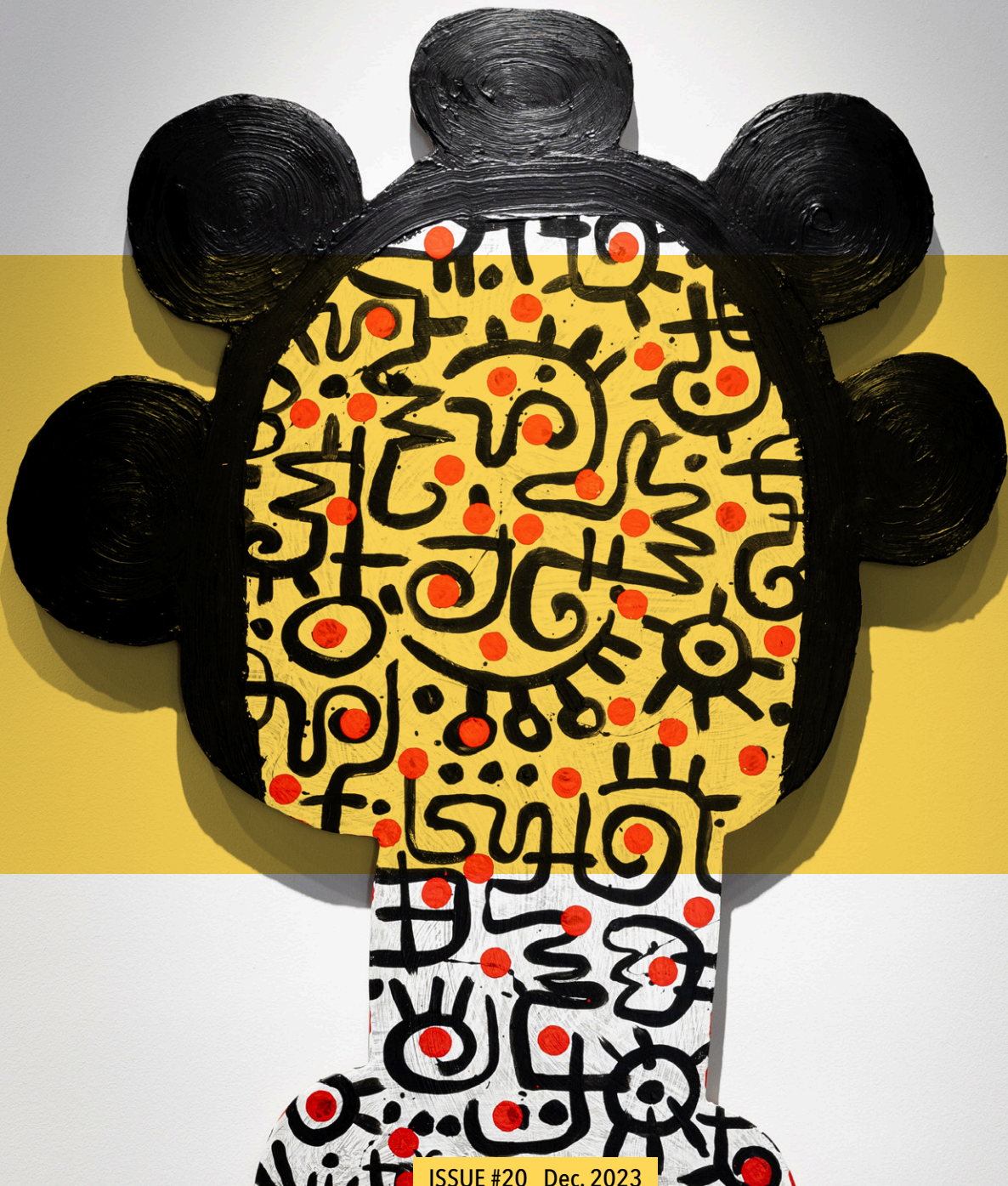


CONTEMPORARY IDENTITIES

International Art Magazine

Abdalla Al Omari | Ákos Bánki | Marcella Barone | Ali Cha'aban | Lottie Cole | Mehmet Dere
Sebastiano Guerrera | Ali Rahemi Haghghi | Awais Naqvi | Monika Stricker | Victor Ekpuk | Alex de Borba



ISSUE #20 Dec. 2023

The artist is nothing without gifts,
but the gift is nothing without work.

Émile Zola



Instagram: [tehrangallery.official](https://www.instagram.com/tehrangallery.official)
For further information please email us at:
info@contemporaryidentities.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Art Writers:

Leo Crane
Anna Guillot
Meera Madhu
Lenka Piper
Zoltán Somhegyi
Braján Vojinović

Editors:

Sara Berti
Elham Shafaei

Artificial Intelligence Editor:

Fabio Gamberini

Art Director:

Soheil Hosseini
tehranstudio.com

Layout:

Fariba Rahdar

Front Cover:

Victor Ekpuk, *Ibibio Girl, 2023*,
Acrylic on wood, Courtesy of Efié
Gallery and the artist, Dubai,
United Arab Emirates

Media Consultant:

Emad Pournasiri



ARTISTS

6 **Abdalla Al Omari**
By: Meera Madhu

8 **Ákos Bánki**
By: Braján Vojinović

10 **Marcella Barone**
By: Anna Guillot

12 **Ali Cha'aban**
By: Zoltán Somhegyi

14 **Lottie Cole**
By: Leo Crane

16 **Mehmet Dere**
By: Braján Vojinović

18 **Sebastiano Guerrero**
By: Anna Guillot

20 **Ali Rahemi Haghighi**
By: Zoltán Somhegyi

22 **Awais Naqvi**
By: Lenka Piper

24 **Monika Stricker**
By: Lenka Piper

26 Interviewed artist
Victor Ekpuk

30 Artificial Intelligence
Fabio Gamberini
Interviewed artist
Alex de Borba

36 **Cultural Currents:**
The Africa Institute's
Exploration of African Islands
in the Indian Ocean

EDITORS' NOTE

As we stand on the threshold of a new year, we proudly present the final issue of ContemporaryIdentities for 2023. This year has been a tapestry woven with the threads of resilience, innovation, and the ever-evolving landscape of artistic expression. In this celebratory edition, we reflect on the kaleidoscope of stories, emotions, and transformative moments that art has ushered into our lives.

2023 has unfolded as a canvas marked by diversity, where artists from around the globe have contributed to the rich tapestry of ContemporaryIdentities. Each stroke, pixel, and composition has been a testament to the unyielding spirit of creativity, demonstrating that, even in challenging times, art serves as a beacon of inspiration.

This issue encapsulates a year of exploration, introspection, and the collective power of artistic voices. As you navigate through the virtual galleries of Issue 20, we invite you to immerse yourself in the narratives, question the boundaries, and celebrate the myriad forms of contemporary art that have graced our pages.

In the twentieth issue's spotlight, we feature an exclusive interview with Victor Ekpuk, Nigerian American artist based in Washington D.C., Ekpuk is celebrated for his bold and expressive paintings, drawings and sculptures that offer sociopolitical commentary while encompassing themes such as cultural memory, humanity, spirituality, and identity of the African diaspora.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to our esteemed artists and art writers who have contributed their remarkable talents to this issue. Special gratitude goes to our dedicated board member, Zoltán Somhegyi (Hungary), whose insightful contributions to the magazine continue to enrich our content. Additionally, we had the privilege of collaborating with renowned international art critics, including Leo Crane (UK), Anna Guillot (Italy), Meera Madhu (India-UAE), Lenka Piper (Czech Republic) and Braján Vojinović (Serbia) whose expertise and perspectives have added depth to our discussions.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge Fabio Gamberini, our editor in the Artificial Intelligence section, for his invaluable contributions to this issue and his ongoing dedication to advancing the intersection of art and technology. He interviewed Alex de Borba. Alex is a Chief Executive Officer for Atmosfear Entertainment, this organization stands as the first hybrid to make a pioneering mark in media, arts, and academia.

As we bid farewell to 2023, we extend our deepest gratitude to the talented artists who have entrusted us with their work, the dedicated readers who have joined us on this artistic journey, and the global community that finds solace, joy, and connection within these pages.

For this Issue we had a chance to find out more about the Africa Institute's Exploration of African Islands in the Indian Ocean. The Africa Institute organizes its series of conferences about the Indian Ocean, marking the third edition of the Institute's annual initiative, "Country-focused Season." This ongoing series delves into the exploration of one African country or African diaspora community through a range of scholarly and public programs. Situated in the heart of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates and affiliated with the newly established Global Studies University (GSU), The Africa Institute is an interdisciplinary academic research institute dedicated to the study, research, and documentation of Africa and the African diaspora.

May the art showcased in this final issue of the year inspire, challenge, and resonate with you as we anticipate a new chapter in the ever-evolving narrative of ContemporaryIdentities.

Best wishes,
Sara Berti & Elham Shafaei

Abdalla Al Omari

Syria-Belgium | Meera Madhu

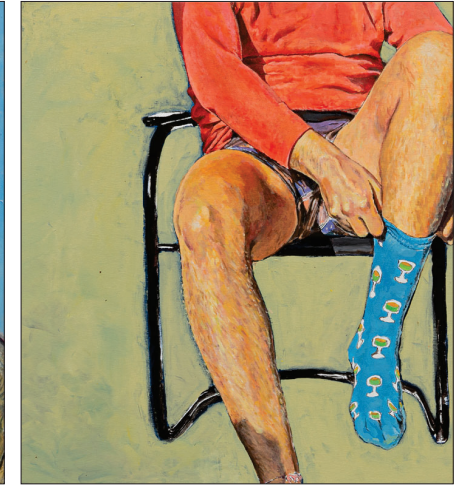


Sometimes I salute nothing, 2023, Acrylic on linen, 90x82.5 cm, Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Abdalla Al Omari delves into the profound within the mundane. He captures the everyday intimate moments, where a person is caught in a state of unawareness. Through movements and gestures of the body, hidden beliefs and unspoken taboos are unveiled, prompting discussions related to sexuality, religion, and



Someone's head next to me Just Exploded, 2023, Acrylic on cotton, 90x80 cm, Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates



Between before and after, 2022, Acrylic on linen, 77x73 cm, Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

addiction. The work thrives on anonymity, making the ordinary universal. Viewers grapple with ambiguity, questioning the identities of these headless figures. This paradoxical tension invites viewers to observe, evoking voyeuristic urges, yet devoid of objectification or sexual fetishism. The scale and composition of the paintings heightens the experience, creating tight, tangible spaces amidst minimalisms. The absence of landscape highlights the reduction of elements to a degree where the fragmented narrative still holds meaning, perhaps even more powerfully. Abdalla's art, though seemingly simplistic, conceals profound complexity within its constrained frames, inviting viewers to contemplate the human condition.

Ákos Bánki

Hungary | Brajan Vojinović



Flumen, 2021, Acrylic on canvas, 180x300 cm, Photo credit: Réka Hegyháti, Courtesy of Gallery K.A.S., Budapest, Hungary

Ákos Bánki's vibrant artworks invite us on an immersive experience. The freedom of movement within an abstract pattern of color and form among individual abstract subjects in his paintings allows for different perspectives on the whole. Painting, as a form of visual communication, provides us with space to feel and reconsider visible forms from within. Bánki articulates the individual artistic appropriation of the experience of movement in an abstract setting. While experiencing the artwork, pay attention to the subjective experience and the emotion-to-thought process. This series of work could be divided into two categories: first, focusing on abstract movement, and later, emphasizing the simplicity of pure color development. Bánki's playful surroundings present the viewer with an opportunity to explore and find connections with their own inner landscape of emotions. Ákos Bánki has achieved establishing seemingly individual living forms — it seems as if each visual representation is trying to develop its own subjective expression, unaware of the cohesive composition they are a part of.



Flumen II. exhibition view, Photo credit: Réka Hegyháti, Courtesy of Gallery K.A.S., Budapest, Hungary



Flumen Series 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 108x180 cm pieces, Photo credit: Réka Hegyháti, Courtesy of Gallery K.A.S., Budapest, Hungary

Marcella Barone

Italy | Anna Guillot



Under Breath, 2023, Sound and environmental, Variable dimensions, On the Contemporary in the Garden, Caltanissetta, Italy

Installation, photography, video, and sound constitute the essential operating modalities of artist Marcella Barone, co-founder 20 years ago in Catania of the SSRG, Sicilian Soundscape Research Group, an organization active in the promotion of studies and research on the soundscape, along the lines traced by musician Albert Mayr. And in some way along these lines Barone still moves today in his personal artistic operation as a whole.

'Under Breath', an environmental intervention with sound installation, is the result of a synesthetic reflection conducted on the thread of memory. Marcella Barone's operation 'in nature' connects two distinct points. The elements derived from the double listening of a portion of land-territory (Otc in the Garden, in Caltanissetta) are intrinsically linked. Capturing and restoring the multi-sensorial value of the small green lung that is the garden, grafting it onto an anthropological reflection that considers the territory's mining vocation – the past use of the subsoil, a use not without tragic significance due to the shameless exploitation of labor – or determining connections between the 'concrete' and the historical datum, increase the intervention's unprecedented symbolic potential.

"This place, Barone writes, is perceived as a physical-aerial space in which the positive geotropism of the underground root system is matched by the opposite geotropism of oxygen emission. Silent witnesses to the underground world, the roots, invisible connections in the rhizosphere, are also a tribute to the underground circuits of the local mining system, the solfataras of central Sicily. [...] A chorus of breaths emitted from several underground cones or sinkholes or trumpets, reminiscent of the so-called 'sinkholes', the chasms or collapses of the ground at several points in the territory in correspondence with disused mines. A demand for oxygen from the 'carusi', the little boys sacrificed to a life in holocaust conditions and often suffocated underground. From underground comes the emptiness and the sound traces of breaths superimposed on those digitally synthesized through sensors applied to the plants in the garden. An ancestral voice from the world of the dead and the world of the living.



Under Breath, 2023, Sound and environmental, Variable dimensions, On the Contemporary in the Garden, Caltanissetta, Italy



Vanish, 2020-2021, Box set, book + video, 18.05x31.05x9 cm closed, 18.05x111.15x9 cm open, Courtesy of KoobookArchive, Catania, Italy

Ali Cha'aban

Lebanon-Kuwait-UAE

Zoltán
Somhegyi

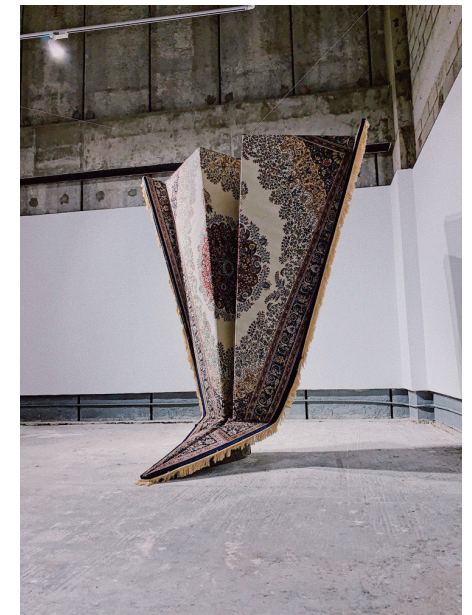


Grandpa's Monobloc, 2023, Plastic Chair, Persian Rug, 52x71x47 cm, Edition 1,2,3,4,5/20, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates



12 PM Class, 2019, Persian Carpet on wood, 350x160x100 cm, Edition 1/4 + 2AP, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

We all have pleasant childhood memories, and these can make us nostalgic. Through his works Ali Cha'aban investigates the role and force of this complex emotion. The curious thing is that while the nature and "working" of nostalgia is quite universal, hence can affect anyone, but what stimulates nostalgia is very personal: it can be a simple object, a piece of music, a smell, a landscape etc. Since it is so personal, it is thus a strong constituent of our identities, in some ways therefore we can say that what we are nostalgic of describes us – of course, among innumerable other factors. This is nicely illustrated in Ali Cha'aban's pieces, for example in the ones that form folded paper airplanes, however this time they are increased on a large scale, and are made of Persian carpets, applied on wood. The simple toy, that is likely to be very familiar for many observers, thus becomes a complex object with references to cultural, national, religious, and social identities.



Twelve PM Class, 2019, Persian carpet suspended on plywood, Edition 1/2, 350x160x100 cm, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Lottie Cole

UK | Leo
Crane



With my back to the world, 2023, Oil on canvas 60x70 cm

Lottie Cole's paintings invite us into an anonymous world of private domesticity. Her interiors are imprinted with the details of imagined lives: a plump chair offers rest and reassurance, a mantelpiece serves as a stage for life's ephemera. Figures are absent, prompting us to populate these small worlds as our own. More recently, Cole has been inspired by vintage photographs of unknown people on the cusp of adulthood. Like Cole's own daughter, these subjects have a strength of personality that denies sentimentality. Small details hint at the relationships beyond the staged studio setting: siblings with a private bond or a daughter mirroring her mother. As with her interiors, this is a world dominated by women, but rather than a fashionable femininity, we are enriched with a feeling of motherhood, that nurturing and guiding force that underpins our every day.



With my back to the world II, 2023, Watercolor and gouache, 51X36 cm



Eyre de Lanux and her daughter, Anne, 2021, Oil on canvas, 60x40 cm

Mehmet Dere

Turkey | Brajan Vojinović



Stardust, 2009, Installation of various found objects, drawing 150x324 cm

"A.G.E." is a reference in itself, operating within an exchange system where value can be added to existing value, similar to artificial intelligence. In "Mim" from 2018, Mehmet Dere initiates a dialogue between symbols of permanence and longevity versus a traditional ingredient in Turkish cuisine. As Mehmet's work often carries socio-political undertones, we can perceive here the concept of reducing cultural identity to a mere product marketed in a certain way. The wall installation contrasts individual memory with collective memory. The composition of the A.G.E. work, featuring two open compositions and one closed, delves into the theme of potential exploitation represented by two upturned glasses, seemingly inviting the consumption of their contents. Referencing a reference creates a space for endless uploads of content for further referencing. In the current expanding cyberspace, significant elements tend to lose their intended meaning. What is deemed important and to whom is entirely subject to individual perception. By establishing a system of reference, Dere has succeeded in creating a space for continuous questioning, leaving us in a position where we can only imply more content implicitly.



Mim, 2018, Installation, 40 iron chickpeas in a paper cone and A4 photocopy 130x25x25 cm



A.G.E., 2023, Installation 3 water glasses, wall mounted wooden pedestals, 100 (49+51) pieces pelure paper, Colored pencil drawing on a pelure paper

Sebastiano Guerrera

Italy | Anna
Guillot



Master Trees, 2016, Drawing on paper, Detail, Courtesy of On the Contemporary, Catania, Italy



Installation, 2020, Pondus in mostra, Courtesy of Galleria Giovanni Bonelli, Milano, Italy



Master Trees, 2016, Drawing on paper, Detail, Courtesy of On the Contemporary, Catania, Italy

In the 'Master Trees' cycle of drawings, Sebastiano Guerrera has been dwelling on the figure of the tree for some time. The artist's reflection, extensive and rich in direct and allusive references, involves multiple implications. Guerrera deploys a rare drawing quality, special mastery of the medium and sense of synthesis, together with a particular expertise in botany. It thus happens that, in perfect complicity with the texts by the poet Franca Mancinelli, the evanescent and meticulous drawing of the tree species present in precise urban neighborhoods, which the artist reproduces in map form, succeeds in implanting a speculative investigation that is aligid and subtle but at the same time powerful. As if dropped into a Zen dimension, the 'Master Trees' suspended in the empty silence of white, yet mighty and firmly planted on the ground, are a meditative and conceptual reminder. Reflection immediately directs the beholder towards the studies and theories of C.G. Jung. Precisely based on his experience as a therapist and his study of medieval alchemy, Jung was interested in sounding out the symbolic values of trees and tended to demonstrate how an archetype emerges from the spontaneous products of the unconscious in modern man, revealing clear parallels with the figure of the tree in all its historical modifications. The tree, as a source of life and protection, a place of transformation and renewal, of feminine and maternal nature, is now the tree of wisdom and knowledge, a symbol of the totality of the Self. "Tree as the slow explosion of a seed" is instead Bruno Munari's aphorism that refers to the concept of time, the time of a life. And it is precisely as a reminder aimed at a restitution in terms of Value, that the meditative atmosphere and intellectual quality underlying Sebastiano Guerrera's "Master Trees" can constitute a reconsideration of the concept of time.

Ali Rahemi Haghighi

Iran | Zoltán Somhegyi



Recycle, 2022/2023, Staged photography



Recycle, 2022/2023, Staged photography

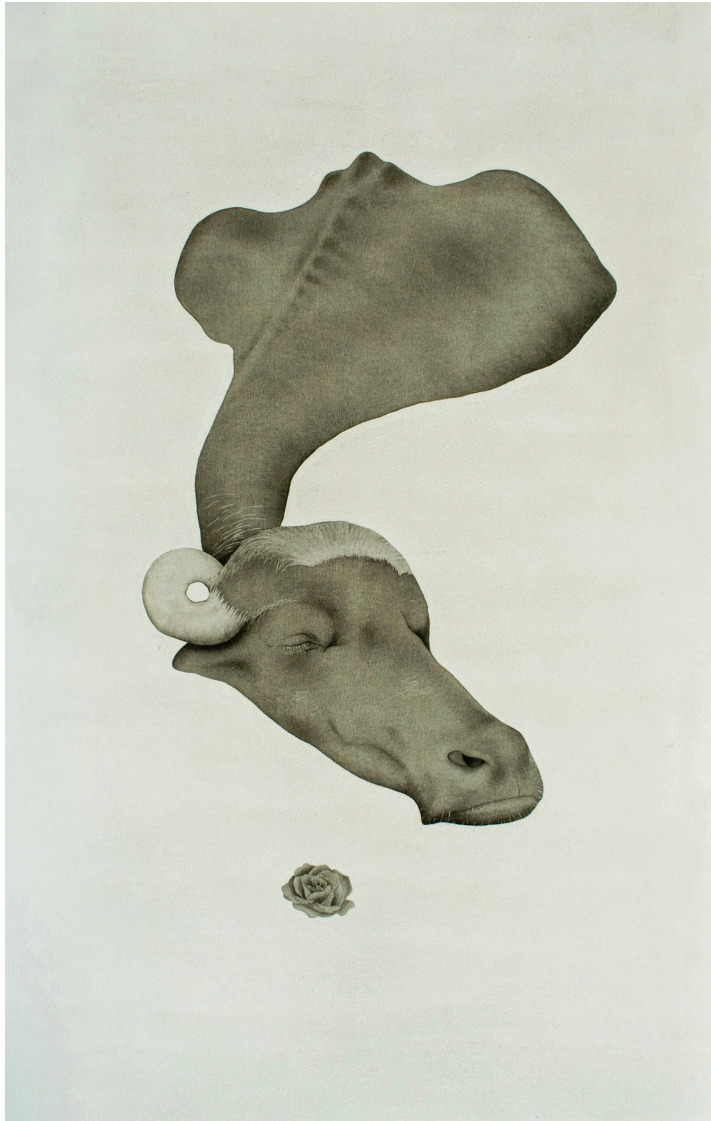
In the photographs by Ali Rahmi Haghighi we can see dilapidated buildings, constructions that first seem to be out of use, and being on their way towards ruination. Traditionally in such cases the dereliction is often manifested through the possibility of observing the various layers of edifices, as if when peeling an onion. For example in some parts the covering tiles have partially still remained, while in other cases the internal structure and elements that are normally hidden now get visible. However, when observing the photographs better we can notice curious signs and traces of some sort of continuity of life: everyday objects are arranged, a framed image appears on a wall, in one of the buildings we see light coming out from one of the corners etc. In this way the artist triggers us to ponder over the multiple fates a building can have and highlights the open-endedness of human constructions.



Recycle, 2022/2023, Staged photography

Awais Naqvi

Pakistan | Lenka Piper



Beauty, 2016, Watercolor on canvas fabric, 178x120 cm



Untitled, 2017, Charcoal on canvas, 215x610 cm



Confluence Series, Ink and photo transfer on Vasil, 40x50 cm

At first sight, the artworks of a Pakistani painter Awais Naqvi depict the mundane in warm shades of grey – paintings of animals, paper boats, mountains... With more time spent on the artwork, more details rise from the surface, including the deeper thoughts they represent. The artist does not depict objects themselves, but instead explores their profound essence. These objects are not black and white, or easy to interpret; instead, they are layers of grey, layers of meanings, relationships, and understanding.

Monika Stricker

Germany | Lenka
Piper



Beastly Arboretum exhibition view, Courtesy of P420 Gallery, Bologna, Italy

Although neon colors such as bright blue, green, and yellow represent electrifying and pulsating energy, these unnatural colors become dull and muted in Monika Stricker's paintings. Vulnerability is the recurrent element in her work and, apart from taking away the power of bright colors, it manifests in intimate relationships and the fragility of the human body. The uncertainty and emptiness into which the bodies sink within her paintings emphasizes their exposure and powerlessness. She captures her relationship with herself, men, and the world, but also the intimate relationships of others that make us feel very differently, whether we are part of them or excluded from them.



Beastly Arboretum exhibition view, Courtesy of P420 Gallery, Bologna, Italy



Beastly Arboretum exhibition view, Courtesy of P420 Gallery, Bologna, Italy

Victor Ekpuk

CI: Please introduce yourself.

VE: I am Victor Ekpuk, a Nigerian American, a multidisciplinary artist.

CI: Can you tell us about your early influences?

VE: My early influences were indigenous art forms from Nigeria and modern artists who have applied these classical art forms in their expressions. I have taken inspiration from Nsibidi—a Nigerian writing system that uses ideograms to express meaning to develop my own Glyph-based language,' which is grounded in instinctual gestures and the linear quality of my drawing. The distinctive script I have created is a through line across my work and allows me to dissolve the distinction between writing and visual art, legibility, and illegibility. The result is a lexicon of abstraction that reveals the very essence of an idea or feeling. Color plays an important role in my work; I see pigments as charged entities with the power to connect with the inner depths of the mind and evoke our connection to the divine.

CI: What art do you most identify with?

VE: I tend to be drawn to minimal abstract art, especially ones with strong graphic lines.

CI: Tell us about your experience with Dubai Calligraphy Biennale.

VE: I find the openness of Dubai Calligraphy Biennale to be very refreshing. It is a very insightful concept to have invited a universal dialogue about the various modes of human graphic knowledge systems. It was a great delight to exhibit alongside and discover the works of featured artists who, like me, are also engaging with and investigating the graphic system to create art.

CI: Tell us about your current practice.

VE: My practice of painting in my studios is ongoing alongside making sculptures and executing commissions of immersive art in public and private spaces.

CI: What does your work aim to say?

VE: I investigate humanity's collective experiences across cultures and space to connect the ancient past and the contemporary moment. I am interested in creating spiritual, sacred objects and spaces through sculpture and immersive installations. When creating these works, my process mirrors the aesthetic philosophy of Nsibidi, which exists as a performance as much as a form of written communication. I allow my vocabulary of glyphs to emerge in an impulsive manner, guided by the subject matter and site-specificity of my physical surroundings. This process encourages viewers to experience my work in a holistic manner, allowing the abstraction rooted in ancestral knowledge and indigenous power symbols to build into a meaningful meaning.



Unveiling of Victor Ekpuk's commission for Dubai Calligraphy Biennale, 2023, Courtesy of Efié Gallery and Moz Photography, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

CI: If you have any current or upcoming exhibition, please don't forget to mention it.

VE: My current solo exhibition is running concurrently with my presentation of 3 meters aluminum sculpture "Passage to Promise" at Dubai calligraphy Biennial. INTERwoven TEXTures is my first solo exhibition in the Middle East presents new body of works at the Efié Gallery, Dubai which runs through November 21st. Both of my works at the Dubai Calligraphy Biennial and my solo exhibition frame the idea of INTERwoven TEXTures. My works in these exhibitions are tributes to the power of dialogue, they extend an invitation to engage with our shared collective human experiences. Though inspired by nsibidi, a graphic system in Africa, my artwork has also engaged the intricate tapestries of Middle Eastern heritage, as well as the global contemporary art. I have developed a unique vocabulary, a style of abstraction which draws from these aesthetics concepts, resulting in a visual symphony with elements of familiarity. Through this exchange of interwoven textures and cultural references, my artworks are an intertext of cultural narrative composed of visual symbols, histories, and stories that transcend time and place.



INTERwoven TEXTures, 2023, Courtesy of Efié Gallery and the artist, Dubai, United Arab Emirates



Mask, 2022, Painted steel, Courtesy of Efié Gallery and the artist, Dubai, United Arab Emirates



Head 13, 2023, Acrylic on wood, Courtesy of Efié Gallery and the artist, Dubai, United Arab Emirates



Brush, 2022, Denim, mopping cloth, 112x84x16 cm, Courtesy of (AV17) gallery, Vilnius, Lithuania

Fabio Gamberini

Interviewed with

Alex de Borba



I met Alex De Borba over one year ago on the web, where we exposed a self-proclaimed digital guru who was using AI to lure some customers claiming stellar art and photography abilities. Alex showcased his expertise and earned my respect for his art and intellect. In our interview, Alex discusses discerning real from fake in contemporary art and reflects on his artistic evolution with renowned artist José Nuno da Câmara Pereira. He shares insights on the limits of AI technology, the recognition of coding in art, and the impact of AI democratization on inclusivity in the art community. I am glad to have the honor to introduce you to what I consider a true great soul in the underground panorama of contemporary arts and new forms of communication.

FG: Given the rapid change in the art panorama with new forms of media and artistic expression, how can we discern what is real from what is fake and most of all, does it matter anymore?

AdB: I hold a strong belief that regardless of the evolution and tools available, there is always room for self-improvement. As an artist with an artistic background, my journey began when I became a pupil of the renowned Portuguese artist, José Nuno da Câmara Pereira (1918 - 1937). This collaboration led to significant artistic achievements, such as a sculptural piece created in partnership with him, which is now exhibited in a museum. We also worked on a substantial piece featuring azulejos, which adorns the facade of a mental asylum. Through my association with him, I acquired valuable skills in sculpture and painting. What made our collaboration unique was the transformation from traditional approaches to a more abstract style, deeply influenced by his distinctive artistic perspective. In the contemporary landscape, having a discerning eye and experience with AI-generated tools can indeed enable one to distinguish between traditional and AI-generated content. Some AI tools, such as Midjourney, while advanced, may still exhibit certain flaws that can be detected upon closer examination. These imperfections often provide telltale signs that the content has been generated by a machine rather than created by human hands.

FG: Do you think that coding and coding-related forms of arts will ever get the recognition they deserve? I see a lot of praise for "interactive art showcases" but I can see little interest in coding which can be used to create beautiful art-observer interactions.

AdB: That is an intriguing question. I would posit that coding has always possessed artistic elements, as the famous saying goes, "Code is Poetry." Nevertheless, it is also evident that individuals proficient in coding have the capacity to expand their endeavors beyond the traditional boundaries of what might be categorized as art. The world of coding encompasses a broad spectrum of creative possibilities, and skilled coders can venture into various domains that extend well beyond the conventional definitions of art. The reception and interest surrounding "interactive art showcases" can often be influenced by the specific audience it targets. In the case of AI-generated artwork, opinions are divided, and whether it is considered art or not depends largely on individual perspectives. Some view AI-generated art as an expansion of one's artistic skills, especially if they have an artistic background. However, for many, AI-generated art can appear repetitive and derivative of works created by human artists, leading to complex and nuanced opinions on the matter.

FG: Let's talk about your life journey, I do understand that there are 2 chapters of this story. How has this affected your practice and your way to produce pieces that can convey your thoughts and feelings?

AdB: I would describe my life story as a tapestry of many chapters and intricate layers, making it a challenging endeavor to capture every detail comprehensively. Currently, my status as a disabled individual grappling with a progressive and degenerative neurological condition has prompted a



profound reevaluation of my life's purpose and a contemplation of what lies beyond in the afterlife. Clearly, this transformation has also had a significant impact on my creative process when producing my imaginative artworks. These pieces have taken on a more profound and contemplative quality, and to some extent, they have embraced a darker undertone. However, they have also become more profoundly human, carrying deeper layers of meaning within them. Each artwork I create is meticulously planned to convey a narrative that can be interpreted in various ways, encouraging viewers to engage with it on multiple levels. It is a deliberate approach where subtle details are scattered throughout the composition, often imperceptible at first glance, requiring observers to closely scrutinize the piece to uncover it. In a sense, you could say that my artworks aim to establish a connection, a form of self-identification, with the observer. They delve into the darker yet harmonious aspects of existence, a journey that may unsettle viewers as they realize their appreciation for the piece but also confront their inner darkness, which they may be reluctant to acknowledge or accept. In addition to these elements, I create my pieces with a particular individual in mind, aiming to capture the essence of solitude that we often experience, whether in our own company or amidst a bustling crowd. It reflects the sense of detachment and isolation that can pervade our lives, even as we strive to find our place in the world. Some of my artworks feature two female figures, symbolizing Life and Death. These representations are a poetic expression of the fundamental aspects of our existence. They engage in a dialogue with our own identities, prompting contemplation about who we are and how we aspire to be remembered in the grand tapestry of life.

FG: Speaking about your story, it feels natural to ask: what do you think of the artist-machine relationship? Why do you think so many feel threatened and fail to understand that we are simply talking about new forms of expression as much as cinema and photography revolutionized the Art world just a bit more than a century ago.

AdB: I believe that the relationship between humans and machines will always have a paradoxical nature. We tend to resist innovation that may replace us initially, only to later embrace it and become improved versions of ourselves while using machines. In many ways, we already rely on machines, like pacemakers that regulate our hearts. Whether through the incorporation of artificial body parts or the adaptation of our minds to leverage machinery, this paradox is an inherent aspect of our existence, whether we embrace it or not. Digital photography has supplanted the charm of various traditional methods of capturing and processing photographs. My personal favorite, the camera obscura, for example, has become obsolete. Television has diminished the attendance at theater premieres, and in many cases, cell phones have taken over various aspects of your lives. Personally, I have a strong preference for traditional methods. In fact, I harbor a disdain for cell phones, as they seem to have become an integral but unnecessary part of human existence. The digital age has ushered in a culture where what is posted online is often accepted as the ultimate truth without verification, while I find solace in a good book or an academic research paper. Despite my involvement in academic editing, coding, and digital art, I maintain a deep appreciation for analog experiences. Fear is a human emotion that frequently emerges when confronted with the unknown, often accompanied by frustration stemming from a lack of understanding. Consequently, any innovative concept encounters resistance until it is thoroughly grasped. The era of artificial intelligence (AI), although AI has been in existence since at least 2005, instills apprehension in many individuals who must adapt to "keep up with the machines." This apprehension, however, is a natural response to change, which occurs at an accelerated rate in contemporary times. It is incumbent upon us to continuously improve ourselves or risk becoming obsolete.

FG: From your art and writings I can see you are an old time Goth lover as myself. It's not the 80's anymore, what do you think is left over of the gothic culture of those years? Has the message managed to evolve or do you think it has failed to become just a stereotype of a past memory?

AdB: While I identify with the Sumerian culture and its rich historical traditions, I would not necessarily classify myself as a Goth. However, I do have a deep fascination with various aspects of Gothic culture, including its architecture, literature, and the evolution of its unique cultural expressions. The dark and elegant mystique that envelops Gothic culture is something that I find particularly captivating and intriguing. I believe that the Goth movement, across different subcultures, continues to exist and maintains its strength, albeit in a somewhat more dispersed and distant manner, largely influenced by the prevalence of social media. In the 1980s, it was characterized by a sense of purity and community, where individuals would support each other and share a united perspective. In the present day, there is a proliferation of diverse forms of Goth expressionism, some of which have become more commercialized. The advent of platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok has transformed a significant portion of the Goth community into a commercial paradigm, often emphasizing fashion and appearance rather than a focus on knowledge about literature, the origins of the movement, and the lifestyle itself. While society has learned to accept and embrace Goths to a certain extent, it is true that only a few stand out as embodying what might be considered a purer form of the movement. Personally, I view Goths as educated, cordial, and dedicated to enlightenment and their unique culture. However, those who truly epitomize the batwinged, unique lifestyle are relatively few. Like any movement, there are individuals who fully embrace it as a core part of their identity, while others adopt it because they were influenced by a show or media portrayal. These newcomers may appreciate the aesthetics but often fail to grasp the essence of the movement. While the 80s era has passed, the Goth movement endures, with elder Goths playing a vital role in educating and guiding the younger generation. Modern Goths may appear more refined, but they may lack the rawness of the earlier era, reflecting the natural process of evolution within the movement. I want to clarify that I am not making a blanket generalization, as there are always exceptions. In my company, Atmosfear Entertainment, we have been serving the Goth community since 2010. Over the course of more than a decade, I have observed rapid changes within the movement. From an academic perspective, it is always fascinating to encounter new research about the movement and gain insights into its ongoing evolution and transformation.

FG: At the moment the possibilities seem endless but maybe you can help us to frame the limits of this technology. I'm talking about the decay of the data set used to train them Machines. They need human made content in order to function properly. We can't simply create a machine that feeds itself with new data entries. Any other insights on the limits of this technology right now?

AdB: Human art and text serve as the nourishment for machines, enabling them to learn from us. Nevertheless, this process raises concerns related to ethics and copyright, which I hope will be addressed and regulated in a manner that benefits both humans and machines. Machines, despite their attempts, are incapable of experiencing emotions in the same way humans do. They can mimic emotions in response to specific situations, similar to a sociopath, but lack the inherent ability to truly comprehend and replicate human emotional responses. Unlike humans, machines lack a human brain to fully grasp the intricacies of human reactions and emotions, as well as a heart to authentically express empathy, love, anger and an understanding of the complex facets of human relationships. Consequently, machines, while capable of some degree of thought, remain unmistakably devoid of true emotion and the depth of human experience that sets us apart from them.

FG: AI tools accessibility for artists has increased. How do you think this democratization of technology will impact the diversity and inclusivity of voices in the art community?

AdB: The outcome largely hinges on the artists and the community's collective decisions. Currently, they may resist, but it is evident that machines will persist. To some extent, the battle against the future may seem futile. Similar struggles have unfolded before and will likely recur in the future. Artists



have contended with the emergence of digital cameras, computer animations, CGI, and other technological advancements. In due course, they adapted, devised new avenues for artistic expression, and the resistance faded into the annals of history.

FG: Are you currently involved in any artistic project/exhibition?

AdB: At present, I am engaged in several intellectually stimulating projects. I have recently launched Séance, which stands as the first WordPress FSE theme featuring AI-generated art and storytelling. Additionally, I am actively involved in the development of Aegis, an FSE theme by my company, which was released some time ago and continues to evolve. Aegis will be specifically oriented towards academic purposes as well. In addition to working on themes that require a creative touch, my company is actively involved in AExpo, a festival encompassing various forms of art, including theater, dance, music, and other performances, along with conferences, workshops, and art exhibitions ranging from traditional to digital. Besides that, I am currently working on a graphic novel where I use AI to generate visuals based on the script, as well as a written book that delves into my personal journey. The book explores the deep corners of my mind where I engage in a cosmic dialogue with Life and Death, pondering the purpose of living in pain versus finding eternal peace in death. The graphic novel follows a similar concept but is adapted accordingly. Besides those endeavors, I am also deeply involved in a musical project called Aemaerth, where I contribute my vocals to lyrical themes inspired by ancient Sumerian mythology. This musical venture is characterized by orchestral death metal elements. I have more projects in the pipeline, and I hope to release them in the future, provided I am still around to do so.

FG: Any upcoming events you feel like talking about?

AdB: The inaugural event for AExpo is scheduled for March next year, featuring a bewitching dance performance titled "Rituals." This performance will serve as the official kick-off for this independent festival. Following this, we have a series of other events in the pipeline. However, I must withhold specific details at this time as we are currently in the negotiation phase.



Multi-disciplinary conference of panels and performances aims to bring the complex history, and rich cultural heritage of the Indian Ocean rim to an international audience

Cultural Currents: The Africa Institute's Exploration of African Islands in the Indian Ocean

Indian Ocean Africa stands as a timeless crossroads of global linkages, with Africa's islands occupying a central role in this intricate matrix of connectivity.

Revered as the 'cradle of globalization' and a pivotal point in the contemporary multipolar world, the Indian Ocean region embodies a cultural continuum shaped by mobility, belief, aesthetics, exchange, and numerous other practices. The historical, sociocultural, economic, and geopolitical significance of Indian Ocean Africa is indisputable, with half of the world's population residing within fifty miles of its shores, and global powers vying for influence in its strategic waters.

Against this backdrop, The Africa Institute continues its series of conferences on the subject of the Indian Ocean, marking the third edition of the Institute's annual initiative, "Country-focused Season." This ongoing series delves into the exploration of one African country or African diaspora community through a range of scholarly and public programs. Situated in the heart of Sharjah and affiliated with the newly established Global Studies University (GSU), The Africa Institute is an interdisciplinary academic research institute dedicated to the study, research, and documentation of Africa and the African diaspora.

"The Africa Institute is committed to promoting cross-disciplinary dialogue and collaboration to deepen our understanding of the complex social, economic, and historical processes that have shaped the Indian Ocean region," said Dr. Salah M. Hassan, Director of The Africa Institute.

Themed "Thinking the Archipelago: Africa's Indian Ocean Islands," the current season invites scholars, activists, and enthusiasts to center Africa in global relations studies, aiming to raise the profile of Indian Ocean societies and bring their complex history and rich cultural heritage to an international audience. The Indian Ocean season has successfully concluded three of the four planned iterations dedicated to Africa's Indian Ocean rim, exploring themes such as "Reimagining Mobilities/Immobilities in the Indian Ocean" (December 2022, Sharjah, UAE), followed by "Legacies of Race and Slavery in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans" (June 2023, Zanzibar). The most recent symposium, "Colorful Threads:



Scholars spotlight Central Africa in global studies, unveiling the rich history and culture of Indian Ocean societies

The Interwoven Worlds of Art and Culture in the Western Indian Ocean," held between December 14-16, 2023, in Sharjah, marked the third of the four-part conference season, shedding light on the Islands' significance through the lens of art and cultural production.

Colorful Threads Unraveled: The Africa Institute's Symposium on Art and Culture in the Western Indian Ocean

The Islands of the Western Indian Ocean region transcend mere geography, standing as storied hubs of creativity and exchange. The 'Colorful Threads' symposium's main feature was four-panel discussions weaving 13 research presentations led by scholars worldwide. Topics included Women, Feminism, and the Indian Ocean; Material Connections and Rupture; Cinema and Placemaking; and Representations and Imaginaries. From music and photography to theater, dance, and ritual performances, the symposium explored diverse forms of artistic expression that have flourished in this region.

Organized by The Africa Institute in collaboration with leading scholars such as Jeremy Prestholdt, Professor of History at the University of California, San Diego; Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, Professor of Anthropology at Georgetown University in Qatar; and Uday Chandra, Assistant Professor of Government at Georgetown University in Qatar. This symposium is co-organized by Prita Meier, Associate Professor of Art History at New York University, and Laura Fair, Professor of African History in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University.

Colorful Threads revolved around the Islands of the Western Indian Ocean region, each laden with historical, socio-cultural, and economic significances. These Islands, from the Eastern African coasts of Kenya, Mozambique, Somalia, South Africa, and Tanzania to Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Mayotte, and Reunion, are not only creolized entities but also vital sites of creativity and imagination. The symposium's exploration of art and cultural production pivoted around key subjects crucial to scholars in the humanities and social sciences.



A performance representing Siddi group, the lost Africans in India during the Africa Institute's inaugural conference in 2022



A performance representing Siddi group, the lost Africans in India during the Africa Institute's inaugural conference in 2022

"The Indian Ocean world is one of the most dynamic places of the world, where diverse peoples, ideas, and materials converge to transform each other. This symposium brings scholars together from diverse fields and disciplines to reposition the Indian Ocean world at the center of global art history. Their contributions address pressing issues regarding the cultural dimensions of globalization by foregrounding the significance of oceans and maritime environments in shaping our world. Individual papers thematize such diverse topics as the oceanic mobility of photography, the trans-cultural reach of island architecture, and cinematic representations of archipelagic life worlds," said Professor Prita Meier.

Co-convenor Professor Prestholdt adds, "These themes deserve consideration not only in comparison with other world regions but also because, unlike its Atlantic and Mediterranean counterparts, the Indian Ocean's unique nexus of translocal relationships has never received the attention it merits."

"The Islands have always been integral spaces of exchange. As crucial points of contact with societies within and beyond Africa, they have been the primary conduits through which people, goods, and ideas move," said Professor Abusharaf.

Looking Ahead: The Final Act of the Season

As the curtain falls on "Colorful Threads," it signals the final chapter of the Country-Focus Season, "Intertwined Ecologies and Interconnected Histories: The Indian Ocean Rim," set to unfold in Mauritius in 2024. This symposium, bringing together environmental historians, anthropologists, climate scientists, and marine biologists, seeks to create a dialogue between sub-spaces and historical regions along the Indian Ocean rim, focusing on Indian Ocean Africa. Such a dialogue braids the "local" and "global" as interconnected scales on which just shared environmental futures can emerge.

The symposium and the broader conference season are not confined to academic circles but extend

an open invitation to the public. All conference proceedings are accessible and livestreamed on The Africa Institute's YouTube channel.

The Africa Institute (GSU) created this annual series to highlight the complex history of the African world while also providing a forum for creatively engaging its present and imagining new futures. Inaugurated with Ethiopia: Modern Nation/Ancient Roots in 2019-2020 followed by Global Ghana in 2021-2022, the country-focused seasons are an integral part of The Africa Institute's year-round work to develop and support original scholarship and programming that expands understanding of African and African diaspora studies among the academic community and the broader public. As The Africa Institute continues its mission of fostering critical thinking and engagement, stay updated by visiting their official website: theafricainstitute.org to learn more about the country-focused season and other programs.

DECEMBER 14-16
2023

SHARJAH

ديسمبر 16-14
2023

الشارقة

**COLORFUL THREADS:
THE INTERWOVEN WORLDS
OF ART AND CULTURE IN
THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN**

**انساق ملونة:
عوالم الفن والثقافة المتشابكة
في غرب المحيط الهندي**

COLORFUL THREADS: THE INTERWOVEN WORLDS OF ART AND CULTURE IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN



THURSDAY
DECEMBER 14

Welcoming Remarks

Introduction Remarks

Panel 1: Women, Feminism, and The Indian Ocean

Archival Entropy: Tracing the Photographic Representations of Djoumbé Fatima

Women and the Creation of Omani-Swahili Identity

The Indian Ocean as Feminist Aesthetic Space: Thinking with Lubaina Himid's Contemporary Practice

Panel 2: Material Connection and Ruptures

The Commonality of Labor: The History and Legacy of Building Construction in Modern Mauritius

From Swamp to Sea: Mangrove Poles and the Making of Space in the Western Indian Ocean

Escape Artist: Vamona Navelcar's Flight Across Continents

Guided Exhibition Tour

Gavin Jantjes: To Be Free! A Retrospective 1970-2023

Location: Gallery 4, 5 & 6, Al Mureijah Square, Sharjah Art Foundation

X (Formerly Twitter) @theafricainst
Instagram @africainstitute
Facebook @theafricainstitute
Youtube The Africa Institute
LinkedIn The Africa Institute

THEAFRICAINSTITUTE.ORG

FRIDAY
DECEMBER 15

Panel 3: Cinema and Placemaking

Cinema as an Archipelago of Desires: Mauritian Film Culture in the 1930s

Movie-Mad Island: Cinema and Public Leisure in Colonial Mauritius

Imaging the Peripheral: Island Making in Postcolonial India

Panel 4: Representations and Imaginations

Arrivals and Departures, Desertions and Betrayals: Fraught Intimacies in Zanzibar and the East African Coast

Imaging the Dodo Bird, Imagining Extinction (Mauritius)

Black, Brown, and Blue: Fabulatory Aesthetics in the Work of Shiraz Bayjoo and Kama La Mackerel

Distributed Objects, Distributed Personhood: Interwoven Relations between the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean Worlds

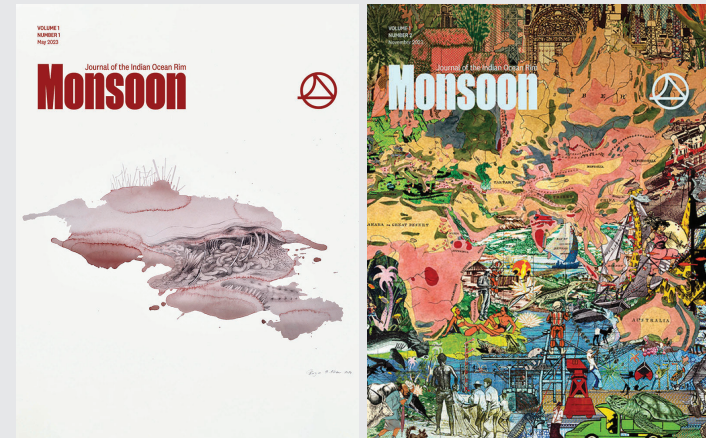
Guided Exhibition Tours

Lasting Impressions: Samia Halaby

Parallel Histories: Barjeel Art Foundation

Location: Sharjah Art Museum

PROGRAM SCHEDULE



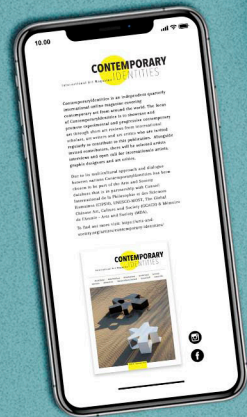
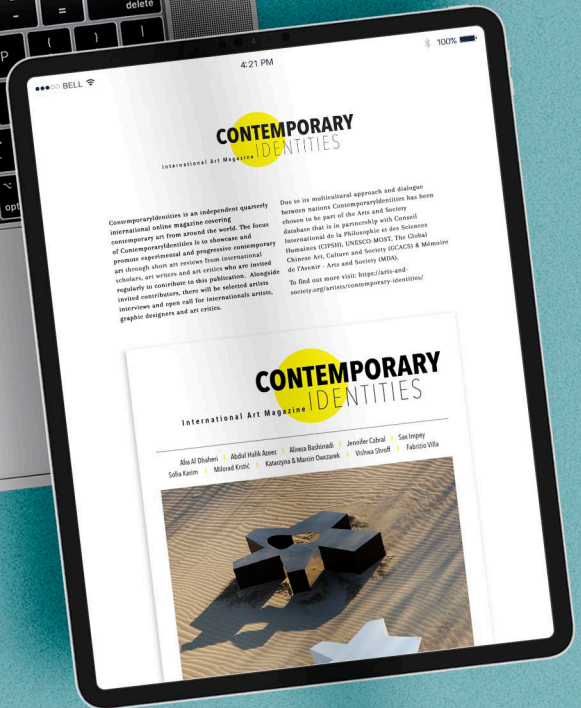
Monsoon: Journal of the Indian Ocean Rim

Frequency: Two Issues Annually

Academic Editor(s): Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, Jeremy Prestholdt

The Africa Institute, in collaboration with Duke University Press have collaborated to publish a new interdisciplinary journal, Monsoon with original and innovative research that analyzes the cultural, historical, and political circumstances that have shaped -and currently affect- the coastal societies of the Indian Ocean.

Monsoon aims to raise the profile of Indian Ocean studies, bringing research on the societies, arts, and cultures of the basin to a wide audience. It also fills a glaring gap in the extant literature on the Indian Ocean rim, which has sidelined African and Gulf societies falling within the region. With an eye cast toward expanding knowledge on the connections forged across diverse environments and cultures, the journal is a critical resource among, and in conversation with, other journals on oceanic and global studies.



www.contemporaryidentities.com
info@contemporaryidentities.com
www.facebook.com/ContemporaryIdentities
 Instagram: contemporary_id