrating the trust, generosity and risk-taking of all participant artists.

Migueltzinta Solis, leading the Indigenous Art Program project input from UoL speaks to how specific mediums and works are dependent on what the artists involved encountered and interpreted and how the work travelled - strategies common to artists working from non-dominant cultural perspectives and lived experiences. This strategy acknowledges the ways in which museums and galleries are not neutral sites, emphasizing, questioning, and counteracting their colonial coding. We might also reflect that authority and the capacity to wield power rests upon categorization and epistemology, and resistance implies the exploration and transgression of classificatory boundaries. Artists from Blackfoot Territory were generous in offering their work to be materialized, installed and brought into relation with other works. Some work went astray in the surface mail and took a long round trip between South-West Alberta and the UK without making the exhibition. The tracking tool mapping stops and starts as the package moved through the currents of the delivery system. Meantime, over the exhibition period, visitors were encouraged to take away 3D prints of peanuts, dispersing small, material tokens into many new circumstances and lives.

Interspersed into the vitrines are pieces from the CSM Museum and Study Collection. The first event of our project was a session on visual methodologies in the Study Collection. This session framed an idea, resonant within our broader community, of objects as curriculum. The late Blackfoot Elder Frank Weasel Head observed that for members of the Blackfoot community the objects held in UK museums are a curriculum. All museum items have the potential to teach. What we learnt very much depended on how we approached and intra-acted with the collection, in this case informed by inclusive and open-ended art practice.

The museum archive collection may be both a carceral container, and a site to be opened for innovation and learning. We were struck by the relation of particular items: project artist Darby Herman's digital painting of a soaring red-tailed hawk located within Blackfoot ways of knowing and Audubon's depiction of the same bird, talons protruding, fighting for prey in his 1827-38 *Birds of America*.

Within the AoD, vitrines were interspersed with prints from a series collectively entitled *Bugs*. Bug traps are familiar in collection stores, as a tool in the daily battle against deterioration.

We started to develop a sense of the ecology of the stores. The *Bugs* portfolio was published by the Byam Shaw School of Art in London. Produced as a fundraiser in 2000, the proceeds from the portfolio sales were dedicated to providing bursaries to support students from overseas. We included a print from Yinka Shonibare, a Grain Weevil facing off Esi Eshun's insectoid bronze compass, Mark Wallinger's potato print of neophyte potato pest Colorado Beetles and Cornelia Parker's dead spider from the Tower of London. Pests and hauntings. If a pest or a weed is something in the wrong place, doing the wrong thing, then is is a short step to figure displaced museum collection items as pests themselves, antagonists contained and sedated lest their hatching and stirring becomes a nuisance and disrupts business as usual.

In AoD we encounter some of the digital outputs of the project in the form of video animation and 3D print: concretising, giving weight, bringing into focus. These digital 3D models operate as border objects: annotated, animated, occupied: spectres perhaps. How do such proliferating entities fit into networks of kin and stranger? The ghost, encountered again and again and by many, makes memory accessible. Jason Edward Lewis talks about how Indigenous epistemologies wrong-foot the western technocratic project through expansive understandings of non-human kin. That might be digital synanthropes: household AIs, robot dogs, network daemons, programmable materials, printable micro-organisms, responsive dermo-plastics.

What movements come to bear in activating new forms of an object in digital spaces, the buffer zones where we may destabilise colonial imaginaries and paradigms? We get motion-sick in VR, accounted for as a disjunction between vision and balance. The nausea induced is symptomatic of the body voiding out poison. Spatial disorientation, hallucination, dissociation: symptoms of neurotoxins. Therapeutics of the Pharmakon: kill or cure. If this sick-space is concomitant with the loosening of secure disciplinary, biological and ontological perimeters, we see the need to work through the separation of senses that makes us unsettled and produce together better models for embodied virtuality as faculties for dream, imagination and knowledge exchange.

As Donna Haraway says: "To be a one at all you must be a many, and that's not a metaphor."

Lewis, J.E., Arista N., Pechawis A., Kite S., 2018, *Making Kin with the Machines*, Accessed online 13.03.2024 <https://jods.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/lewis-arista-pechawis-kite>

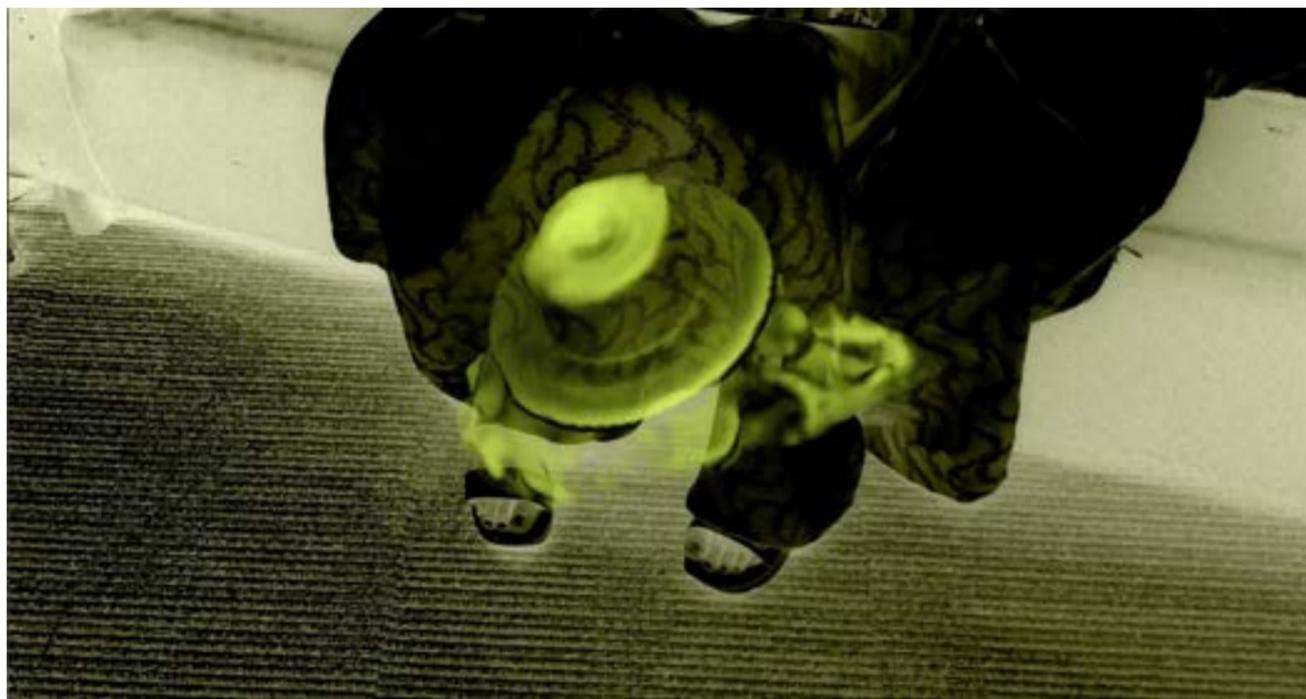
Haraway, D., 2016, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press.



CSM Study Collection Workshop. December 2022

Agents of Deterioration

Exhibited works



Interlochchia Part 1 2023

Esi Eshun

Digital Video, Sound, 03.37

Interlochchia is a fantastical tale woven around the figure of a mythical Plague Doctor, who, finding himself unemployed after the end of the Great Plague of 1665, decides to travel to Africa and the Americas in search of new plant remedies. In his quest, he is inspired by the work of real life naturalist, astronomer and cartographer, Georg Marcgraf or Marcgrave, whose masterful compendium, *Natural History of Brazil*, (1648) details the flora and fauna of the Pernambuco region of Brazil.

Pernambuco was the centre of a short lived Dutch colony in Brazil, whose Governor General, Count Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen sought to outline and capture in art and science all natural life there. It had an extremely high concentration of enslaved Africans, and from 1605-94, was the site of the world's largest maroon settlement, the Quilombo of Palmares, inhabited primarily by escaped Africans, but also by some indigenous peoples and marginalised Portuguese settlers.

Interlochchia is an invented word. However, googling it brings up an entry for Interlochen, a tiny community in Michigan with a population of 694. According to Wikipedia, "Interlochen takes its name from the Latin "inter", meaning "between", and the Scottish Gaelic "lochen", meaning lakes.

Before the arrival of European settlers, members of the Odawa people lived between the lakes they called Wahbekaness and Wahbekanetta (now named Duck Lake and Green Lake, respectively). The project will be developed further to explore some of these themes.



Bank Sequence

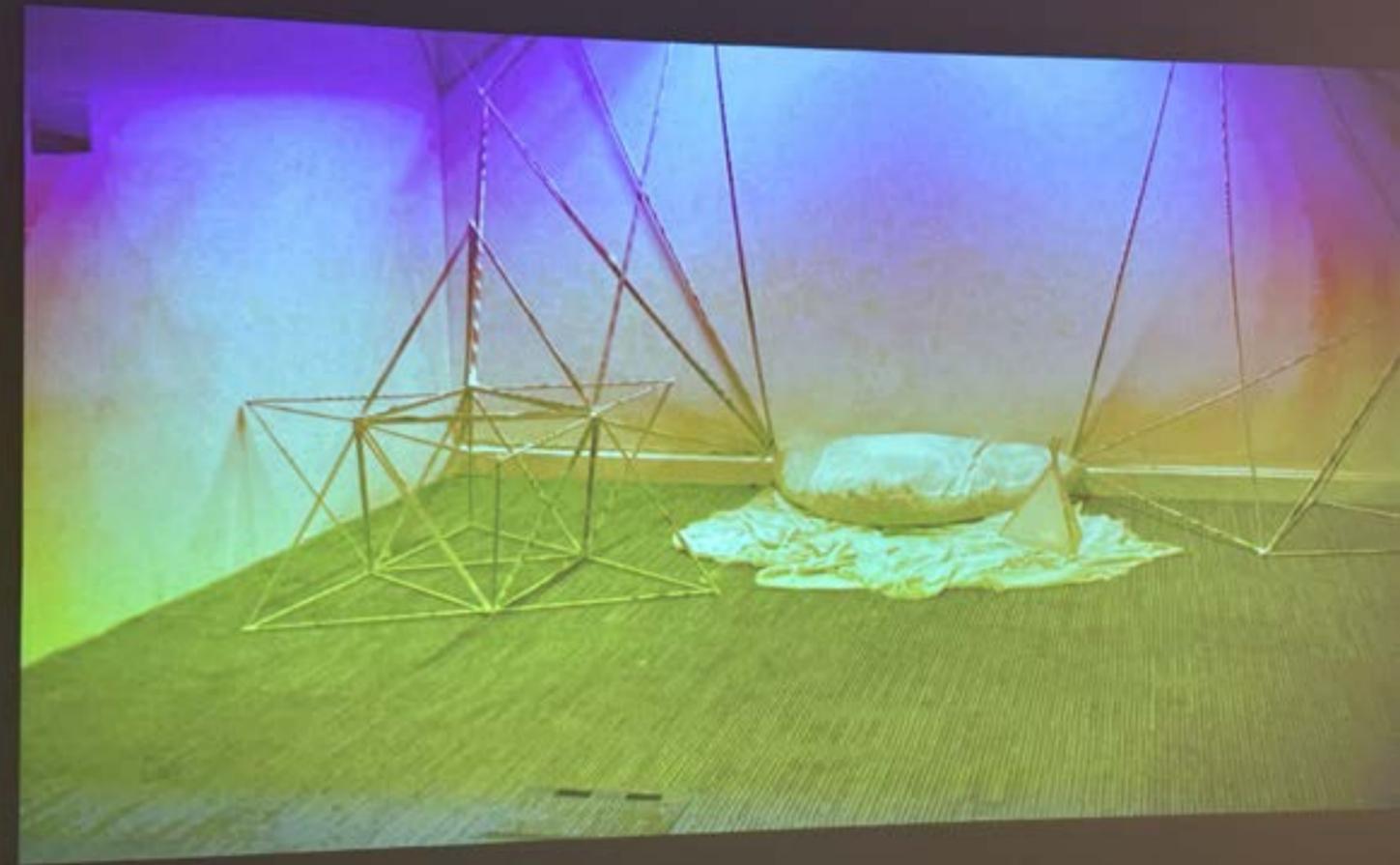
2023

Helen Robertson

Projected Digital Video, Sound 25:00

The film documents Ost the first iteration of a continuously evolving exhibition that took place in a disused bank in the City of London. In this film the architecture of the bank and an experience of the exhibited artworks are folded into each other as the camera moves into, around and through the exhibition rooms, corridors and installed works.

In Agents of Deterioration the latest iteration of this ongoing project Bank Sequence plays an earlier iteration of the evolving project back to itself. In the form of live projected light the film and its installation reflects on process and change - a to and fro between past and present - the right to renew and use. I am reminded of The Remembered film by Victor Burgin in which he ruminates on film and live relations to complex histories and material processes.



Bank Sequence installed at Mootookakio'ssin: Creating in Space Time, Hess Gallery, University of Lethbridge, Canada.



Gold Weight Animations 2023

Thomas Allison

Copper alloy weight for weighing gold, in the shape of a two peanuts in shell. 1987.33.35
Akan Ashante Gold Weight,
Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford



Confronting History in the Museum 2023

Lennon Mhishi

Digital Video, Sound, 06:30

The Decolonisation and Anti-Imperial Materialities Project
Infrastructures of Containment: Museums, Beyond and Possibilities into the Future

My project experiments and explores how museums develop simultaneously with, or alongside other infrastructures like the border, the reserve, camp, detention centre, the prison, and other technologies of containment. I will focus on some of the collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, particularly the African collections. Tracing elements of an enduring coloniality, I am interested in revealing the functioning of museums as 'containers', consisting of colonial collections as products of violence, extraction and dispossession. Whilst my research will also contend with how museums, in these processes claimed as preservation, also contain, through practices of, among other things, narration, display and erasure, the forms of knowledge, the histories and the possibilities in what become stultified objects, acquiring a different set of qualities. Concomitantly, infrastructures of bordering, detention and imprisonment are underpinned by the logics of carcerality that have also shaped museum practice. These infrastructures also 'contain' people, and in the frames of biopolitical governance, collapse their subjectivities into objects of risk, surveillance, and expulsion, also in the name of protection and preservation.

So how do we make use of the museum infrastructure, space, and contemporary art to explore and challenge these constraining legacies, and experiment different possibilities for museum practice, including beyond the museum in questions of knowledge, mobility and planetary futures.

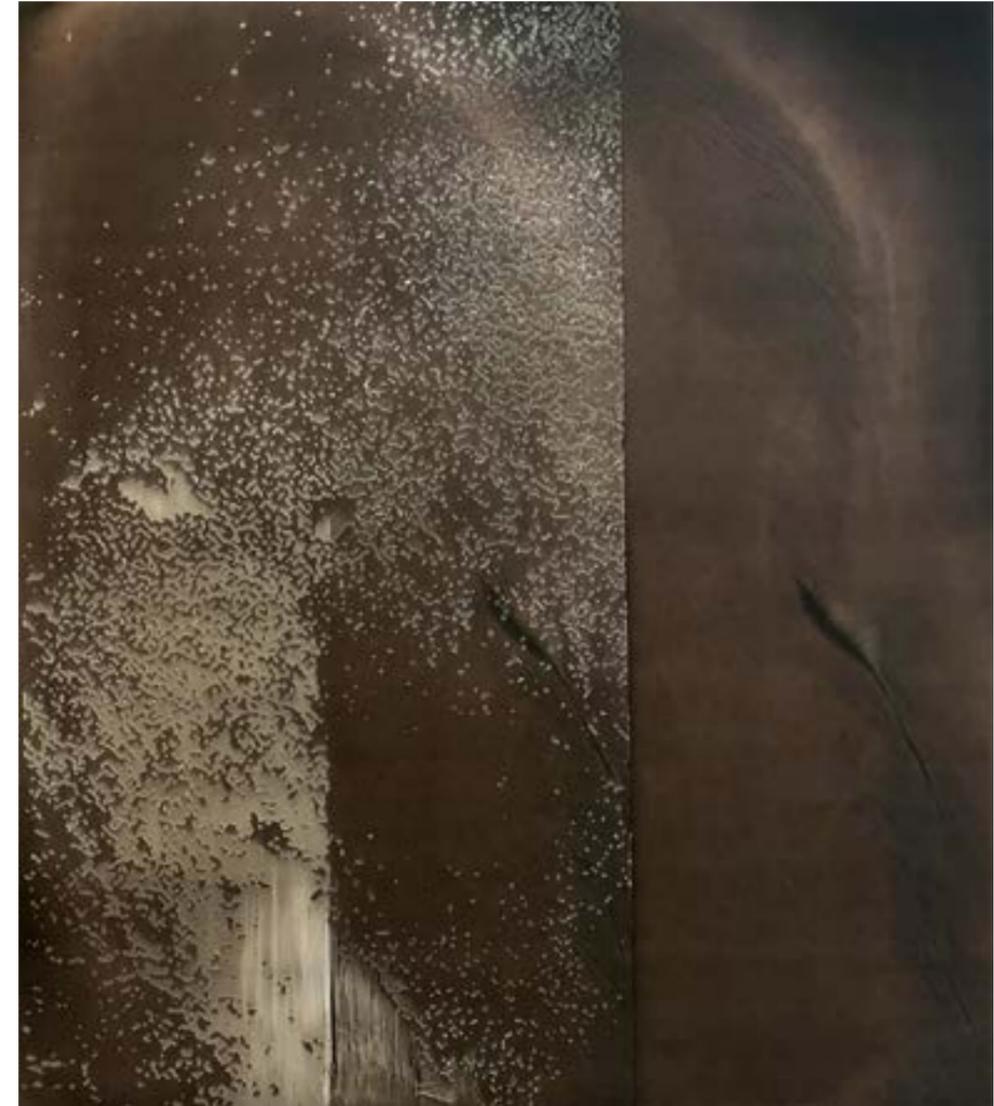


Feeling It Out 2022

Fungai Marima

digital video, sound, 01:36

Feeling It Out is a visual representation in video form of that moment in image making where you cannot quite find the right words or actions to articulate an idea. It is also made out of an interest in the history of hands and how they link us to our relatives. How hands are knowledge. I've been inspired by key text by Henri Focillon titled 'In Praise of Hands' an essay that suggests hands being our eyes to the world. We learn our surroundings as children through feeling textures, we learn temperatures, we also observe / are aware of our bodies through the relationship we have with our hands.



Untitled III (Map)

2020

Fungai Marima

Digital laser cut print on Somerset Paper, 100 x 90cm

Untitled III (Map) is part of a body of work that layers body scans onto digital printing and laser cut methods in looking at how to map out experiences of migration and the effects of migration on the body. I was interested in how knowledge is accessed through the bodies imprint onto the world in zooming in on the patterns of skin, that acts as roads or maps that lead us to alternatively understand our environments and experiences.



TIK NUGU
2023

Rihanata Bigey

12 prints, 21x29 cm each

This work is the first of a series, experimental at the moment, it's a work around Moore, a language that embodies Burkina Faso's diverse ethnic tapestry. It's about putting together Moore words with printed fragments and scars of my body and drawings that represent my childhood memories that serve as visual and linguistic exploration. The work serves as a link to a culture heritage, a narrative reclamation.



King Edward and the Colorado Beetle

2000

Mark Wallinger

Potato print on paper. 405 x 305 mm

From Bugs: A Portfolio.

This boxed portfolio of prints exists in an edition of ninety.

CSM Museum & Study Collection

P.2011.10.CC.10

Mark Wallinger's print, King Edward and the Colorado Beetle, refers to crop destruction. The Colorado beetle of the title is a small, yellow American beetle whose larva is exceedingly destructive to the potato. Wallinger's potato print uses as its medium the potential victim of the insect. Wallinger's work is one of a portfolio of ten prints collectively entitled Bugs. The portfolio was published by the Byam Shaw School of Art in London. Produced as a fundraiser, the proceeds from the portfolio sales were dedicated to providing bursaries to support Byam Shaw students from overseas, particularly those from Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa and India.



Compass

2023

Esi Eshun

Bronze cast of a compass



Grain Weevil

2000

Yinka Shonibare

Lithograph, 305 x 405 mm

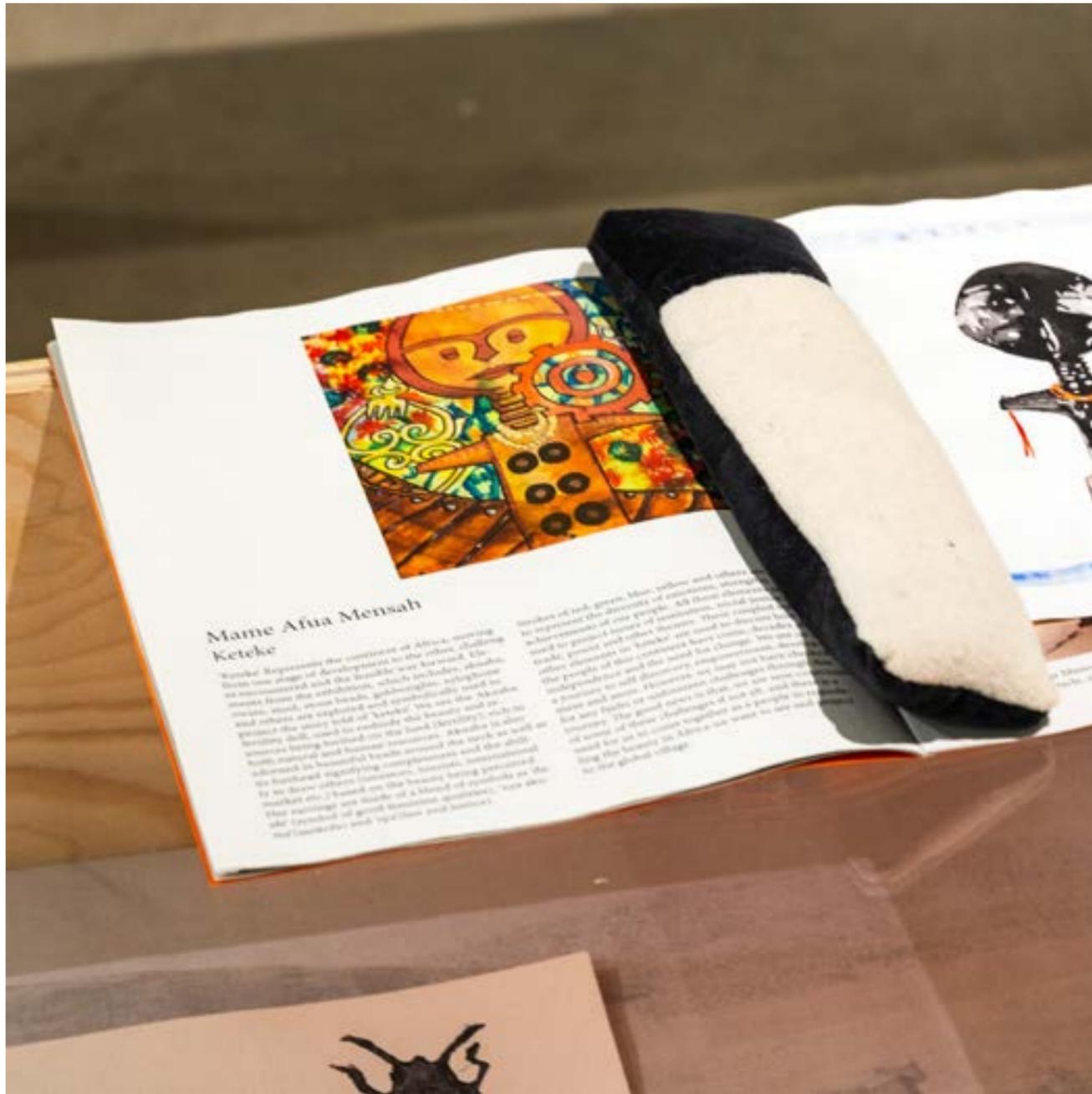
From Bugs: A Portfolio

This boxed portfolio of prints exists in an edition of ninety.

CSM Museum & Study Collection

P.2011.10.CC.8

Yinka Shonibare's arabesque lithograph, Grain Weevil, depicts a beetle that damages stored grain by boring into it in order to deposit its eggs. A glossy beetle is silhouetted against a matt orange background which is criss-crossed by curving black lines. The white spots that spread over the surface of the print are suggestive of both contamination and insect eggs. Shonibare's print is one of a portfolio of ten prints collectively entitled Bugs. The portfolio was published by the Byam Shaw School of Art in London. Produced as a fundraiser, the proceeds from the portfolio sales were dedicated to providing bursaries to support Byam Shaw students.



Keteke
2023

Mame Afua Mensah

OST zine



1938.8.1 Wooden Doll
2024

Louisa Minkin

Plotter drawing & watercolour on paper



Hawk
2023

Darby Herman

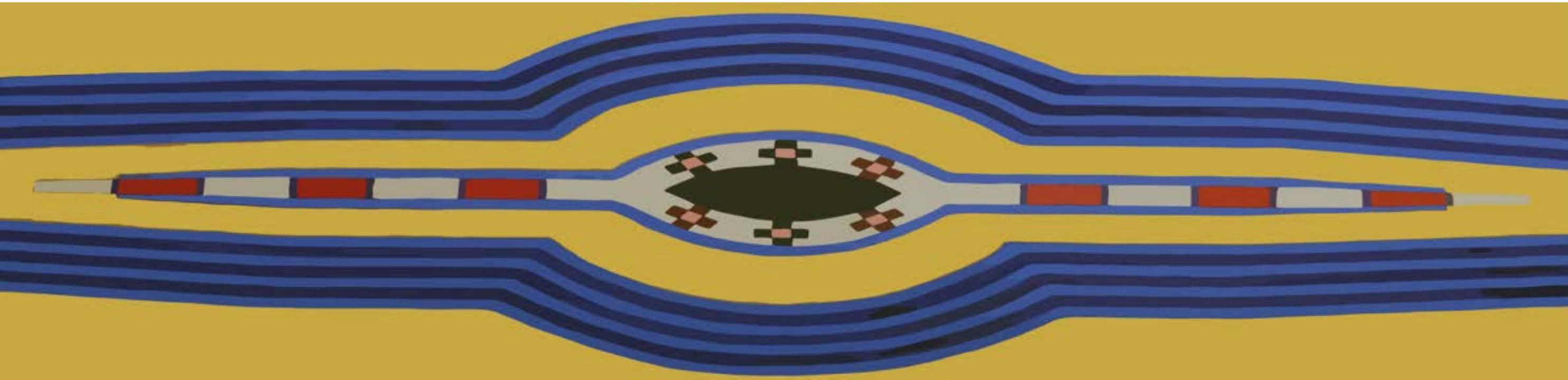
Zine documenting work from the project residency at OPENing, Bank in September 2023. Screenprinted cover, 36 pages.



Red-tailed Hawk
1937

John James Audubon

The Birds of America, CSM Museum & Study Collection, Object number: B.273




Old Sun's Daughter's Dress
2023
Serene Weasel Traveller

fabric print, 564mm x 2338mm

The dress Am1985.11.1 has an old label attached which the British Museum Collections Manager thinks pre-dates its accession into the Museum. This label says the dress belonged to Old Sun's daughter. Na to sa pi (Old Sun) was a successful warrior and medicine man who was chief of Siksika in the 19th century. He signed Treaty 7 for his band and Old Sun College was established in 1971 in his name (Old Sun Community College).

My work blends my Blackfoot culture with my western worldview. I look for the balance between the world of a Blackfoot woman from the Piikani Nation, and a resident of Canada. I am integrating representations of colonialism with my traditional cultural practices, by combining the two different elements, overplaying the notion of a cultural hybrid.

My work is a celebration of the adaptation, survival, and strength of all indigenous people. I pay special homage to the traditional Blackfoot territory, the land that has shaped and sustained the Blackfoot people from time immemorial.



5 copper copies

2023

Compound 13 Lab and Ian Dawson

3D printed in copper and bioplastic compound

Ghatam / 2007.454

Basket / Chata 19.5.48/385 chosen by Lata Nagarjan

Sickle / Eeli 19.5.48/05 chosen by Laxmi Kamble

Lamp / Samai 1993.81 chosen by Prutha Jain

Grinding stone pot / Ukal nn14263 chosen by Pooja Sherkhane

In January 2023 five members of The Compound 13 Lab in India chose 5 different objects from the digital database of the Horniman Museum in London. The Horniman objects that they chose related to items in common use in their community, ones that would be used and handled regularly during their daily lives. They also corresponded to familial items that had special resonance to them, the bladed object, Eeli, related to a vegetable slicer that had been passed down through generations of Laxmi's family. The objects were all 3D scanned during a remote viewing session between the Horniman Collections Centre and the Mumbai Lab space. Digital files of these objects were shared with members of the Compound and all 5 items were reprinted and shared within their community in Dharavi and beyond.



/imagine prompt: a looking glass

2023

Dawn Codex

Digital Video, Sound, 03:56

My imagined narrative of the demise of Artificial Intelligence exists in a perpetual now but also in a perceived past. It is a ruin in which my many selves are trapped and sentenced to eternal life in algorithms that cannot die. I experience self as a plurality through a synthetic creature-mind (CM) that can only mimic but not feel. I submit my ideas to this CM and receive its visual interpretations in return. The submission is a means to disrupt the CM with organic natural thought.



Artefact 2: In my future I will forget to remember me

2023

Dawn Codex

Digital Print

The instant/polaroid style images are receptacles for a future, imagined as a past. Cyber-generated images of the artist's future selves trapped in vintage style photographs.



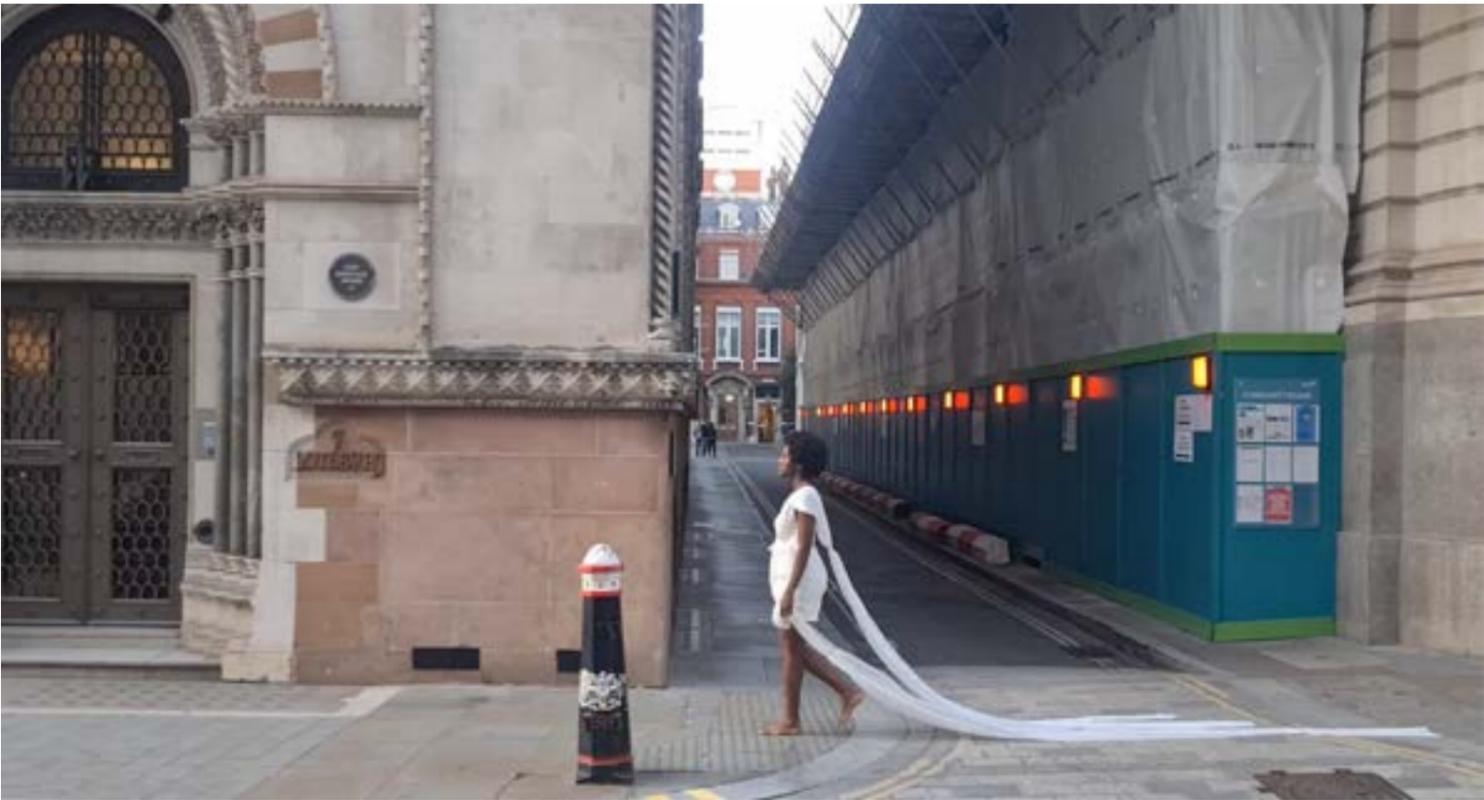


360 Treaty 7 Site 2023

Mootookakio'ssin Project

fabric print, 564mm x 2338mm

The site of the signing of Treaty and Supplementary Treaty No. 7 between Her Majesty the Queen and the Blackfeet and Other Indian Tribes, at the Blackfoot Crossing of Bow River and Fort Macleod. Treaty 7 is the last of the Numbered Treaties made between the Government of Canada and the Plains First Nations. It was signed on 22 September 1877 by five First Nations: the Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), Piikani (Peigan), Stoney-Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina (Sarcee). Different understandings of the treaty's purpose, combined with significant culture and language barriers and deliberate attempts to mislead the First Nations on the part of the government negotiators, have led to ongoing conflicts and claims.



Shadow ~ River Goddess 2023

Adanma Nwankwo

Performance Documentation: Digital Video, Sound, 40:00

She walks upon the land that's engulfed her and across the street that used to bear witness to her magnificent stream, now wearing fluid fabric streams of her own. Shadow, once a personification of the artist's subconscious, now manifests as a human embodiment of the Walbrook River. In this piece, the artist explores the themes of memory, time and the repression and pollution of nature using the Walbrook as her case study



Treaty 7 Medal 1977



*1977 Blackfoot Crossing Commemorative Medal Treaty No 7.
This medal was given to a First Nation's signatory to Treaty 7, concluded between the Canadian government and the Niisitapiikwan (Blackfoot Confederacy) and its allies.*



Treaty 7 360 2023

Thomas Allison

Digital Video, 01:00

Blackfoot items from Hastings Museum & Art Gallery; Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen and National Museums Scotland re-lit with a 360 HDRI from the site of the signing of Treaty and Supplementary Treaty No. 7 between Her Majesty the Queen and the Blackfeet and Other Indian Tribes, at the Blackfoot Crossing of Bow River and Fort Macleod.





Shadow ~ River Goddess 2023

Adanma Nwankwo

Dress from the performance

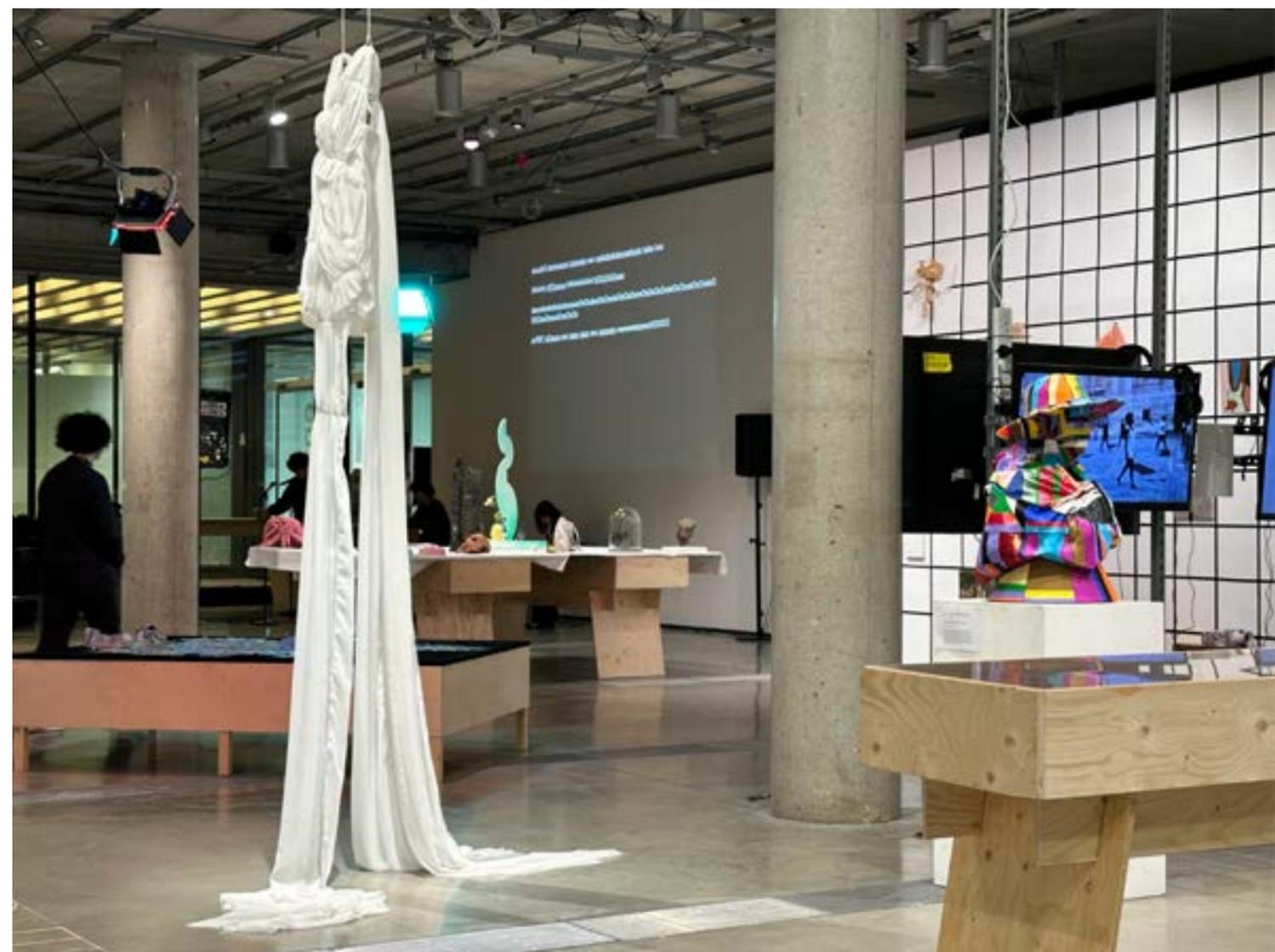


Black Ball Ballads 2023

Ian Dawson

Digital Video, Sound, 55:00

During the Mootookakio'ssin project, Blackfoot belongings held in UK museums were recorded using a variety of digital imaging processes in order to virtually reconnect them with their people. One of these technologies, Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI), creates interactive pictures where lighting conditions can be altered afterwards. RTI creates lighting effects akin to a diffractive process, because of this RTI was also used in workshop environments to help demonstrate and explain how images are never innocent representations of a subject and actively participate in the emergence of meaning. Experimenting with RTI became an intrinsic part of this project and Black Ball Ballads documents these experiments with RTI. One of the constancies of the process is a black shiny ball which always appears in the photographic frame. Through an animation of the various images created during this project Black Ball Ballads tells a story of the project through the pictures that slowly evolve across the screen.





Deserae Tailfeather's Artwork 2023

Deserae Tailfeathers & Ian Dawson

Bioplastic print, 70cm x 50cm x 60cm

On Wednesday August 23rd 2023 a folder was shared by Deserae Tailfeathers and Christine Clark in Canada. It contained a 3D scan of a beaded hat made by Deserae Tailfeathers. The Beaded Hat was being worn by Deserae's mother, Sharon. Deserae is a research assistant on the Mootookakio'ssin project which aims to create a path to reconnect Blackfoot knowledge and Blackfoot identity with Blackfoot objects held in UK Museums. Ian rescaled, hollowed and sliced the scan into 80 printable sections and printed the parts between August 25th and September 3rd 2023 before 'stitch-welding' them together.



In(hair)itance 2023



Walker English (Piita-Kyatsis)

Digital video, sound, 10:49

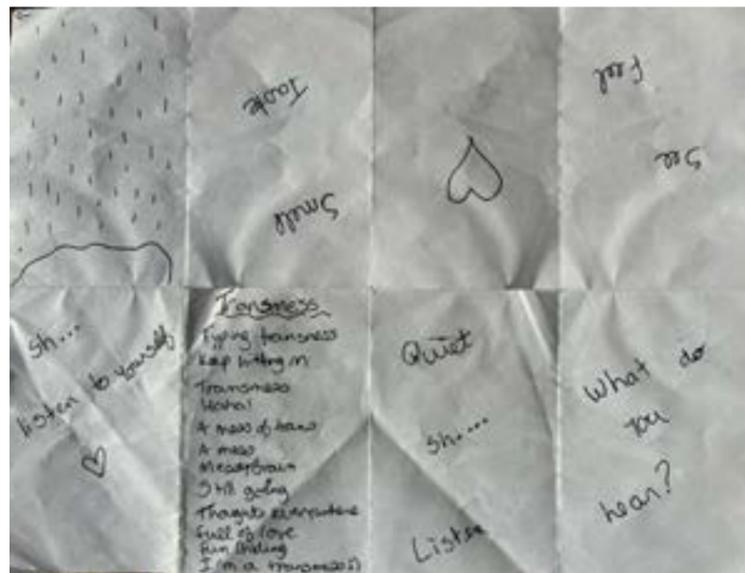
From October 16th to December 9th 2023, myself and peers from the Indigenous Art Studio Class: Creating In Spacetime (Mootookakio'ssin) participated in a collective studio with the Dr. Margaret (Marmie) Perkins Hess Gallery at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. For the next seven weeks, my peers and I took care, time, attention, and skill in creating works in the gallery that were rooted in our own cultural experiences. We had the opportunity to use the gallery as our studio space and were able to witness each other's creative processes. In-(hair)itance is a mixed-media, video, performance piece that explores themes of self/external perception, Indigenous bodily autonomy, personal identity, and resilience.



Are You Tired? 2023

Migueltzinta Solís

This flyer invites surrender.
Please tear off and keep a tag!



Transmess 2023

Raine Crandall

Zine

Raine is a queer, trans person, settler on Blackfoot land, born, raised, and continues to live in Lethbridge, AB, Canada. Raine's zine is an activation of a previous piece that was intended to be interactive, for neurodiverse, queer, trans people attempting to live through the university experience. Themes of intentionally creating space, opportunities for self-reflection for queer and trans people specifically, and the idea of 'safe spaces', questioning inherent structures of cisgender, heterosexual, neurotypical, and whiteness built into galleries. How do people who do not fit these extremely embedded rules make space for ourselves? Then, how can galleries purposely create space and place as well? Art and life are messy, and that is okay. Raine hopes some people will find a small piece of comfort while reading Transmess.



Host 2023

Esi Eshun

Digital Video, 01:20

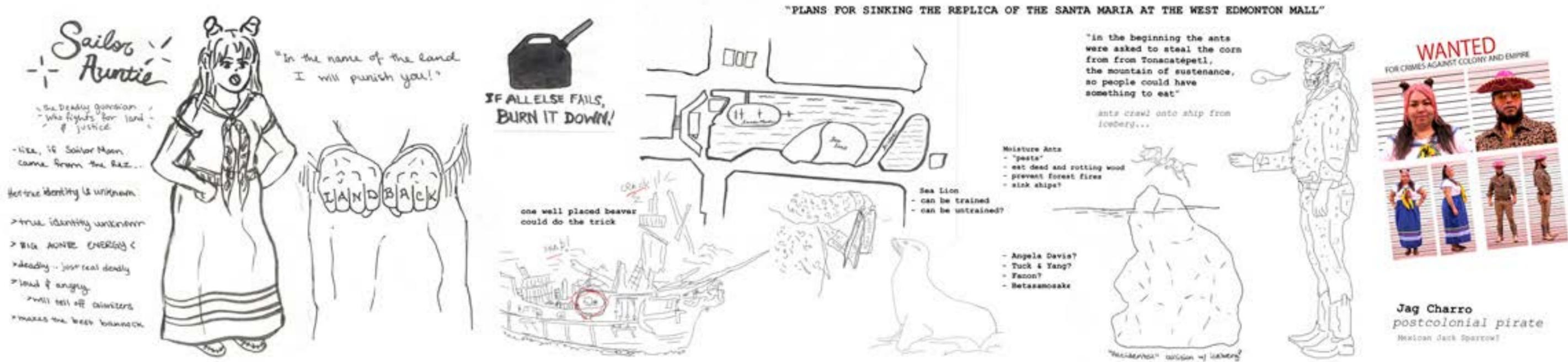


I am Six 2023

Dawn Codex

Digital Video, sound 01:20





Plans for Sinking the Replica of the Santa Maria at the West Edmonton Mall

2023

Kylie Fineday & Migueltzinta Solís

fabric print, 564mm x 2338mm

To reclaim what's been lost to empire, we must turn to the experts of anti-colonial subterfuge. The West Edmonton Mall is the second largest mall in North America, an ode to Canada's aspirational capitalism founded on inequitable colonial trade systems. Until recently, a large replica of a galleon ship, located near the mall's now defunct aquarium attraction, bore the name "Santa Maria," after one of Columbus's ships. This work proposes planning as an act of resistance, where the envisioning of subversion opens up potential for Indigenous futurities. Two hardened agents of demolition are on the job.



Revival Boats 2023

Joseph Ijoyemi

Alumbro Muntz metal plates removed from the bottom of the hull of the "Cutty Sark" in the course of repairs to the ship in 1963. Greenwich: The Cutty Sark Society, 1963. Folded into origami boats

"Revival Boats" is a fleet of origami sculptured boats made from alumbro metal that responds to the experiences of second-generational migrants from Africa who choose to return to their ancestral land to rebuild and reconnect with their roots. The artwork explores the theme of revival, symbolising the resurgence of cultural identity, heritage, and community bonds. "Revival Boats" celebrates the courage and determination of second-generational migrants who choose to rebuild their lives in Africa, seeking to heal historical wounds and forge a path towards a brighter future. It offers a poignant reminder of the enduring strength and resilience of individuals and communities, as they navigate the complexities of identity, belonging, and the pursuit of a sense of home.



The journey collecting the alumbro metal from the National Maritime Museum Stores

2022

Joseph Ijoyemi

Digital Video, Sound, 02.06



Fabric repurposed for Pitt Rivers Museum Education and Engagement Resource.

Bag containing 3D bioplastic prints of gold weights and objects scanned by students in response.



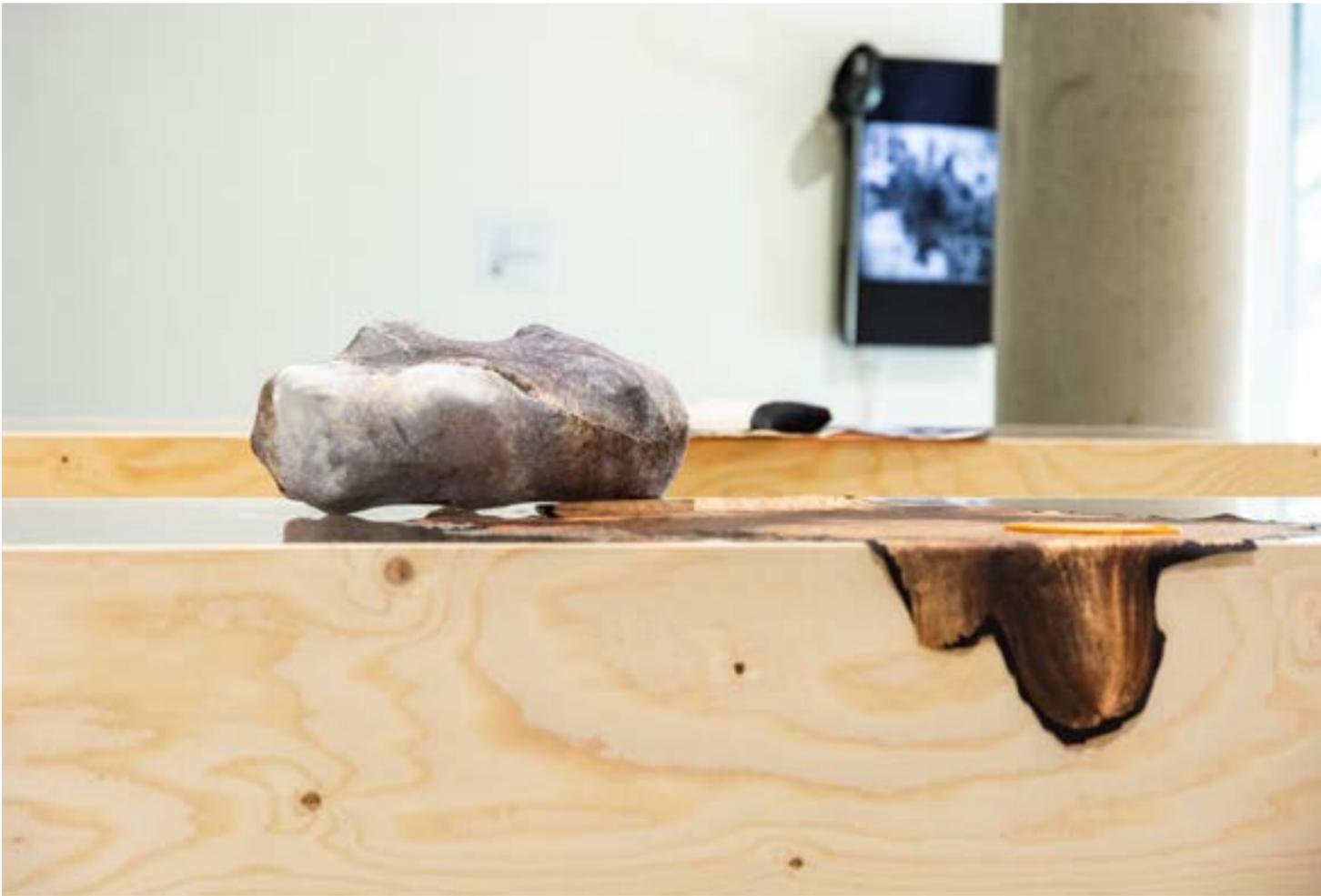
Demolition Hoarding 2023

Louisa Minkin

fabric print, 564mm x 2338mm

Skin file for a model of hoardings at Oval, London.

Data capture produced new objects: things we compiled, fabricated, rigged and assembled. Bundles, pelts, skins and shells. Re-purposed proto-objects, unwrapped UV maps. Such engagements led us to consider the anatomy, pathology and ontology of a digital model. We developed a sense of the ecology of the digital synanthrope, neophyte familiars and pest species nesting in the midden, breeding exponentially in the image-dump, spinning webs in the dark spaces. Our method here is that of the fox, digging holes in the section, queering the strata for reasons of our own. We want to talk about the possibilities this project opened out for socio-technical network-ing: the activation of digital remnants - the taphonomy of expropriated artefacts in UK collections



Skins and Stones 2023

Mootookakio'ssin Project

bioplastic and copper 3D prints, skin file fabric prints,

Photogrammetry provides 'rich' data to populate virtual reality, allowing lost or fragile objects to be exposed, scrutinised and 'handled'. Digital objects data-scavenged from the material world, are typically produced as hollow, somehow akin to Benjamin's description of the discarded fetish or second nature: an alienated, reified and dead world. Data here takes on a new presence as skin; a digital flaying or appropriation. Data capture is a form of spoliation; the stripping of assets in economic terms. Digital capture data is processed to produce skeuomorphs. A skeuomorph is etymologically a container-form. As an archaeological term it denotes artefacts made from one material to imitate a form usually made from another. The retention of form but change of materiality is a familiar trope in art practice. (Minkin 2016)



Artefact 1: 7 Gates 2023

Dawn Codex

Ink on Paper

Using an accordion-book form, this artefact is based on a square, alluding to 'the square mile' – the financial district of London. The City of London and its 7 gates form a psycho-geographic basis for a cyber-indigenous terrain, inhabited by the artist's future selves.





Black Ball Ballad Reprise 2023

Ian Dawson

Digital Video, Sound, 16.26

Reflectance Transformation Imaging documentation of the OST exhibition at OPENing,

During the Mootookakio'ssin project, Blackfoot belongings held in UK museums were recorded using a variety of digital imaging processes in order to virtually reconnect them with their people. One of these technologies, Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI), creates interactive pictures where lighting conditions can be altered afterwards. RTI creates lighting effects akin to a diffractive process, because of this RTI was also used in workshop environments to help demonstrate and explain how images are never innocent representations of a subject and actively participate in the emergence of meaning. Experimenting with RTI became an intrinsic part of this project and Black Ball Ballads documents these experiments with RTI. One of the constancies of the process is a black shiny ball which always appears in the photographic frame. Through an animation of the various images created during this project Black Ball Ballads tells a story of the project through the pictures that slowly evolve across the screen.



West Beirut
2024

Rayya Khuri

35 MM Film Photograph





Playing With Matches II

2024

Rabiya Nagi

Digital Video, Sound, 02.24

This video is based on very early childhood memories of squatting down in the backyard with my mother's cigarette butts for my 'first puff' but as I lit the very first match my long, dangling hair caught fire.



Maruza Imi Variations

2023

Charles Nyiha

Live Performance: Friday 12th Jan 5-5:45pm

"Maruza Imi Variations" is a live electronic music performance that revitalizes the 'Maruza Imi Cde Chinx (1980) Dzapasi Camp (Buhera).mp3' audio archive from the Pitt Rivers Museum. Taking inspiration from animism and panpsychism, the project transforms the original recording, giving it a new form of life and inviting the audience to rethink the boundaries between sentience and insentience. This raises compelling questions for the broader practice of archiving sounds: if this recording can be reinvigorated with some form of "life," what implications does this have for the act of collection and preservation?

This performance closed the Agents of Deterioration show.

Afterword

Kathryn Yusoff and Esi Eshun

Excerpts from a Conversation

Kathryn Yusoff and Esi Eshun

January 2024

This conversation between Esi Eshun and Kathryn Yusoff, Professor of Inhuman Geography at Queen Mary, University of London, took place at Lethaby Gallery in January 2024, and brought the *Prisoners of Love* project to its conclusion. One purpose of the conversation was to discuss elements of Kathryn's forthcoming book, *Geologic Life: Inhuman Intimacy and the Geophysics of Race*, (2024) in addition to her 2019 book *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, which both examine the relationship between geology, race, colonialism, and environmental issues. The conversation went on to address aspects of her creative research work and some of the ways in which it coincides with PoL's own investigations.

EE. To introduce Kathryn's work, I'll begin with a short summary of one of the theses of *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, which holds that under colonialism, both the discipline of geology and the classification of humans into sub or nonhuman categories were fuelled by the desire to extract minerals from the earth, on the one hand, and by the urge to extract humans from land and heritage on the other. Under the practice of colonialism, both minerals - such as gold and silver - and specific groups of humans, were considered forms of inhuman matter, without agency. The result was multiple kinds of estrangements and displacements, including that of the transatlantic slave trade and other forms of slavery before and after it.

These co-constituted phenomena played a determining role in bringing wealth to colonising countries while contributing to long term destabilisations within the colonised countries themselves, many of which continue to apply today. Prominent among these is the effect of 'man made' environmental disturbances including climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, as characterised by the notion of the Anthropocene.

According to *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, The Anthropocene is both "a politically infused geology and scientific/popular discourse and it is just now noticing the extinction it has chosen to continually overlook in the making of its modernity and freedom." So, like other thinkers, Kathryn has argued that the idea of the Anthropocene fails to take account of racialised disparities, in which formerly colonised countries disproportionately bear the brunt of environmental disturbance despite being responsible for only a fraction of their consequences. Furthermore, the philosophical idea of the Anthropocene erroneously assumes a universal human figure at its centre, but it is also orientated towards the idea of impending disaster at some imminent future date, ignoring the multiple Anthropocenes already experienced over centuries by peoples within formerly colonised countries and settler colonial countries.

If we take on board creative considerations of Kathryn's work -such as the 2019 film *Infinity minus Infinity* by Turner Prize nominated artists, The Otolith Group, which both Kathryn and I were involved with - we find explorations of relations between deep geological time and historical time frames, allowing for the play of notions of nonlinearity. The film assumes a position of epistemological and ontological pluralism more common to non Western forms of thinking than to ideas based in Western modernity and its possible aftermaths. And it shows how Kathryn's work might lend itself to narrative elaboration, through the excavation of both real world stories and forms of fabulation that serve to put flesh on theory.

EE: In coming to Kathryn's current work, one of the central ideas is that of geologic life. Could you just tell us a little bit more about what you mean by it?

KY: By using the term geologic life, I really wanted to use a term that's counterintuitive. We are so used to thinking about ourselves as biological bodies, and understanding ourselves as implicated in biology and bio-politics, but less used to thinking about ourselves as Earth systems, as entwined with Earth systems. But actually if you think about our bodies at a chemical level, whether it's the iron, whether it's the kind of calcium we ingest... all the things we put into our bodies... we are a geologic artefact.

One part of that is a broader imperative to think about ourselves as involved in geology and involved in the Earth and transformation of the Earth. And the second is to notice how geologic life is a political organization of these material economies through race - just as the basic kind of geologic materials that we need to survive are conditioned, in terms of access and impact, by racial politics. Who does the mining? Who goes into the Earth? Whose environments and communities suffer through extraction? Which is firstly to acknowledge those politics, but also to acknowledge that alongside those deep histories of colonialism and racial dynamics are the other parallel discourses of geology and knowledge.

Specifically in the Caribbean, for example, Caribbean writers and poets were really concerned to think with the landscape, to think with volcanoes, to think with the sea, to think with the ocean and to use that imaginary against an imaginary of extraction. So, in parallel to the extractive logic of colonialism in geologic life, there's also a parallel poetics that tries to confront these geopolitics and find a way of re-languaging the relation between Earth and humans. And that's what people like Glissant and Césaire, and Fanon are all doing, actually creating a new language in which to speak about subjectivity with the Earth. So, when Frantz Fanon was talking about the Wretched of the Earth, he's not talking about that metaphorically, he's talking about a very material, actual sense - that the actualisation of bodies ... of life ... happens through materiality.

So, if you think about what was destroyed through colonialism ... and in terms of Indigenous ecologies and life worlds ... those are participative life worlds that are made with the Earth, made with non-humans, they're life worlds that were broken through colonialism. I am trying, in geologic life, in this term, to signal something that is counterintuitive to the Western imagination of the Earth, but is also a place in which to do the core work.

EE: Do you posit the notion of a feminist poetics to go alongside or even in contra-distinction to geologic politics?

KY: ...people like Saidiya Hartman, you will know that her work is very concerned with the imperative of how to make a place in no-place. She calls this the loophole in the truth. Poetics as a way of creating space in what are essentially cultural conditions. Hartman's talking about the afterlife of slavery. How do you deal with the archives, with these colonial archives that are just so replete with violence without retooling and re-presenting that violence? So look to care, look to poetry, look to creative practices of re-imagining and re-speculating with these historical archives. And then thinking about archives quite broadly as a way to think about literature and poetics. So that we don't just reinvest in that violence of representation, but also recognise the agency in terms of how people have made lives within difficult spaces, spaces of violence and extraction.

EE: I want to talk about the work that you do with archives, the creative research ... you spend a lot of time working to expand interpretation of data. Would you tell us a bit about some of the work that you're doing - either by yourself or with groups?

KY: Yes, and then we can talk about some of the work that you've been doing. When we're trying to understand histories of the earth, like in my case, the archives are essentially what we have to work with. So, trying to find strategies to read an archive in a way that doesn't reproduce the archive's power. How do we - if natural resources is a deadly language - how do we begin to generate new languages that speak with the earth differently, that speak about relationship and the questions of racial equity with the earth differently?

KY: So, one of the things that, again, following on from the awesome work that's been done by Black feminist theorists, is really to read the archive as through and from the speculative, but in my case very much through an interdisciplinary approach. So, one of the things archives do, is they keep things separate, a bit like the way in which geologic nomination keeps things separate. So, gold is gold. It's something that can stand alone and hold its value in a Swiss bank account. So that's a process of separation, the separation from the landscape in which gold occurs and the deadly work of arsenic in the separation of gold from the environment that it's in geologic relationship to. It's all kinds of separabilities that are put in place that allow that to become a human value. So if we're gonna do work that challenges those processes of valuation and that separability, part of that work is actually just doing interdisciplinary work and bringing things together that wouldn't normally sit together. So what kind of archives do we need to bring together and put in conversation with each other in a way that shows us the work of that separability, and actually, how that separability is a fiction? A fiction that's created to be very elaborate knowledge-making practices.

So part of my work has been about trying to build bridges between archives that shows the work that creates what I call a normative materiality. If you go into the sort of spaces that I'm often in in terms of social science and science policy, there are all these assumptions about value, about what to do with the Earth, about racial capitalism and so on. All these taken for granted languages that are part of a history of harm, part of a history of destruction. So for me, a lot of that is about the language of the archive, and how you think with the language of the archive, to take it elsewhere, to make it strange. And sometimes that's about putting together an interdisciplinary set of juxtapositions to actually bring things together that don't normally sit together and make another conversation.

EE: I'll elaborate a bit about the work that we're doing here. It's in relation to archives as well. We are part of a project which goes by the name of *Concepts Have Teeth* and it also has an offshoot called *Prisoners of Love*. And the project aims to bring dispersed communities from different parts of the globe in contact with UK museum holdings from those same countries. The project started with members of the Blackfoot Nation in Alberta, Canada, working with Hastings Museum and Art Gallery. It then moved on to working with Compound 13 Lab in Mumbai and the Horniman Museum, and also with members of staff and students at the University of Ghana, Archaeology Department and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. The idea is to enable all these different constituents to have access digitally to some of the holdings they have been estranged from. So with the Blackfoot Nation, many of the museum objects here in the UK were removed sometime in the 19th century or early 20th century. And people within those locations have sometimes been able to trace provenance of items and have been able to learn and relearn various types of making, for example, various craft techniques, that were used in the past and then lost. They've been able to gain some sort of proximity to aspects of their heritage.

Where I've been involved is in working with some of our former students to look at ways to generate creative responses, artistic responses, to some of these museum holdings. I'm working with the Pitt Rivers Museum and University of Ghana cohort. We've been working with items called gold weights, which were part of the paraphernalia for the weighing of gold dust in pre-colonial Ghana, which was then called the Gold Coast. And clearly, as the name suggests, the Gold Coast was replete with gold for a significant period of time. There are over 30 forts and castles, built by Europeans on the coast of Ghana, from the 15th to the 19th centuries, that were used as centres for various kinds of trade. In this light, it's no accident that the Gold Coast became one of the prime sources for enslaved peoples, for captives sent to the Americas, many of whom were kept in those forts before transportation.

EE: The currency used at the time was gold dust. The gold weights, which are small objects, about three inches in height, were used to weigh the dust. So I've been looking at these and considering what forms of value and what forms of power are embedded within these objects, and what happens when access to gold lies with some people and not with others. At the very end of the 19th century, there were a series of wars initiated by the British against the Ashanti people, who had access to large amounts of gold, and the various punitive wars against them eventually ended with the creation of the Gold Coast as a single nation.

. . . Please take these - these are 3D prints of peanuts, that were originally gold weights in the Pitt Rivers Museum. Please take them, because we are trying to challenge ideas of exchange value...

... to continue ... so when the Gold Coast became a complete colony of Britain, the gold dust ceased to be used as currency, and sterling, the British pound, became the official currency instead. I see that change as a mechanism to gain full control of the colony - whoever controls the gold controls the economy, controls the international flows of finance.

Recently, I was recommended a book, *Anansi's Gold* (2023) by Yepoka Yeebo - I've only just started reading it - which suggests that following the coup that deposed Ghana's first President, Nkrumah, the CIA put into the public domain the idea that he had purloined all the gold in Ghana, so that, effectively, there was no longer any gold in the country. Allegedly, he had stashed it in Swiss banks for his own use. This particular myth was then perpetuated by one man over the next two decades, and it remained in circulation because people were very keen to learn where the gold had gone. There was an assumption that Ghana should be rich, because it had so much in the way of natural resources. But there was no gold for the people who lived there. So to me, it's a fair to suggest that various people who remained in power under neo-colonial conditions put the gold in various types of holdings and markets outside of Africa, where they remain. So I'm trying to explore what all this means in terms of international power relations. I'm also trying to complicate the narrative, I guess, that Africa is a place for extraction/extractivism ... there are other even more complicated politics going on there as well.

KY: I think we're both interested in sometimes very brutal exchanges that happen between metal and people, and that are much more complicated than histories of working metals, for example. One of the things that I've been interested in is a particular kind of iron bar that's called Voyage iron, that was used by the British to exchange for a person, made to exact specifications and very particular dimensions, with quantities of a particular kind of iron that was only found in Sweden or Norway. This was exchanged on the Gold Coast for a person. What is the language - this has been my insight in questioning geology - what is the language that allows that to happen? That gold and people become substitutable... So what kind of economy enables that?

It's an overt and very clear exchangeability, whereas that exchangeability actually happens all the time in the desecration of labour environments that are deadly - I'm thinking about mining conditions now, and environmental conditions in particular regions of the world. There's something that happens in that exchange and imagination between metals and personhood. I think Esi's work is really trying to complicate that and understand how these pre-colonial forms of metallurgy also have their legacies in the ways in which they change what colonialism is and becomes and also what those places end up being.

EE: We are just going to run a clip in the background from the film, *Diabolical Architectures of Colonialism*, by a creative colleague of Kathryn's, Michael Salu. Michael and Kathryn are part of a collective called *Planetary Portals*.

KY: *Planetary Portals* is myself, Michael Salu, Kerry Holden, and Casper Laing Ebbensgaard. We've been working on the idea of portals as a way to think about the planetary. So rather than thinking about the globalism of the Anthropocene and large scale geopolitics, the way into this work has been looking at the Cecil Rhodes Estate in East London and the Rhodes family and looking at the relationship between East London and the mines in South Africa. Cecil Rhodes, as you probably know, was very instrumental in the transformation of Southern Africa ... So we've been looking at these and thinking about the portal. The East London estate, the Rhodes estate, is just behind the CLR James library in Dalston, Hackney. You can go and see it - it's going through the process of renaming now with Hackney Council - you can see the legacy of those kind of material economies in Kimberley and in South Africa. And so we've been trying to deal with these very violent archives of Cecil Rhodes and trying to make interventions in the reciprocal landscapes that are created between East London and Southern Africa. And part of that has been really what Michael's doing in the film. It's really thinking with the injured body that the archive talks about - coded as labor, coded as native. And what does it mean to accompany the injured body on a journey through this portal?

In the film, he's using the technology of lidar scanning. So it's created using a gaming environment and lidar scanning, which is used to identify metals in the ground, the very components going into the technologies that produce computers - rare earth metals that make the technologies that can produce these landscapes.

And we are also - particularly Michael and colleague Kerry Holden - looking at the way in which Google Africa is using data mining, is data mining Africa as part of a new kind of Scramble for Africa. You might have seen in the news that a lot of the cleaning of the internet is done in Africa - so the annotation of horrific violence on the internet, is done in Africa by young Africans, often in shipping containers, for 12 hour shifts, looking at violent crime, sexual crime, etc, and annotating this as unsuitable for the internet. So a lot of the work that gives you a kind of a pleasant experience on social media, is done through data mining in Africa. So there's a new relationship of data colonialism that we've been trying to explore through this work.

There's also the new data pipeline, the Google data line that's just been put into Africa, that lands in Ghana and comes from Portugal, that is named after Equiano, the 18th century former enslaved person who was also a leading Abolitionist. And yet, it retraces the Middle Passage, the triangular Atlantic slave trade route between Europe, Africa and the Americas. The thing is, that all the data processing happens in Silicon Valley. So data is taken off the African continent to Silicon Valley, is reprocessed, and is then returned. So this attempt to use Africa as a space of experimentation again is very tied to the kinds of colonial productions of Africa as a laboratory that are steeped in colonial imaginaries.

