

WHEN THINGS ARE BEINGS

Proposals for the Museum Collection

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INTRODUCTION

Rein Wolfs
Director of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

The Municipal Art Acquisitions project traces back to 1929 with financial support from the City of Amsterdam to present and acquire works from designers and artists working and living in the Netherlands. Since 1995, the project has come about through an open call procedure, followed by a selection made by a jury. The exhibition presents the selected works within a curatorial framework or theme that changes with each edition, allowing for a differentiation of perspectives on the cultural zeitgeist of the Netherlands. During the exhibition period—after the opening—the museum selects a number of works to acquire for its collection.

This year's open call, by Design Curator Amanda Pinatih and Curator Britte Sloothaak, invited designers and visual artists to submit proposals with an emphasis on objects, sculptures, and other projects that directly or indirectly involve *guna-guna*. This term,

which originated in the Indonesian archipelago and traveled to the Netherlands along with the Southeast Asian diaspora, describes a silent and mystical force that can be productive, protective, or destructive. The curators introduced this concept for its associations with animism, and popular beliefs, ritual acts, spells, and entities encountered not only in Southeast Asia but also in Europe, for example in the folklore surrounding will-o'-the-wisp, or the spirits of wise women known as Witte Wieven in Dutch mythologies. The curators expanded the interpretation even further to engage with forces that most people certainly feel, but that not everyone can see. Moving away from framing *guna-guna* solely as a site-specific and spiritual phenomenon, this exhibition investigates the term as a metaphor for the enigmatic or metaphysical powers of objects and sculptures, and for all that eludes direct observation in design and art.

From over 750 entries, the jury comprising Aric Chen (director of Het Nieuwe Instituut), Roos Gortzak (director of the Vleeshal), Prince Malik Jewiti-R (co-founder of Artskop3437), and Aude Christel Mgba (independent curator), plus the Stedelijk exhibition curators, chose 24 projects for the 2022 edition for the Municipal Art Acquisitions exhibition. I wish to extend my warm thanks to the jury for their contribution and to all the designers and artists for their openness, time, and close collaboration. Not unimportantly, I also wish to mention Studio L A for their exhibition design, which presents all the projects both autonomously and as part of this group show. On behalf of the curators, I would like to pass on their gratitude to project leader Niels Staats and project officer Marieke van den Belt, floor manager Marc Claeijs, registrar Katinka Duffhuis, and all the conservators and art handlers involved in the realization of the exhibition, as well as the publication team Gwen Parry and Valeria Mari for all their work, and Mira Asriningtyas for her commissioned essay. A special mention also for Jasmijn Mol, who was of tremendous support during her curatorial internship. Last but not least, I would like to thank the

Municipality of Amsterdam, with whom this project began in 1929. I am looking forward to continuing the tradition of this thrilling and always surprising and thought-provoking series of biannual exhibitions.

ON THINGS AND BEINGS: *The Affordances of Objects and Ways of Knowing*

Amsterdam 2022

Amanda Pinatih is Design Curator at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and her colleague Britte Sloothaak is Curator at the museum. In this conversation, they reflect on the curatorial process for the exhibition *When Things Are Beings. Proposals for the Museum Collection* and discuss the inner power of objects and sculptures inside and outside the museum context. They address the shift from working with an open call surrounding the notion of *guna-guna*,* to curating an exhibition that turned into an exploration of *guna-guna* as a metaphor in design and art. And, since a selection of works will be acquired for the museum collection, they ask themselves: How do objects change when entering the museum and the collection?

***[gu.na.gu.na]**

- Definisi:* jampi-jampi (mantra dan sebagainya) untuk menarik hati orang; pekasih ~;
- Definition:* incantations (spells and so on) to attract people's hearts; lover ~;
- Definitie:* bezweringen (spreuken enzovoort) om de harten van mensen aan te trekken; minnaar ~;
- Source:* [Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia](#)

BRITTE SLOOTHAAK Just adding this while we are already writing other sections of this curatorial talk. Shouldn't we explain a little more explicitly why we positioned *guna-guna* and "diasporic magic" as central notions in the open call, before we discuss the exhibition?

AMANDA PINATIH No? Is anyone interested?

BS I don't know, let's see what the editors say when they read our first draft.

EDITOR I think it's good to explain.

BS OK, it started with us using the idea of *guna-guna* to secretly empower ourselves. This was always in situations where we could use a bit of magic. Mentioning the term was kind of a secret language in which we could express our support for each other.

AP We both grew up with the notion of guna-guna, although in quite different ways. Part of my family, on Bali, uses it in daily life, and my father has many childhood stories about how guna-guna was used to protect him from natural and supernatural forces. But in your family, who descend from other Indonesian islands, Celebes and Java, they shy away from it a bit more, don't they? They're probably thinking, "It's not something you should talk about, let alone make an exhibition about!"

BS Indeed, in my family it's something we're not supposed to talk about. But that's exactly what fascinates me: it's a taboo, and therefore something of a hidden knowledge—an "if you know, you know" kind of thing. In Dutch books published around the turn of the century (Daum 1889, Couperus 1900) guna-guna is considered as a silent force. However, in more recent literature (Zoest, Van, and Nunuk Tri Heryati 1992) it's explained as a broad realm of spirits and spiritual practices. Overall, it's a subject on which relatively little has been written or publicly discussed. What I also noticed is that the meaning of guna-guna has changed over time and differs among generations and locations.

AP I agree. And it is diasporic in the sense that at different sites it's seen as positive, negative, or something in between, and the notion moves with people across continents and alludes to their sense of belonging.

BS [nods in agreement.]

AP Okay... let's talk about our exhibition then. It deals with forces that not everyone can see, but most people certainly feel. Through this exhibition we want to move away from explaining guna-guna solely as a location-specific and spiritual phenomenon. This exhibition investigates the term as a metaphor for the enigmatic or metaphysical powers of objects and sculptures, whether inside or outside the realm of the museum; for everything that eludes direct observation in design and art. *When*

Things Are Beings moves between the elusive pull of both abstract concepts and forms of spirituality that can lie hidden in objects and sculptures.

BS The 24 projects in the exhibition range from installations to photography and print, jewelry, object design, video, film, soundscape, and performance. They were selected from more than 750 applications—together with a jury we focused on the inner power of objects and sculptures to make our decision. Some projects in the exhibition appeal to a spiritual world, and others connect complex and layered stories and histories between people from different generations and locations. Some of the projects have a strong enigmatic force—they cause confusion, but evoke curiosity at the same time. Some even appear to have metaphysical strength, existing both here and beyond our physical world and sensory perception. What we're trying to say with this is that design and art can enchant or captivate you in a way that's not always clearly explicable or easily defined.

AP Yes.

BS Lol. Yes. Okay. *When Things Are Beings*, the title of the exhibition, refers to what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai calls "the strong relationship between human actions and things" (1986). We chose this title because we noticed during the studio visits that all the selected projects bridge the worlds of the material and the non-material: they connect ideas and objects, spirituality and materiality, or social issues with tangible matter.

AP Exactly. In the museum people tend to attach values to things, like beautiful, ugly, expensive, cheap, interesting, boring, etc. Looking at things through Appadurai's lens actually offers the opportunity to see things as always in motion. He shines light on human behavior and positions their actions in relation to an object in a social context. Our exhibition addresses the inner power of objects and sculptures in several ways: as

well as the material elements and techniques or stylistic characteristics, it highlights the intention of things and how people can become emotionally and sensually entangled with them.

BS The material and the immaterial, the spiritual and the non-spiritual, the animate and the inanimate all exist together in this exhibition. Maybe we should briefly address the fact that we don't believe in such divisions either; that we believe things are also beings – *wink wink*.

AP 😊

Yes, Appadurai says that people and things are not radically distinct categories, and that the transactions that surround things are invested with the properties of social relations. In the Global North, the common view is that industrial production and circulation in global networks has led to “things” losing their mystique. This loss is seen as a precondition for modernity—both a historical period and the ensemble of particular socio-cultural norms, attitudes, and practices that arose in the wake of the renaissance of 17th-century thought and the 18th-century “Enlightenment”. However, in recent years it looks as if the animate and the inanimate worlds are becoming increasingly intertwined. A new sensibility is emerging in everyday life for the strange existence of things, for their unattainable alterity and hidden power. Accordingly, the Western dichotomy between humanity and non-humanity is continuing to weaken (Saurma-Jeltsch & Eisenbeiß 2010).

BS This ties in with the way we aim to present the projects in this exhibition. It's an interdisciplinary group show where contemporary design and art coalesce. We are trying to evoke the idea of the seen and unseen as well as break with the traditional rationale of the white cube through the design by architecture studio Studio LA, using colorful mesh walls.



ON THINGS AND BEINGS

Graphic interpretation by Studio The Future of Amanda and Britte walking and talking, 2022. Original image courtesy of the curators. Photo: Charl Landvreugd.



We are trying to break with the traditional rationale of the white cube through the design by architecture studio Studio LA, using colorful mesh walls.

AP Another important thing is that we wanted to move away from seeing guna-guna only as a concept tied to one specific geographic site or diasporic culture, or explaining it in a one-sided way. The variety of projects in the exhibition taught us to explore the concept more as a metaphor for “spiritual thinking through things.”

BS Addressing the spiritual realm through art is not something new. In Euro-American art circles, the best-known movements that have been tied to mysticism are the Symbolists, Expressionists, and famous artists such as Piet Mondrian (Bauduin 2013). Mondrian was a member of the Dutch Theosophical Society from 1909, and he kept a picture in his studio of Madame Blavatsky, one of its co-founders. The Russian aristocrat Madame Blavatsky and other theosophical writers believed that contact with a deeper spiritual reality could be established through intuition, meditation, revelation, or some other state transcending normal human consciousness.

But what’s more interesting in the light of current social debates is the steady increase of interest in spiritual powers within contemporary art practices. Critical thinkers have shed light on how the occult offers critical conditions of thinking. They propose that ‘the magical’—or spiritual, religious, esoteric—is a fundamental threat to the logic of colonialism, capitalism, ecocides, and gender constructs (Silvia Federici 2018; 2021, Dale Turner 2008, Lee Harrington and Tai Fenix Kulystin 2018, among others). This way of thinking has gained traction in the contemporary art world and continues to inspire cultural practitioners who are interested in societal questions (Sejbæk Torp-Pedersen et al. 2021).

EDITOR This is quite a big statement. I think readers on both sides of the political spectrum might like to read a few words on how the magical undermines all these pervasive constructs. Don’t answer with “it’s magic!” please.

AP Hahaha okay, that's fair. Mira Asriningtyas' essay in this publication explains using several examples how the magical resists such constructs. She writes how people can enchant the world, and by doing so reject the heterogeneous structural processes that shaped the modern world and, if this is done collectively and intentionally, turn a specific agenda into a common goal.

Back to the works in the exhibition.... With the stylistic characteristics and sociological constructs in mind, we grouped the projects in different conceptual clusters according to overarching visual elements and the social questions they raise, in which style and subject matter can coexist. Iris Kensmil and Sebastian Koudijzer both busy themselves with (Ancestral) Family Matters. Ana Navas, Eric Giraudet de Boudemange and Laurids Gallée illuminate transformational processes in their Shape Shifter projects. Sondi, Ginevra Petrozzi, Amy Suo Wu & Elaine W. Ho work within the Digital Realm, where they create safe havens. And Yinka Buutfeld, Wendy Owusu, Wei Yang and Aram Lee make objects that allude to Embodied Empowerment. Others, like Seán Hannan, Chequita Nahar, Shani Leseman and Antonio Jose Guzman & Iva Jankovic, work around Rites and Rituals—which also ties in with the projects by Ayo, Saskia Noor van Imhoff, Jae Pil Eun that refer to Cultured Nature. The inner power of objects also comes to the surface in the projects by Hatutamelen (James Noya), Magali Reus and Sabine Marcelis. They create Objects of Desire, work that evokes curiosity while allowing meaning to remain elusive and challenging to grasp. And a more critical note comes from Marcos Kueh and James Beckett, whose works evoke Skeptical Spectres.

BS I think we should make it clear that these conceptual clusters are neither indicated in the exhibition nor further substantiated as themes. We developed them after arriving at our selection with the jury. Devising these clusters helped us find connections between the projects and distill the subjects that the designers and artists brought to us in reaction to the open call.

AP The way a curator wants to bring structure to the world?

BS Yes—in hindsight, as a process of reverse engineering. 😊

AP 😊 I can't deal with that term.

BS Lol—sorry I can't help it, my study group (Curatorial Research Collective, TU/e) keeps using this phrase. It might seem a bit silly and technical, but it does apply in a way to the Municipal Art Acquisitions projects, right? 😊

It's also the least of our problems. A bigger question is that we are asking ourselves how a museum should deal with objects that contain hidden knowledge, taboos, spiritual power, the metaphysical and the enigmatic, i.e. forces that not everyone can see but many can certainly feel. There are two issues at stake. Firstly, the acquisition process risks turning the intrinsic value of these works into commodities—a property or product. As Appadurai says, the world of art is tied to the related worlds of collection and commodification (2006). Secondly, the museum is, in general, mostly geared towards conserving and presenting visible, concrete works—even conceptual artworks such as Sol LeWitt's murals have installation instructions that direct towards a visual outcome. The same goes for performances and their choreographies.

AP This is exactly what I'm interested in—in an object's biography and how this changes when an object enters the museum space and maybe the collection. An object may be tamed by becoming part of this environment, maybe resulting in the loss of its original purpose, but never of its power, I think. A transformational appropriation of things in this way, marked by constant revaluation, reframing and recoding, illuminates transformational processes in social contextualization, knowledge transfer and—because individuals are always

involved in the making of exhibitions and collections—the transformation of individual identities (Saurma-Jeltsch & Eisenbeiß 2010).

EDITOR Wait a minute, instead of wondering how a *museum* should deal with objects that contain more than their materiality might suggest, how are you as museum curators working with such hidden forces now, while preparing for the exhibition? Is it possible for curators to protect these works from a potential loss of meaning in the physical and symbolic transfer to the museum context? Possibly using your own *guna-guna*?

AP Yeah, so how do we personally take care of these projects? Britte and I already attach a lot of importance to working very closely with designers and artists and find this intimate relationship crucial for what we do. From what we've learned curating this exhibition, we would continue to approach objects and sculptures in the same way and really cherish the relationship that we curators, along with everyone else in the museum—including the audience—have with them. We're trying to do this by giving space to their stories in the exhibitions and wall texts and putting them in a certain context where they can encounter each other. But we still don't have a clear answer as to how we can put this into practice on a long-term basis. How will the next generation of curators take care of them?

BS Individual curatorial intentions aside, we believe one should stay critical of the museum's design framework and art historical framework, of how they influence a specific construction of meaning and knowledge about design and art—especially when it comes to objects that contain a power that many people can feel, even if they can't see it. Sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos acknowledges the impossibility of communicating the unsayable: All that arbitrarily was conceived as being “outside” a highly intellectualized and rationalized field was ignored or stigmatized. The unsayable is described

here as the dark world of passions, intuitions, feelings, emotions, affections, beliefs, faiths, values, and myths that cannot be communicated save directly (2016:5).

AP That's right. How can we give space to the unsayable and intangible as well as the perhaps more easily articulated visual aspects of design and art? Over the last decade, much has been written about how one of the functions of objects in museums can be to help us remember histories and tell stories, or enable us to make connections between different realms in space and time (Dudley 2010; 2012; 2017, Basu 2013). As the interdisciplinary scholar James Clifford says: “Sites of collections start to appear like places of encounter and openings: objects are travelers, crossers, diasporic with powerful, very meaningful ties elsewhere” (Clifford 1997).

BS Ooh, I love that as a way to conclude our conversation. It's an appeal for continuing discussions and further reading, and conversations that will hopefully resonate long after this project.

AP 

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ON RE-ENCHANTMENT AND COSMIC HOPES: *The Power of Checkered Textile, Moringa Oleifera, and Collective Intentionality.*

Independent curator and writer Mira Asriningtyas was invited to write an essay to explore the idea of magic as a tool to fight oppression and ward off harmful societal forces. After addressing case studies from Indonesia, she moves to examples from a more global context and brings up questions such as: Can a specific object with apotropaic magic protect you from a global pandemic and natural disaster? And can we collectively try to re-enchant and remake the world using the power of objects?

Guna-guna—an incantation done to captivate someone’s heart—falls within a type of Indonesian witchcraft related to controlling animals, human beings, physical phenomena, and nature in general. Its manifestation can be productive, protective, deflective, or destructive (Pinatih and Sloothaak, 2021). *Guna-guna* is often used as a vehicle to achieve specific goals such as love, power, wealth, or protection. The term’s grounding in the practice of captivating someone’s heart is similar to that of “enchantment”.

enchantment (n.)

c. 1300, enchaument, “act of magic or witchcraft; use of magic; magic power,” from Old French encantement “magical spell; song, concert, chorus,” from enchanter “bewitch, charm,” from Latin incantare “enchant, cast a (magic) spell upon,” from in- “upon, into” (from PIE root *en “in”) + cantare “to sing” (from PIE root *kan- “to sing”).

Source: [Online Etymology Dictionary](#).

Enchantment uses phrases, rhythms, or a song to create a more delightful sight—a sense of wonder and inexplicable delight similar to putting a rose-tinted glass on a specific idea. Unfortunately, it goes both ways and can cause someone to fall madly in love or be tempted to jump off a cliff. Whether the intention is good or bad depends on the spellcaster. When casting a spell, one projects a future that is yet to come, altering a non-ideal situation to create their version of an idealized reality. From this point of view, enchantment can be seen as a micro form of worlding: a proposition to live the imaginary possibility as if it were possible.

Using “enchantment” as a starting point, this essay explores magic as a tool to fight oppression and ward off forces that cause global crises, beginning with Indonesian case studies and moving toward global examples. Questions include: Can we learn from the ecological wisdom of a wise person, *dukun*, or shaman in the face of a climate emergency? Can objects with apotropaic magic protect you from a global pandemic and natural disaster? Can a spell be cast against the delirium of influence and power that lead to war and destruction? And finally, can we collectively try to re-enchant and remake the world using the power of objects?

On Re-enchantment: The Role of the Wise People

There is an anecdote from Indonesia about a village experiencing drought and a young priest new to the area. During his first few months spent walking around the area, he found that the heavy logging in the surrounding forest was slowly damaging the ecosystem that provided a water catchment for the village. It was not easy to stop or slow down the logging—until he noticed how superstitious the villagers were. One day he went into the forest and put a black and white checkered cloth around one of the oldest trees. The young priest made

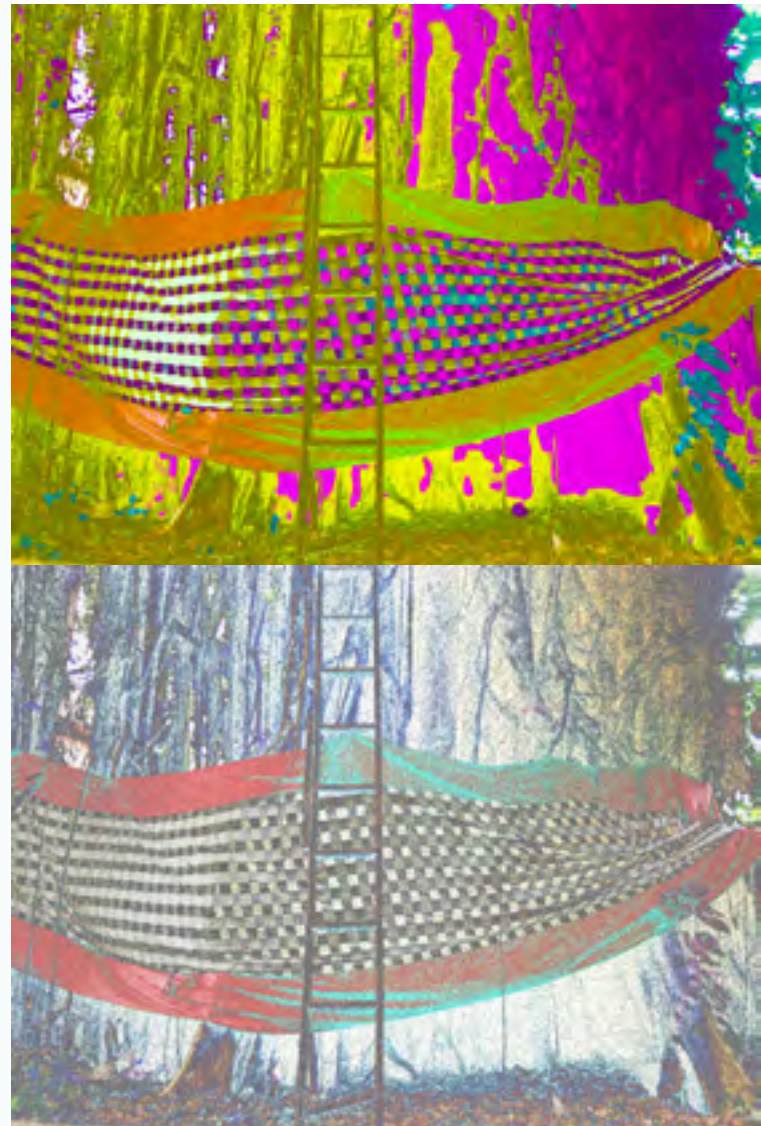


fig.1
A similar practice of bringing back the sacredness of a site is done by a group of environmental activists in the village of Besan Gunungkidul. The members of the Besan Gunungkidul, consisting

Graphic interpretation by Studio The Future of poleng (two-tone) textile wrapped around the tree to indicate the presence of a deity or spirit inside an object that needs to be treated respectfully. Original image courtesy of the author. Photo: Mella Jaarsma.

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sure that someone from the village saw him. Whenever someone asked him about it, he would explain that he saw a deity living inside the tree, and that harming the tree might wreak havoc on the village. Over the years, he continued doing these processions to slow down logging while at the same time building a water catchment system and community reservoir infrastructure to address the water crisis. This anecdote portrays the idea of re-enchantment on a small, geographical scale.

It was never clear where the village was, or whether the story was true or a combination of similar experiences from different parts of Indonesia. Yet the young priest did adopt the idea of wrapping a checkered cloth around a tree from the Balinese philosophy of Rwa Bhineda, a concept of balance and harmony symbolized in *poleng* (two-tone) textile (fig.1). When the textile is wrapped around an object (statue, tree, stone, etc.), it indicates the presence of a deity or a spirit inside the object that needs to be treated with respect and caution. It became a shared symbol understood beyond the geographical scope of Bali, and thus, key to the success of the young priest's act of preserving the water catchment area. It is not the mundane textile object that holds the magical power, but what it implies in combination with the priest's position as a public figure, and the community superstition. Together, an old spirit is brought back into the forest to solve a specific contemporary problem. As a spiritual leader, the priest occupies a position usually filled by local wise people or *dukun* (shamans) who become conduits to activate the power of an object by declaring that a certain item inhabited by a spirit or building a bridge between an object and a belief system.

A similar practice of bringing back the sacredness of a site is done by a group of environmental activists known as Resan Gunungkidul,¹ made up of *resan*

1 Resan Gunungkidul is a group of *resan* (protective tree) lovers or *resaners* in Gunungkidul. The members of the Resan Gunungkidul, consisting

(protective tree) lovers whose activity includes restoration and conservation of land and water resources in the Gunungkidul area in Yogyakarta with frequent water crises and prolonged drought. Their practice is grounded in both local wisdom and ecological discourse and combines the knowledge of local wise people, conservationists, and ecological activists. Aside from using spiritual attempts to reignite the sacredness of natural resources, the Resan Gunungkidul community identify and protect big protective trees considered keystone species, voluntarily cleaning up and restoring water reservoirs and replanting trees in multiple areas as a proposition for a greener future for Gunungkidul. Prior to doing these conservation attempts, they sometimes use ritual and simple sets of *sesajen* (offering)² as a courtesy to acknowledge the presence of the protecting spirit of the *resan*.

The knowledge needed to prepare the more densely symbolic and meticulously prepared *sesajen* is often passed down through generations or entrusted to wise people or *dukun*. Wise people's role to prepare *sesajen* permeates daily life to mark personal moments

of local communities scattered in various hamlets/sub-districts in Gunungkidul, try to consistently and continuously carry out *gugur gunung* (cooperative voluntary work) in restoring and conserving land and water sources (springs, rivers, beji, tuk, caves, mountains, lakes, etc.) in Gunungkidul area. They also prepare seed to plant and care, based on rooted cultural strategies that are owned and embedded in local belief, then carried out to achieve the dream: *Gunungkidul Ijo Royo-Royo* (green and lush Gunungkidul). **Source:** "Tentang Kami: Resan Gunungkidul," Resan Gunungkidul (website), accessed October 3, 2022. Translation by author.

2 *Sesajen* is one of the virtuous gestures toward communicating with the deities or entities of higher powers that protect nature and to achieve a more harmonious relationship. It can be as simple as a pack of fragrant flowers and incense, or as elaborate as many types of edibles and objects with different names, shapes, and colors. *Sesajen* is often linked to a specific purpose whereas each item withholds its own philosophical meaning; the compilation of hope and prayer, an attempt to ward off evil, and symbols of gratitude is materialized but sometimes also internalized through ingesting and reflecting. For example, *ingkung* (a whole-chicken dish commonly found in *sesajen*), which symbolizes religious obedience and humility is not only presented visually but in words, with its name derived from *ingsun* (a humble pronoun for oneself) and *manekung* (a gesture of obeisance). The combination of the visual and philosophical wordplay translates as a form of devotion to the higher power.

such as weddings, births, and deaths, and nurture sacred natural resources such as springs, old trees, or places where the force of nature is strong, unpredictable, and often destructive, such as near an active volcano or ocean. These places are believed to be the dwelling places of deities who maintain the balance of nature. At the same time, in preserving a natural resource as sacred and respected, the community promotes its sustainability, keeping it pristine and off limits from over extraction or irreversible damage.

The role of shamans as guardians of nature is not unique to the Indonesian context. Anthropologist David Abrams has observed that a shaman acts as an intermediary between the human community and the larger ecological field to ensure an appropriate flow of nourishment that is balanced and reciprocal between the human community and the earth, and that the village never takes more from the living land than it gives back—not just materially but with prayers, propitiations, and praise (1996:6). For many years, Indigenous communities from all over the world have been warning of ecological catastrophe as a result of colonialism, capitalism, and the prolonged extractive practice of modern society. The late shaman Sabino Gualinga, from Sarayaku in Ecuador's Amazon rainforest, was one of the Indigenous spiritual leaders who testified at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica for the trial of Sarayaku vs. Ecuador in 2011. In his testimony, he educated the world about the idea of a Living Forest³ that acknowledges

3 In the declaration of the Living Forest by Kichwa Native People of Sarayaku in 2018, the Living Forest or Kawsak Sacha is acknowledged as a living being, with consciousness, constituted by all the beings of the jungle. It includes the beings of the animal, vegetable, mineral, spiritual and cosmic worlds, in intercommunication with human beings, giving them what is necessary to reanimate their psychological, physical and spiritual facets, thus restoring the energy, life and equilibrium of the original peoples. In the waterfalls, lagoons, marshes, mountains, rivers, trees and other places of the territory, the Protective Beings of Kawsak Sacha live and develop a life of their own, similar to that of human beings. The Kawsak Sacha transmits the knowledge to the yachak (wise elders) so that they can interact in the world of the Protective Beings of the jungle, in order to maintain the balance of the Pachamama, and heal people and society. This knowledge is methodically main-

the forest and its content as a living, conscious, right-bearing entity. He also demanded the right to legally recognize the community's sacred connection with the Living Forest (Brown 2022). Such gentle practices and understanding of cohabitation with non-human entities are becoming more important amidst the global climate emergency we all face.

Tolak Bala: Objects of Apotropaic Magic

In areas closer to Mount Merapi, one of the most active stratovolcanoes in the world, located on the island of Java,⁴ rather than attempting to control the uncontrollable force of nature, rituals such as *labuhan*⁵ and *merti desa*⁶ are peace offerings and acknowledgements of presence and cohabitation paid to a higher being and toward the spiritual kingdom of Mount Merapi. In the volatile environment of Merapi, the role

tained and transmitted to new generations. **Source:** Kawsak Sacha website.

4 "Java ... is an island of Indonesia, bordered by the Indian Ocean on the south and the Java Sea on the north. With a population of over 148 million (Java only) or 152 million (including the inhabitants of its surrounding islands), Java constitutes 56.1 percent of the Indonesian population and is the world's most-populous island. Formed mostly as the result of volcanic eruptions from geologic subduction between the Sunda Plate and Australian Plate, Java is the 13th largest island in the world and the fifth largest in Indonesia by landmass at about 138,800 square kilometers (53,600 sq mi)." **Source:** Wikipedia, "Java", last modified October 1, 2022.

5 "Labuhan is a sacred ceremony conducted by the Kingdom of Yogyakarta to give offerings to the spirits who rule in specific places such as the Southern Sea and the mountains." **Source:** "Upacara Labuhan," Dinas Kebudayaan (Kundha Kabudayan) Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (website), March 14, 2014. Translation by author.

6 "Merti Desa/Dusun or cleaning up the village is the symbol of the community's gratitude for abundant fortune, safety, peace, and harmony in the world. This kind of ritual is still common in rural areas. Javanese people believe that even when they are hit by deep sorrow and calamity, there are still many things to be grateful for." Samigaluh—Melestarikan Merti Dusun. **Source:** Kapanewon Samigaluh Kabupaten Kulon Progo (website), accessed October 3, 2022. Translation by author.



fig.2

Graphic interpretation by Studio The Future of janur (young coconut leaf), which is placed above a door as a symbol of hope in difficult times and of new life. Original image courtesy of the author. Photo: Dito Yuwono.

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October 3, 2022. Translation by author.



FIGURE 2

of the wise people is to mediate the power of nature and create a warning system by sensing the rise in volcanic activity through dreams, animal behavior, and changes in nature. As soon as there are signs of eruptions, the wise people send silent warnings to the villagers using collectively understood symbols. For example, the villagers will be asked to assemble a simple knot of *janur* (young coconut leaf) and place it above their front doors (fig.2). The meaning of this can be found through wordplay: *sejatining nur* (the true light or the divine light). The *janur* is a silent prayer materialized—a hope to find light in difficult times and a symbol of the starting point to a new life. A volcanic eruption might bring destruction, but it is also believed to be a blessing, a moment of renewal and future prosperity. But beyond magic, I think the logic behind this system of signs might include a disaster mitigation strategy. Having a brightly colored *janur* placed above the front door while praying for one's safety heightens one's awareness of the exit door. The prayers vested in the *janur* might resurface from the back of our minds should there be any sudden volcanic eruption, so one can calmly locate the exit door amidst possible panic.

Assembling a simple knot of *janur* is a *tolak bala* practice to ward off misfortune through an object endowed with apotropaic magic. The practice of *tolak bala* is popular in Indonesia, probably due to the widespread awareness of the unstable force of nature given that the ground continuously moves beneath us. Indonesia is home to some of the most active volcanoes in the Pacific Ring of Fire, formed due to subduction zones of the three main active tectonic plates. Animism becomes part of a culture that forges an intimate relationship with its ecosystem and everything that lives on the landscape. It is believed that not only human beings but also trees, animals, even mountains have intelligent souls. In this case, the idea of magic inclines toward a deeper connection between humans and the animate natural world. The wise people are believed to possess

a more intimate relationship with the animate natural world through years of embodied knowledge transmitted through ritual, oral tradition, and sensorial experience. They can sense even the slightest change in nature and feel the imminence of danger—sometimes even collaborating with the deities to alter the weather.⁷

Tolak bala has also been practiced against plague. During the early Covid-19 pandemic, the popularity of *Moringa oleifera* (fig.3) escalated due to its immune-boosting qualities and amulet-like ability to protect against evil—or in this case, against a global pandemic. In Bali, moringa is used in food, medicine, and beauty products, and is planted around the house to ward off evil (Eveleigh 2022). In the Banyuwangi region—just across the strait from Bali and one of the few areas in Java where belief in magic is still part of the social fabric—it is common for a host to serve a bowl of simple moringa soup to a guest or visiting stranger. The soup is made with moringa leaves, which are believed to be exceptionally potent in counteracting evil spirits, bad intentions, and all types of witchcraft and *guna-guna*, no matter how strong. As soon as the magic manifests, all intentions of the guest are purified, and the judgment of the host is unclouded. Moringa is believed to be so pure and powerful that it can be used as an amulet against dark forces when carried in one’s pocket, hung above the door, or planted around the house. In West Java, it is used to purify, clean, and bathe dead bodies before burial. The plant easily grows all year, providing a cheap and sustainable source of food with medicinal quality. A nutrient-packed superfood, moringa is also highly anti-inflammatory and an antioxidant, it harnesses the power within us, turning nature into a somatic power with healing abilities. After all, it is never just about the magic.

7 One of the most popular examples of an attempt to alter the weather was by Rara Istiati Wulandari, a rain shaman who was tasked by Indonesian government to control the weather during the MotoGP at the Mandalika Circuit in Lombok - Indonesia. Source: Aisyah Llewellyn, “Weathering the storm: Indonesia’s rain shamans,” Aljazeera, April 1, 2022.

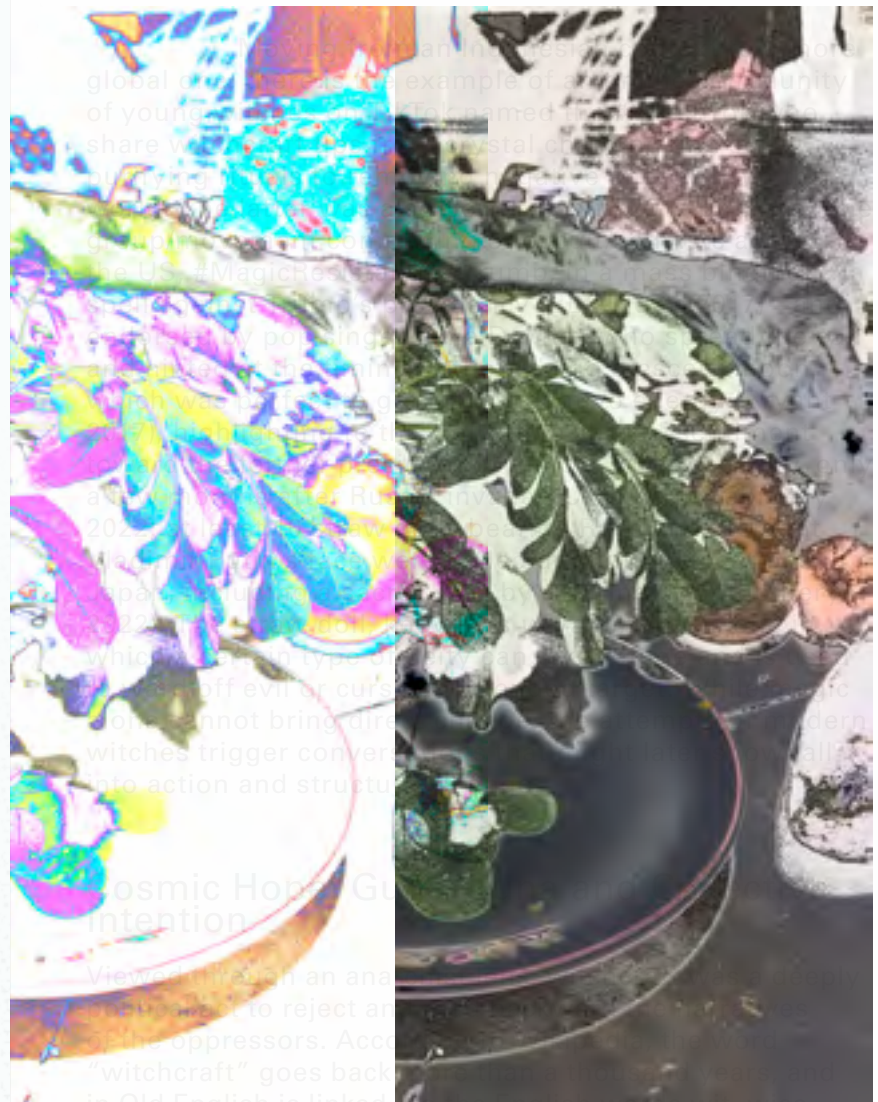


fig.3

Graphic interpretation by Studio The Future of Moringa oleifera, a plant used for its immune qualities and its ability to protect against evil when worn as an amulet. Original image courtesy of the author. Photo: Dito Yuwono.

a more intimate relationship with the animate natural world through means of embodied knowledge transmitted through ritual, oral tradition, and sensorial experience. They can sense even the slightest change in nature and feel the influence of language, sometimes even collaborating with the deity to alter the weather.

Tolak bala has also been practiced against plague. During the early COVID-19 pandemic, the popularity of *Moringa oleifera* (MO) escalated due to its immune-boosting qualities and amulet-like ability to protect against the disease, against a global pandemic that was rampant in food, medicine, and beauty products and scattered around the house to ward off evil (Purhita, 2021). In the Banyuwangi region—just across the island of Bali—one of the few areas in Java where the magic is still part of the social fabric—the community has a habit of serving a bowl of simple *moringa* soup to a stranger, or a stranger. The soup is made with *moringa* leaves, which are believed to be exceptionally powerful in warding off evil spirits, bad intentions, and all types of magic, *guna-guna*, no matter how strong. If the magic manifests, all indications of the guest are null, and the judgment of the host is clouded. *Moringa* is believed to be so pure and powerful that it can serve as an amulet against dark forces. One carried in a pocket, hung above the doorway, and around the house. In West Java, it is used to purify water and bathes lead bodies before burial. The plant easily grows in a jar, providing a cheap and sustainable source of medicinal quality. A nutrient-packed superfood, *moringa* is also highly anti-inflammatory and an antioxidant, harnesses the power within us, turning nature into a somatic power with healing abilities. After all, it is never just about the magic.

Graphic interpretation by Studio The Future of Moringa
A plant used for its immune qualities and its ability to
protect against evil when worn as an amulet. Original image
7. One image used for its immune qualities and its ability to
weather was by Para Istaiti Wulandari. Photo: Dito Yuwono.
Indonesian government to control the weather during the MotoGP at the
Mandalika Circuit in Lombok - Indonesia. Author: Alan Llewellyn. "Weather
erasing the storm: Indonesia's rain shamans," Aljazeera, April 1, 2022.

Moving from an Indonesian context to a more global one, there is the example of an online community of young witches on TikTok named the #WitchTok who share witchcraft tips from crystal charging and self-purifying rituals to removing negative energy from the world. The latter was also performed in 2017 by the online group/movement comprising of occult/activists across the US, #MagicResistance #Trump, in a mass binding spell against Trump's presidency (BBC News 2017)—and endorsed by pop singer Lana Del Rey who spread the call and hinted at the timing of the waning crescent moon, which was perfect to get rid of negative energy (Bryant 2017), highlighting to this collective shared-sentiment toward the former president of the US. More recently, only a few months after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, at least 10 straw dolls bearing Russian President Vladimir Putin's face were nailed at multiple locations in Japan, including a sacred tree by a shrine (Montgomery 2022). The straw doll, known as *wara ningyo*, is one in which a certain type of deity can take refuge and is used to ward off evil or curse an intended target. While magic alone cannot bring direct change, the attempts of modern witches trigger conversations that might later snowball into action and structural change.

Cosmic Hope: Guna-Guna and Collective Intention

Viewed through an anarchist lens, witchcraft was a deeply political act to reject and read backward the narratives of the oppressors. According to Wikipedia, the word "witchcraft" goes back more than a thousand years, and in Old English is linked "to the English words wit, wise, wisdom: 'craft of the wise.'" The concept and belief that has persisted throughout recorded history in many cultures worldwide was slowly corroded during colonialism, when religious enlightenment was introduced alongside modern science. But to re-enchant the world, according to Silvia Federici, is not the promise of an impossible return to

the past but the possibility of recovering the power to collectively decide our fate on this earth (Federici 2018).

Let's go back to *guna-guna* as a silent mystical force, and the notion that an object may possess a soul or power that cannot be seen but can be felt. The power of objects and amplification of collectively understood symbols that connect likeminded audiences across borders is foregrounded in widely circulating common goals. Amplification brings awareness to causes so a wider community can form allyship and cross-continental solidarity to imagine a possible future that might eventually lead to a revolution. Unfortunately, like *guna-guna*, power goes both ways. The raised clenched fist as a symbol of resistance and resilience can clash with the MAGA hat—a collective symbol of bigotry.

People's beliefs instill objects with an inherent power they can ignite. Intention is important here, since the manifestation of *guna-guna* or enchantment depends on that first spellcaster. The animating force of *guna-guna* and an attempt to re-enchant the world requires a collective faith and intention; philosopher John R. Searle has stated that the notion of collective intentionality implies cooperation (Searle 2002), turning a specific agenda into a common goal. To enchant a new world into existence requires a meditative moment where movement is paused and pressure relieved to clearly foresee what could have taken place in a world that is yet to come. It is a resistance to the temptation to postpone joy; it is a call to tune in to a global choral vibration and sing creation into being, aligned with the power of the cosmos and body. Collective faith and intention are the philosopher's stones that can transmute base material (*poleng* textile, *sesajen*, *janur*, Moringa, the straw doll) into the gold of conservation, community protection, and ultimately, collective hope.

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PROJECTS

AYO

Ayo's work comprises extended research projects that shapeshift through film, sculpture, and performance. Her research interests and desire to amplify counter narratives are nourished by archival matter, oral histories, intangible forms of cultural heritage and informal knowledge practices held by unofficial bodies.

Winnow(er) (2022) is the outcome of Ayo's quest to learn the craft of weaving winnowing fans in the style of Langi people living in northern Uganda—the objects are known as *Odero* ("Langi winnowers") in the artist's mother tongue. Presenting the fans as sculptural objects that were inspired by a Langi winnower inherited by the artist herself, the project investigates embodied knowledge about personal and collective histories etched deep within diasporic bodies. The center of gravity for this project lies in the expansion of Ayo's practice towards informal knowledge production and immaterial cultural heritage.

The ancient agricultural practice of winnowing is used to sort harvested products, for example by separating grain from chaff. This manual technique involves shaking the mixed grain and chaff on the flat fan, throwing it upwards and then catching it again—just

a light breeze is enough to blow away the chaff, leaving only the heavier grain in the winnower. The fans are also used for carrying crops from the garden or farming land. Globalization and the automation of agricultural practices are threatening the manual craft of winnowing fan-making with extinction in northern Uganda. Communal practices such as traditional winnowing are typically passed down generationally from mother to daughter. This knowledge remains largely undocumented, and is now at risk of erasure.

Ayo inherited a traditional winnower, but not the knowledge on how to craft one herself. This motivated her field research in Kamdiny and Owiny, Uganda. She contacted women who could teach her all she needed to know about the winnowing fan: the materials used to make it, the craft of fashioning them, and their uses. This process—involving personal conversations while performing manual work—gave Ayo the opportunity to repossess the informally transferred knowledge into her own diasporic body. The *Winnower* thus also serves as a metaphor for filtering out dominantly present western knowledge until only transient forms remain.

The constellation of sculptural objects on display at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam is inspired by both the material of the winnower as well as the multitude of meanings and functions it embodies. The original family heirloom that is kept safe in Ayo's personal collection, for example, is made out of materials such as cow dung, *itele* reed and the *opobo* bark - the latter used by Langi healers to treat illnesses and bring reconciliation in times of community dispute. For the sculptures, Ayo started her making process in Uganda using traditional materials. In the Netherlands she added locally sourced Dutch reed, cow-dung, bark, and concrete and in so doing has metaphorically interwoven her embodied technique into the materiality of the Dutch landscape she currently inhabits.



Ayo, (detail) *Winnower*, 2022. Sculptures composed of handwoven winnowing baskets. Courtesy of the artist.

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and bring reconciliation in times of community dispute. For the sculptures, Ayo started her making process in Uganda using traditional techniques, but when she added locally sourced Dutch reed, she metaphorically interwoven her embodied technique into the materiality of the Dutch landscape she currently inhabits.

Conceptually, *Winnow(er)* represents the forces manifested through the multiplicity of energies and purposes that can be contained within this object. *Winnowers* are not only used in agriculture, but also in ceremonies such as *Dwoko Atin Awobi lot*, a child-cleansing practice and rite of passage that UNESCO recognized in 2013 as intangible cultural heritage. Ayo's engagement with her diasporic experience—using Dutch materials while engaging with Ugandan techniques and heritage—imbues *Winnow(er)* with trans-historical and trans-geographical significance.



Ayo (left) *Winnow(er)* 2021. Sculpture composed of woad woven winnowing baskets Courtesy of the artist.

AVO

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THE SCEPTICAL STRUCTURES OF MAX

JAMES BECKETT

James Beckett's installations examine transhistorical subjects pertaining to industrial heritage and the built environment, drawing on traditional belief systems as a means to gaining a more holistic understanding of the modern era. Beckett seeks to unlock the potential of artefacts in both his personal and larger museum collections with an eye for the absurd and uncanny. His work explores, with a focus on mechanisms of display, the peculiarity of human behavior, particularly in a neoliberal context.

2019
Wall sculptures.

James Beckett's *The Sceptical Structures of Max* (2019) shines a light—through the lenses of industrial heritage and socio-cultural discourse—on German engineer and entrepreneur Max Himmelheber, who streamlined the production of particleboard, a cheap and inevitably disposable construction material. This sculptural installation coalesces animist spiritual belief systems with the indifferent worlds of industrialism and finance capitalism.

Made from the waste of sawmills—wood chips and sawdust—mixed with phenol resin, Himmelheber's invention is accountable for the majority of today's mass-produced furniture, the prime and most infamous example being IKEA products. Particleboard is a highly versatile and stable product, but recent discoveries about its environmental impact raise issues about its sustainability. Himmelheber, an ingenious and eccentric figure, amassed a fortune through the management of patents for this product.

After sourcing particleboard waste from the streets of Amsterdam, Beckett began tracing the history of the material to its inventor. This research culminated in *The Sceptical Structures of Max*, a sculptural installation comprising individual components incorporating original prototype particleboard panels made at Himmelheber's laboratory and subsidiaries between 1945 and 1962. The panels in the installation feature comical objects and serious texts that narrate an open network of interpretations on Himmelheber and the history of particleboard. Beckett purposely incorporated the visible decay of the structures that form the backbone of the installation, projecting a state of discard and exhaustion. The crafted appearance of the installation alludes to both the decorative arts and the crude social reality of industrial materials.

The outcomes of Beckett's research-based practice often explore the peculiarities of human consumption behaviors, particularly in the neoliberal context. It is for this reason that *When Things Are Beings* is choosing to spotlight Himmelheber's particular fascination for Japanese Shinto animism: the belief that all nature, objects and materials contain a soul or a vital force. Once Himmelheber's particleboard invention had taken off, his factories started opening up around the world, meaning he would spend much time abroad. His visits to Japan sparked a long-term interest in Shinto animism, and in Germany he commissioned the architect of his first factory to build a Japanese-inspired villa in his hometown. Besides his interest in animism, he further developed philosophical reflections on man's role in the industrialized world, for instance through his quarterly magazine *Scheidewege: Jahresschrift für Skeptisches Denken* (Crossroads: Journal for Skeptical Thinking), in which he published scientific and philosophical texts, which were at times quite lucid. In his overall practice, James Beckett is interested in exploring the material value of industrial artifacts, but he also believes in their metaphysical potential and the activation of interpretations by taking absurdist or uncanny perspectives. His obscure visual language often reflects on mechanisms



JAMES BECKETT

James Beckett, (detail) *The Sceptical Structures of Max*, 2019. Chipboard sculptures. Courtesy of the artist and T293 gallery, Rome (IT).

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for Skeptical Thinking), in which he published scientific and philosophical texts, which were at times quite lucid. In his overall practice, James Beckett (detail, *The Sceptical Structures of Max*, 2019. Chipboard sculptures. Courtesy of the artist and T&S gallery, Roma) finds the material value of ind objects and believes in their metaphysical potential and the activation of interpretations by taking absurdist or uncanny perspectives. His obscure visual language often reflects on mechanisms



JAMES BECKETT

of display which resonate in the shrine-like sculptures presented in the exhibition. For Beckett, material serves as a vehicle for communication and connectivity.

Beckett's research on Himmelheber began in 2019, and a publication *The Sceptical Structures of Max* is scheduled for autumn 2022, designed by Will Holder, with Roma publishing.

YINKA BUUTFELD

Led by her intuitive touch and an artistic approach to design, Yinka Buutfeld questions the world through an interdisciplinary lens. Her jewelry pieces can be seen as wearable art, and are made to empower the wearer. Engaging with material, shape, color, and texture, her aim is to involve and communicate with the viewer through storytelling, where her Nigerian heritage is key.

AGBARA is a set of wearable art pieces by designer Yinka Buutfeld. The journey through which she connected with her Nigerian heritage forms a dominant thread in her practice, and the objects she makes connect and communicate with the viewer through storytelling. *AGBARA* comprises a set of “awareness pieces,” made to be worn on various parts of the body, including ear pieces, ankle or leg pieces, arm pieces, and one larger piece that can be worn around the torso. Made of rough shipping rope using decorative, braiding, and bleaching techniques, and adorned with ceramic pearls, the objects empower the body and embrace natural beauty.

This project reflects on the global issue of skin bleaching, which is rarely discussed in the public domain despite it being a common practice. Some people with darker pigmentation use harsh chemicals to remove melanin from their skin. The most frequently

used whitening products are hydroquinone and mercury, which can be hazardous externally, causing scarring, skin thinning, stretch marks or even burns, and internally, causing damage to the lungs. The desire for fairer skin is connected to a longer colonial history of oppression and ideas surrounding the supremacy of white people. *AGBARA*, meaning “power” in Yorùbá, interrogates this desire, and attempts to break through the stigma to open up a dialogue about a practice that is often covert and deeply ingrained within many societies.

The series is a manifestation of an in-depth material study based on carefully selected techniques and meaningful colors, shapes, and textures. The color range of the wearable pieces focuses on darker melanin skin tones and on the side effects of chemical bleaches applied to human skin, which are represented by the multiple shades of pink and brown. These objects bearing the marks of chemical bleaching constitute a plea to cherish all skin colors.

The *AGBARA* awareness pieces are also inspired by West-African manilla (“money”) jewelry, which was once used as a colonial currency. While these objects are well-known for their bold visual characteristics and are sometimes used as decorative elements in the domestic environment, their history is less appealing: in times of colonial rule they were used for trading enslaved people.

Buutfeld’s use of shipping rope serves in part to draw a connection between current beauty standards on the one hand and the colonial past and the transatlantic slave trade on the other. Created out of the idea that the human body is precious and delicate, *AGBARA* celebrates all skin tones. Buutfeld ensures that the abstract powers of these objects shine through by literally braiding and weaving diasporic stories into them, transforming the shackles of the past into vibrant sculptural accessories that empower the body rather than oppress or commodify it.



Yinka Buutfeld, (detail) AGBARA, 2021. Wearable artpieces made of bleached shipping rope. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Iris Rijkskamp.

BLUE MOON

JAE PIL EUN

Writer and performance artist Jae Pil Eun's practice is rooted in research on alternative forms of myth. In his performances, he explores mythologies that are different from or counter the single-narrative mythology of Western society. Eun attempts to revive traditional ritual practices from different geographical and cultural backgrounds that have been neglected or erased as a result of colonialism.

2022

Performance and installation with ceramic drums.

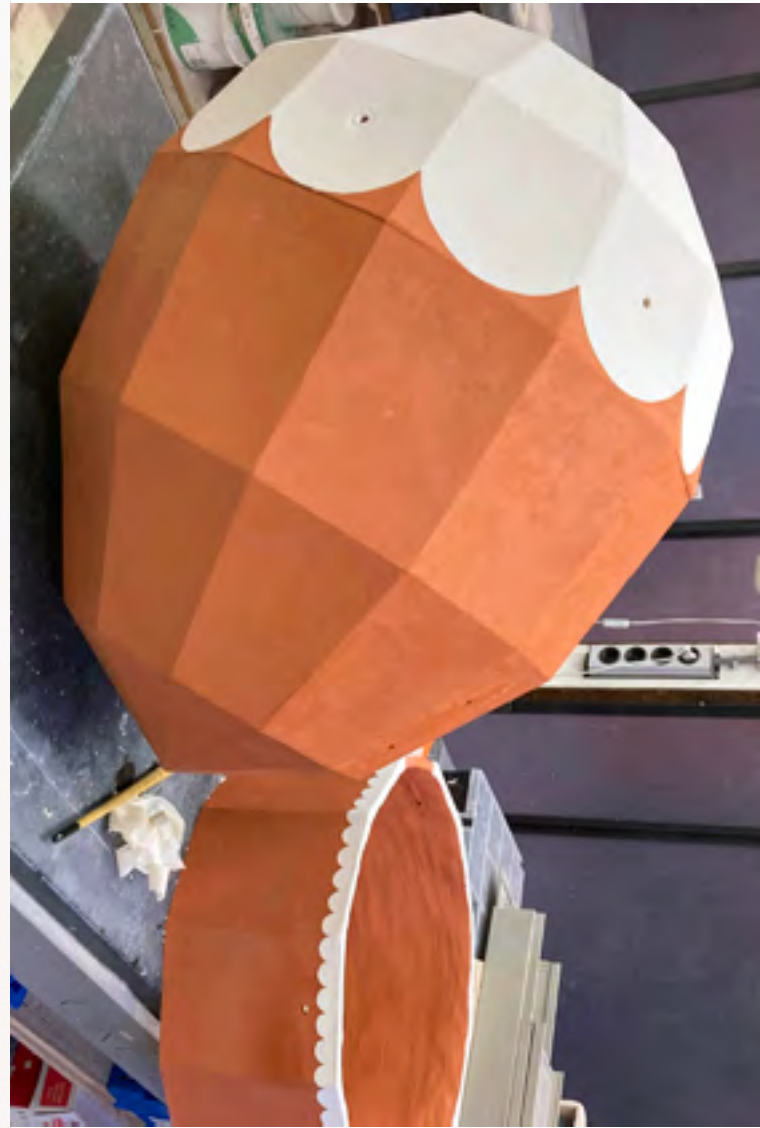
In *Blue Moon* (2022), artist and writer Jae Pil Eun examines the performative aspects of sculpture, departing from his research into Korea's ritual music. Part of the project is a performance, staged in the opening weekend of the exhibition.

Growing up in a small community in the South-Korean countryside, Jae Pil Eun was taught how to play the drum by his grandmother. The *samul nori* music he learned to play was traditionally performed in rice-farming villages to petition for and celebrate a good harvest. Colonization and rapid economic growth have led to these traditions being repressed and all but forgotten—while they are still present and respected in local communities, they are generally practiced away from public view because many outsiders regard them as redundant. With the memory of playing the drum with his grandmother in mind, Jae Pil Eun has documented and revived these Korean traditions

through his *Blue Moon* installation comprising ceramic drums, performance, and sound recording.

Drumming is used in Korean shamanic practices to invoke ghosts or spirits. The rhythms and vibrations can cause disorientation or even dizziness in the listener, giving rise to its description as “ghost music.” The sounds are each associated with specific natural phenomena such as various types of weather. The size of the drum determines the pitch of the sound: a lower pitch may represent clouds and rain; a higher pitch, thunder and wind. Different sounds and rhythms invoke particular natural phenomena and summon particular kinds of spirits.

Blue Moon tells the story of the reflection of the moon in a body of water. In this story, the reflected image of the moon is so beautiful that people try to grab it, making the water ripple and the reflection disappear. The water gradually becomes still again and the moon reappears. This cycle then repeats, over and over again. In the performance, the image of the moon is represented by a slow, low-pitched drum beat, and the splashing of the water by a fast-paced rhythm played on a high-pitched drum. Jae Pil Eun uses sound to evoke the spirit and vitality of creatures and inanimate objects. *Blue Moon* questions the dualities of nature and culture, and human and non-human, while also engaging with Asian theatrical storytelling traditions to investigate how sculptural objects can function in a performative realm.



Jae Pil Eun, (detail) *Blue Moon*, 2022. Performance and installation with ceramic drums. Courtesy of the artist.

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Jae Pil Eun, (detail) Blue Moon, 2022. Performance and installation with ceramic drums. Courtesy of the artist.

ERIC GIRAUDET DE BOUDEMANGE

Eric Giraudet de Boudemange works with mixed media “collages” that reflect on struggles around cultural identity in a global context. His artistic projects navigate a forest of references, from pop culture to folklore studies, and draw on material collected in situ. The resulting, playful, visual idiom is suffused with dark humor. Folkloric practices and collaborations with local healers are often his doorway to explorations of economic and cultural power relations.

Moults is a series of three mixed-media floor sculptures that form part of a research project on wolf myths and the folk stories surrounding the re-appearance of the animal in the French Alps in the early 2000s. Local shepherds wanted to take action against the wolves to protect their herds, while ecologists wanted to promote biodiversity; this resulted in great political tension in local communities. The return of the wolves led to a resurgence in the popularity of wolf-based fictional tales rooted not only in ancient myths but also in pop culture.

The title *Moults* refers to the shedding of feathers or skin by animals. The work is based on Saint Véran, a folk tale about three werewolves who shapeshift at nightfall and hide their human skins in a jar. One night, the fiancée of one of the werewolves discovers the skins and brings them to the villagers. Out of fear, they proceed to burn the skins. Ever since, it is said, the desperate

beasts have been haunting the mountains, thirsty for blood and love.

Placed apparently nonchalantly on the floor, the three sculptures comprising *Moults* are human in form, with the silicone skins resembling arms, legs, and a head. They are draped with fleeces and felt blankets featuring visual references to pop culture, as well as colorful psychedelic and absurdist themes. Central to the work is the notion of shapeshifting or metamorphosis, which can be associated with the figure of the wolf on multiple levels, including the trope of the wolf trickster in sheep's clothing. This anthropomorphic quality of the sculptures is reinforced by the silicone body parts on top of felted fleece fabrics. The sheepskins were crafted with a local artisan in the French Alps, forging a connection between the materials used and the local stories they relate to. While Giraudet de Boudemange's *Moults* presents the material leftovers of ancient myths concerning metamorphosis, these objects also have a contemporary aesthetic and could be worn as a fetishistic or ritualistic accessory.

The work is exemplary for the way Giraudet de Boudemange maps out local traditions and multiple perspectives on territory and landscape. His attachment to the land and to agriculture is rooted in his own family history: Boudemange is also the name of the farm in central France where his family still grows corn. This hereditary connection to landscape seeps into his artistic practice, in which he channels folklore in collaborations with local communities and engages with questions of personal identity and territory.



ERIC GIRAUDET DE BOUDEMANGE

*Eric Giraudet de Boudemange, (detail)
Moults, 2019. Mixed media sculpture.
Courtesy of the artist.*

THIEVES

LAURIDS GALLÉE

Laurids Gallée works at the intersection of art and design. His motivation to design objects is fueled not by notions of functionality, but by his interest in the contemporary application of materials and techniques with historical roots in the applied arts. Gallée highlights the physical properties of the design object, and often draws inspiration from Austrian folk tales and images.

2021
Free-standing shelf unit.

Thieves (2021) by designer Laurids Gallée pushes material limits and blurs the boundaries between functional design and figurative sculpture. Gallée's practice takes the form of a contemporary reflection on the history of applied arts through his use and reinterpretation of a traditional Austrian craft: hand painting folk furniture.

The exhibit itself is a free-standing shelf unit featuring the image of a flock of white birds in flight, as if captured in a snapshot of a fairytale. All other aspects of the narrative—where they came from, what they are fleeing, and where they are going—are up for interpretation by the viewer. The birds are shown carrying various objects in their beaks. The fact that some of these objects are man-made, while others are flowers, perhaps hints at intersections of the human world and the non-human natural world. The dynamism of the visual form

suggests the birds might at any moment fly off, escaping the restriction of the solid wood. Rather than simply being a case of applying ornamentation to an object, in this work the contours of the object itself are integral to the illustration.

Gallée's current practice is influenced by the traditional craft of marquetry: the inlaying of veneer in a wooden surface to form a pattern or design. This technique has long been used to add decorative patterns with a smooth surface to cabinets and seating. The artist was inspired to use marquetry by the *bemalte Bauernmöbel* (traditional Austrian hand-painted folk furniture) he was so used to seeing at his grandparents' home. Although he grew up surrounded by this style of furniture, he only recently incorporated the technique into his own furniture designs.

For projects such as *Thieves*, Gallée starts by drawing sketches and motifs on an iPad and then freely combines and overlays them to create a variety of collages. Having made his selection from the digital images, the artist laser-cuts their outlines into solid wood and hand-paints them using various paints and pigments. The laser-cut outlines serve as borders between the veneered, colored surfaces. The result is the artist's own contemporary take on traditional marquetry. This self-developed and labor-intensive technique is exemplary of Gallée's ongoing exploration of the possibilities of contemporary manufacturing techniques, and the ongoing development and evolution of his artisanship. While the items of vibrant and colorful *bemalte Bauernmöbel* that inspired *Thieves* usually feature biblical iconography, Gallée's objects are dominated by natural phenomena. His images of flora and fauna are always presented in some form of rhythmic or repetitious pattern. In traditional biblical iconography, each bird or snake or object has its own allegorical meaning, and the overall visual narrative conveys a particular moral message. In Gallée's work, these folkloric influences playfully hint at the biblical



Laurids Gallée, (detail) *Thieves*, 2021.
Free-standing shelf unit. Courtesy of the artist.

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allegories adorning the furniture of his past—without ever pushing any form of dogmatic message. Instead, the viewer is left with a sense of having experienced a fairytale—something that can be felt without being told.



MESSENGERS OF THE SUN

2022

Performance and installation with organic Indigo dyed Ajrakh block printed patchworks.

ANTONIO JOSE GUZMAN & IVA JANKOVIC

Antonio Jose Guzman engages in audiovisual storytelling through multidisciplinary textile installations, experimental rituals, and performances, and is involved in other projects related to genetics, decolonization, postcolonial history, and the African diaspora. In his Pan-African work, Guzman explores the relationship between the histories of animism, indigo dye, textiles, and sociocultural identity work to address migration and investigate the mechanisms of power and violence associated with the ongoing confrontations between different perceptual worlds.

Iva Jankovic transforms ideas into performances, installations, and unique garments. Merging her background in traditional fine arts with crafts, her sustainable practice serves as a platform for artistic research into the use of patterns and symbols across the world. By deconstructing cross-cultural symbols and bringing them to a local environment, she advocates sustainability as a route towards decolonization.

Messengers of the Sun is part of the *Electric Dub Station Series*, an ongoing collaboration between multidisciplinary visual artists Antonio Jose Guzman and Iva Jankovic. Their research projects incorporate indigo textiles, photographs, videos, soundscapes, and performances that address how immigration and diaspora have structured today's world. Through an exploration of global histories of rituals, animism, and a variety of socio-cultural identities, each project creates Afrofuturistic landscapes or spaces where mechanisms of power and violence are confronted and questioned. For the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Guzman and Jankovic have continued their series with a new textile installation and performances highlighting the sacred ancestral powers that traveled along with transatlantic trade.

Messengers of the Sun encompasses public performances at various locations in the museum building

and small-scale rituals in a textile installation in the exhibition space, and explores multiple layers of Black Atlantic interaction—an overarching experience that is not specifically African, American, Caribbean, or British. The public performances take the form of Afrofuturist ceremonial processions dominated by music and dance referring to a fictional story in which the lost children of the prophet Sun Ra are “messengers of the sun.” They live in the Sirius-B galaxy, to which the ancestors from the African diaspora migrated in times of destruction in Sub-Saharan Africa. Monthly cleansing rituals are performed away from the public gaze to honor the ancestral specters and contemporary spirits they summon. Although modest, meditative, and unannounced, these small-scale rituals are just as important as the public processions.

Visitors entering the exhibition space encounter monumental banners and an Afrimono, a kimono-style garment that is worn during the performances. The fabrics are made using an Indian Ajrakh block printing technique and sewn with Japanese Boro stitching. The abstract embroidered scriptures on the fabrics are inspired by *gris-gris*, small talismanic amulets or charms. They originated in West African Islamic traditions and are mostly used by Fulani people. In Muslim communities, illustrators, block printers, and wood workers do not use figurative elements such as faces or eyes to avoid idolatry. This led to the development of floral or geometrical designs. *Messengers of the Sun* is a further abstraction of these figures, which could be read as a newly developed abstract alphabet.

Users of *gris-gris* believe these objects have the power to purify the soul and protect the wearer from evil spirits. Under colonial rule, they were brought to the Americas by enslaved African people who used the objects to give them strength and ensure their safe passage across the Atlantic. This led to the introduction of the *gris-gris* to the southern United States, where they are commonly found to this day in New Orleans, for example.

ANTONIO JOSE GUZMAN & IVA JANKOVIC



Antonio Jose Guzman & Iva Jankovic, (detail) *Messengers of the Sun*, 2022. Performance and installation with organic Indigo dyed Ajrakh block printed patchworks. Courtesy of the artists.

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Now, centuries after the European colonizers and church banned their use, Guzman and Jankovic are providing space for the invocation of these talismans' positive magical powers, and the introduction into the museum space of Afro-Yoruban and Fulani beliefs in the protective powers of sacred rituals.

Users of gris-gris believe these objects have the power to purify the spirit and in a way protect from evil spirits. Under colonial rule, they were brought to the Americas by enslaved African people who used the objects to give them strength and ensure their safe passage across the Atlantic. This led to the introduction of the gris-gris to the southern United States, where they are commonly found to this day in New Orleans, for example.

LUCK

SEÁN HANNAN

Visual artist Seán Hannan works with a broad array of media: he makes drawings, video works, paintings, and objects that are driven by a curiosity about the invisible and the mysterious. Roaming the domains of computer hackers, political influencers, and agitators in search of the leaked documents and conspiracy theories that serve as source material for his projects, Hannan explores alternative, speculative information and how it can affect our emotional well-being.

2022
Film and installation with cursed egg.

LUCK (2022) is a film and installation about a cursed egg, revolving around *piseógs*, an ancient form of Irish folk magick (spelled here with ck to refer distinctly to spiritual magic). Nowadays, piseógs are mostly associated with harmless superstitions such as turning your socks inside out when you are lost to find your way back home, or opening the back door if you hear a knock on the front door, to let the fairies through. Piseógs have a far darker history, however, involving specific types of curses or spells that can cause harm to another person, or steal their luck. This powerful magick was generally cast by breathing intentions into an object that once lived or might have brought forth life. Often, this object would be an egg.

Seán Hannan travelled to Ireland to work on *LUCK* with Tara Tine, a songstress, storyteller and practitioner of Irish folklore and magick with old

knowledge on how to cast piseógs. Together, they designed a piseóg especially for the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. The curse is now housed in an egg and displayed in the exhibition space. Having carefully transported it from Ireland to the Netherlands in a special flight case, the artist placed the egg in the museum. The details of the piseóg it contains remain ambiguous.

It is vital to this work that the curse is positioned as a poetic intervention rather than purely a bearer of bad intentions. The Irish tradition of piseógs presupposes that incorporating one's intent into a curse makes it possible to steal luck and prosperity from some other person or place. The piseóg for the Stedelijk Museum was designed to take effect only if the egg containing the curse should break, and concerns the restoration of a kind of natural balance: should the egg break, the Stedelijk's luck and prosperity will be transferred to those in greater need of it.

Although the installation is accompanied by a film documenting Hannan's journey for this project, it is the egg itself that forms the center of gravity of this piece. This ethereal object transcends its mundane nature through its transformation into the bearer of an ancient and disappearing Irish tradition. In the video component of the work, Hannan documents the process of creating the piseóg and expands on Irish oral history and other forms of knowledge exchange that do not involve written sources.

SEÁN HANNAN



Seán Hannan, (detail) LUCK, 2022. Film and installation with cursed egg. Courtesy of the artist.

30”N 45”E, PLOTS AND UNWRITTEN SPLINTERS

SASKIA NOOR VAN IMHOFF

Saskia Noor van Imhoff creates installations, sculptures, and photographic works that question the idea of the singular or original artwork. She conceives of her process as marking a moment in time, a temporary combination of materials and circumstance that will inevitably undergo further permutations. Saskia Noor van Imhoff employs materials associated with contemporary architectural spaces, which she synthesizes with found materials.

2022
Mixed media installation.

Saskia Noor van Imhoff’s oeuvre examines systems, hierarchical structures, and ideas about collecting. While addressing the underlying dynamics that lead to decisions about what we keep for the future, and what we decide to dispose of, she questions the idea of a collection as a knowledge system and a mechanism that selects, differentiates, and classifies. She approaches these structures using a variety of media such as photography, sculpture and architecture, which merge into a whole in her installations.

30”N 45”E, Plots and Unwritten Splinters (2022) is an installation of wall objects and an architectural intervention, which has broken through a wall. The work is made up of elements from modern agriculture and a 19th-century farmhouse with the surrounding land, such as weathered wooden truss beams, grow lights and obsolete utensils. Van Imhoff analyzed the material, and

the geographical and ideological origins of these diverse objects. In her research into the origin and history of use of the various materials, Van Imhoff discovers and explores the relationship between the spontaneous and the planned, the organic and the artificial, and between nature and culture. In doing so, she provides insight into how materials and objects have a broader conceptual origin. She intends to show us that dating materials is more complex than pinpointing a single moment. The construction of knowledge and attribution of meaning always arises from subjective considerations that have political implications and personal motivations.

30°N 45°E, Plots and Unwritten Splinters reveals the traces of time and remnants of human actions in a historic and rural place. The visual properties of these remains have been magnified, distorted, or enhanced. A wall in the exhibition hall has been broken through, exposing the brick structure of the museum building from 1895. It is an example of how Van Imhoff's artistic working method dismantles structures around the presentational value of objects. Cultivation and conservation are related to her subject matter. These terms mean not only to cultivate and preserve, but also to maintain, refine, civilize, and develop with care. Characteristics that are closely linked to the public art museum that originated in the 19th century and was assigned by the government the task of imparting cultural taste and knowledge to the people.

Van Imhoff's work suggests that structures and compositions are always temporary. She creates a field of tension by reorganizing elements from a monumental building and its surroundings. In doing so, she places the parts in a new constellation that gives them a different meaning: highlighting that context and knowledge play an essential role in the perception and appreciation of an object. At the same time, the current form of presentation is once again only a temporary constellation that will eventually turn into a new form of cohesion. The



Saskia Noor van Imhoff, (detail, in progress)
30°N 45°E, Plots and Unwritten Splinters, 2022.
Mixed-media-installation. Courtesy of the artist.

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installation could be defined as an “organic collection”, a kind of ecosystem referring to the totality and interaction between matter, water, atmosphere, and plants. Here both living and non-living components play a role that undergo processes of forming, cultivating, processing, and finishing. Each element embodies the passage of time and transformation, becoming an example of transience.

van Imhoff's work suggests that structures and compositions are always temporary. She creates a field of tension by reorganizing elements from a monumental building and its surroundings, bringing together different parts in a new constellation that gives them a different meaning: highlighting that context and knowledge play an essential role in the perception and appreciation of an object. At the same time, the current form of presentation is once again only a temporary constellation that will eventually turn into a new form of cohesion. The

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

IRIS KENSMIL

Iris Kensmil's work comprises paintings, drawings and installations. She works from her own lived experience and from a Black feminist perspective on history, with a focus on the achievements of a postcolonial future, which has long begun. Her critical stance extends also to styles of representation, with a sensitivity to how the complexities of life are archived within art.

2021
Installation with cottage, paintings, drawings and various objects.

Iris Kensmil chose the title *In My Father's House*¹ as a homage to the book by Anil Ramdas. Her house offers a personal interpretation of the dilemmas raised in his volume. For this installation, Iris Kensmil works from memories of her childhood in Suriname, where various beliefs and Winti² rituals and taboos were part of her family tradition. She takes a Black feminist perspective in her translation of the role of memory and ritual into a presentation that creates space for all manner of references and connections with other themes in her work.

1 Iris Kensmil has chosen the title *In My Father's House* as a tribute to the TV series *In Mijn Vaders Huis* (English: In my father's house) by Anil Ramdas, in which he addressed the dilemma between universalistic progress and local belonging in the Netherlands in 1993-1994. With this title, Ramdas in turn referred to the work of Kwame Anthony Appiah, who himself took it from a Christian gospel.

2 Learn more about Winti faith of Surinamese Dutch: listen to The Black Archives Podcast #4 - Winti en Muziek, May 1, 2021: <https://youtu.be/yqYyxTAunpQ> (in Dutch, automatically generated captions are available).

Iris Kensmil is well known for her topical work about those engaged in the struggle for a future created by and for Black people, about the battle for freedom and emancipation from slavery, and about equality. In her perspective on the future, she does not focus on the past, but on what her protagonists do or did with it. By making these choices, they create their own identity and become important to us.

Another common thread of sisterhood and brotherhood runs through Iris Kensmil's work. One can recognize the struggle for freedom and equality in her work, but she also refers to the ideas of Marcus Garvey and other advocates of Black self-determination in segregation. These topics represent the possibility for Black people working on the future to share together feelings based on their shared experiences and traditions; of being at home in one's father's house. This is not because every individual's identity should draw on this past of communality, or because projections based on a distant past reveal one's true nature, but because without collectivity and mutual acknowledgement, the future is merely a lifeless projection of abstract norms and plans.

Winti and related movements can serve as resources for communality and sisterhood and brotherhood in this context, even though individuals assign different values for the future to it. The manner of Iris Kensmil's engagement with her own experience and knowledge of the meaning of faith in postcolonial Suriname in *In My Father's House* can be understood in the light of the ambiguity infusing the subject matter. The Winti religion is Surinamese, but a great variety of Winti practices and beliefs are embedded in the various Surinamese communities. Winti, Voodoo or Hindu incantations cannot be set aside as exclusively expressions of magic and animism—this is only possible from a Christian or blinkered anthropological gaze. While the origins of the names given by Winti practitioners to their spirits, gods, and rituals are indeed to be found in



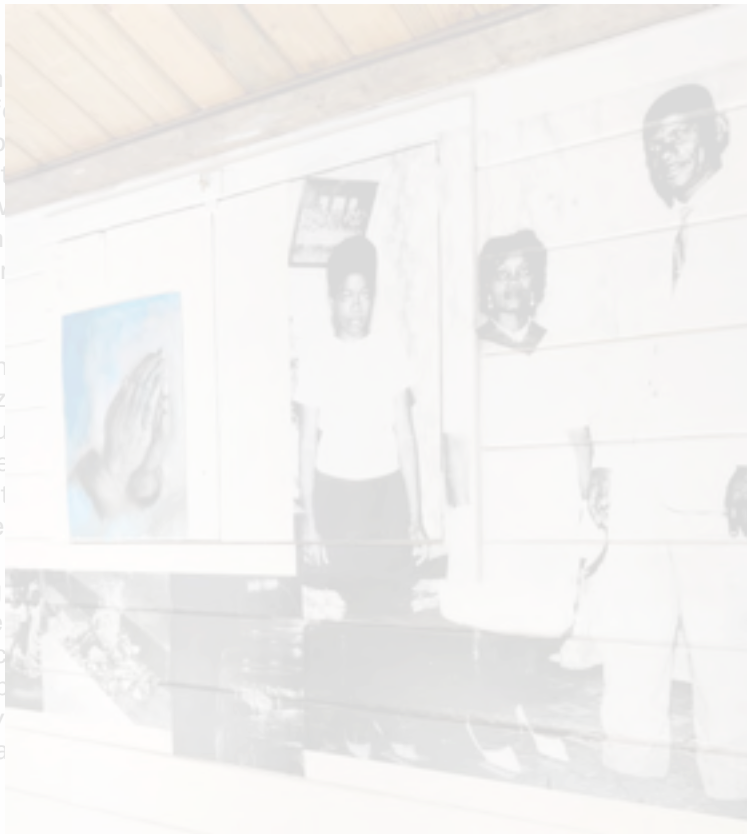
Iris Kensmil, (detail) In My Father's House, 2022. Installation with cottage, paintings, drawings and various objects. Courtesy of the artist and Ferdinand van Dieten Office.

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as resources for communality and sisterhood and brotherhood in this context, even though individuals assign different values for the terms. Much of the meaning of Iris Kensmil's work is in the way she uses images and knowledge of the meaning of faith in postcolonial Suriname in *In My Father's House* can be understood in the light of the ambiguity infusing the subject matter. The Winti religion is Surinamese, but a great variety of Winti practices and beliefs are embedded in the various Surinamese communities. Winti, Voodoo or Hindu incantations cannot be set aside as exclusively expressions of magic and animism—this is only possible from a Christian or blinkered anthropological gaze. While the origins of the names given by Winti practicants to their spirits, gods, and rituals are indeed to be found in

animism, the social world view experienced and shared in this religion is changing and modernizing along with the specific locales and conditions of the time. The dream of a common magic for everyone is an illusion.

Iris Kensmil's *In My Father's House* conveys the experience of what brings together people of a similar background to her own: for some, the installation offers a deepening recognition, for others a sense of a new connection.

Text courtesy of the artist.

THE STRANGE FAMILIAR

2022
Photography and text on wallpaper.

SEBASTIAN KOUDIJZER

Artist and photographer Sebastian Koudijzer connects through his artistic practice with his Javanese-Indonesian heritage. He attempts to bring disappearing traditions, values, and spirituality back into his own reality by engaging in ritual practices, in the hope of reconnecting with his past. Though he works in various media, Koudijzer is currently uses photographic images and text as tools for exploration in his search of the nostalgic feeling encapsulated by the phrase *gotong royong*, meaning “carrying the burden together.”

Artist and photographer Sebastian Koudijzer brings the values and traditions of the Javanese side of his family into his current reality. As a descendent of the Javanese-Surinamese diaspora, Koudijzer’s current artistic research involves ancient Javanese spiritual practices, such as *Kejawen*, in a furthering of his search for his roots and a sense of community and belonging. One outcome of this research is a project titled *The Strange Familiar*, comprising installation, printed text and photography. Having originally presenting his research as a graduation project at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, Koudijzer developed and evolved *The Strange Familiar* into its current form for this exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Koudijzer regards the camera as a tool of exploration, and he uses photography and text to document his research into spirituality and ancient rituals.

The Strange Familiar came about through Koudijzer's search for the *keris*, a dagger commonly found in Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia and its island Java. A rich spirituality and mythology developed around this weapon in its roles as a talisman possessed of magical powers, a sanctified heirloom, a ceremonial accessory, and an indicator of social status. As a child, Koudijzer was fascinated by the family *keris* mounted on a wall in his grandparents' house—he sensed mystery and vitality radiating from the object. Years later, in conversations with his grandparents about the past, Koudijzer became increasingly interested in his ancestry and Javanese culture, and his grandfather asked to be photographed in his traditional batik attire, proudly holding the *keris*. Later, when Koudijzer asked his grandfather if he could photograph the *keris* again, to his surprise his grandfather said he had thrown it away—his grandfather's Christian church leader had said the *keris* was not compatible with the Christian faith because it possibly possessed dark powers. This event prompted Koudijzer to go in search of a *keris*, marking the start of this project.

Koudijzer is using this project to rediscover an abandoned heritage, in the hope of connecting with his family's past. It led him to start engaging in *kejawan* Javan spiritual practices that include meeting with others to practice meditative spiritual exercises and visiting a *dukun*, a Javanese healer. Koudijzer now owns two *kerises* that were gifted to him: one provides him with a sense of overview and a focus on inner peace, while the other brings him assertiveness—he uses it primarily to concentrate on outward productivity. Koudijzer makes offerings to ask the *keris* for spiritual guidance based on his situation and needs at that time. These rituals bring him peace, and acceptance of where he comes from.

The Strange Familiar transposes into a visual form the sense of peace and fulfillment that follows the performance of these highly personal rituals. Koudijzer



Sebastian Koudijzer, (detail) *The Strange Familiar*, 2022. Photography and text on wallpaper. Courtesy of the artist.

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retells diasporic stories and performs ancient rituals to inspire the next generation to engage with their heritage, in an attempt to claim back what was taken from them in previous generations.

Koudijzer is using this project to rediscover an abandoned heritage, in the hope of connecting with his family's past. It led him to start engaging with Javan spiritual practices that include meeting with others to practice meditative spiritual exercises and visiting a *dukun*, a Javanese healer. Koudijzer now owns two kerises that were gifted to him: one provides him with a sense of overview and a focus on inner peace, while the other brings him assertiveness—he uses it primarily to concentrate on outward productivity. Koudijzer makes offerings to ask the keris for spiritual guidance based on his situation and needs at that time. These rituals bring him peace, and acceptance of where he comes from.

The Strange Familiar transposes into a visual form the sense of peace and fulfillment that follows the performance of these highly personal rituals. Koudijzer

KENYALANG CIRCUS

2022
Textile posters.

MARCOS KUEH

Marcos Kueh is a textile designer with a background in graphic design and advertising. He refers in his practice to his ancestors, who encapsulated their hopes, dreams, and myths in their textiles. His current work examines and speculates on what these traditional practices mean and look like in a contemporary context. Kueh attempts in this way to understand the significance of post-colonial independence and the position of inherited values in contemporary life.

Kenyalang Circus (2022) embodies Marcos Kueh's search—through the lenses of graphic design and visual art—to adopt a critical stance on the neoliberal fetishization of “icons” and the use of visual iconography in advertising. Extrapolating from his roots in the Malaysian part of Borneo and the commodification of the island as “the unknown, exotic Malaysia” and “the land of the orangutans,” Kueh questions the significance of a post-colonial independence characterized by forced role-playing to fulfill western expectations. Borneo's dependence on the tourism industry and the traces of the colonial past in its neoliberal society means the island now finds itself caught between radical commercialization of its local culture on the one hand, and a desire to preserve traditional practices and values on the other. Kueh's work examines how these contradictions converge in contemporary daily life, and addresses the island's internalized exotification.

Positioned in the context of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, his work also serves as a subtle critique of museum practices and exhibition making.

Kenyalang Circus (Sarawak Malay for ‘Hornbill Circus’) is a series of eight woven textiles in the form of advertisement posters. This exhibition presents five objects from the series. Kueh’s woven posters form a stark contrast with contemporary advertising media that are, for the most part, either literally or metaphorically disposable. Images of mystical beings in saturated colors that draw the viewer’s gaze are woven into the textile, where they are frozen in time, on display for all eternity. A closer look reveals incongruous details such as buckets and rags, as well as texts hinting at poverty, oppression, and greed.

Kueh, who has a background in graphic design and advertising, traveled around Borneo to document traditional weaving methods, sparking in him a desire to understand the visual languages of his birth country, and a powerful attraction to the properties of the materials used to convey them. Before the arrival of painting tools, the original inhabitants of Borneo encapsulated their myths and stories in textiles. Kueh’s practice speculates about what this act of myth-weaving would look like in the contemporary context; what stories do we take the time to encapsulate and why? Kueh also hopes to empower other Southeast Asians to reevaluate the meaning and power behind their identities.

Kenyalang Circus deconstructs, disentangles, and re-fabricates the many interwoven layers of Borneo’s perception of the self, in an attempt to disrupt the expectations of oppressors and the histories written by them. These woven diasporic stories radiate an emancipatory power. In a world shaped by advertising, *Kenyalang Circus* is a contemplation of self-worth and authenticity that straddles the traditional and the contemporary.



Marcos Kueh, (detail) *Kenyalang Circus*, 2022.
Textile installation. Courtesy of the artist.
Photo: Aaryan Sinha.

DUTCH WIFE PART TWO

2017 - 2022
Textile installation with guling.

ARAM LEE

Aram Lee's artistic practice involves performative events, film, and video installations in which she reinterprets materials found in institutions. Her research-driven practice seeks to relocate the role and purpose of these materials, and challenges diasporic amnesia. She empowers institutional instruments such as archival objects in museums to speak for themselves. Lee endeavors to undermine the domination of one culture over another and to visualize new structures.

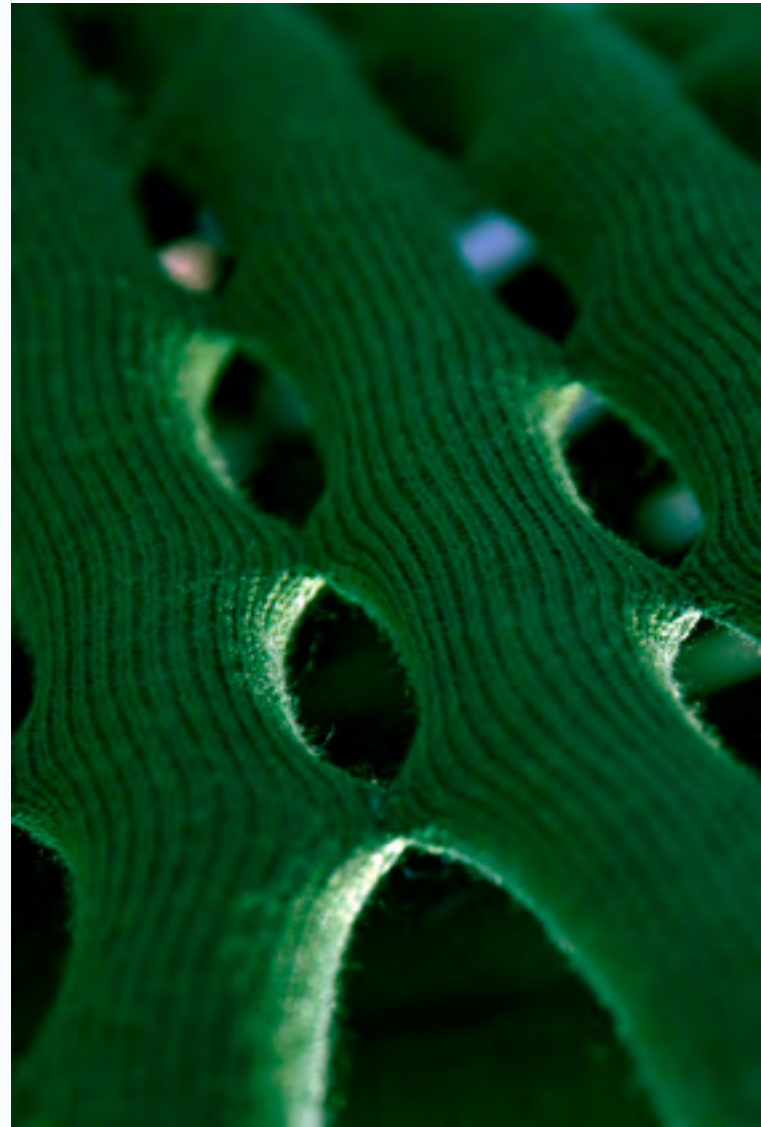
Visual artist Aram Lee's sculptural presentation explores the multiple layers of stories and histories surrounding the *guling*, a human-sized elongated cylindrical bolster cushion. The guling has ties with the Dutch colonial past in Indonesia (British traders mockingly referred to it as the "Dutch wife"), but although it remains a familiar household object for many Southeast Asians and East Asians and its diaspora, it is now largely unknown in the west. Lee is interested in the trans-geographic meanings of the "body" of the object as well as its affordances in the context of a contemporary art museum.

The guling is used to wrap one's arms and legs around while sleeping, keeping the sleeper in a relaxed position—even those who toss and turn at night, hence the name guling, meaning "to roll" in Bahasa Indonesia. Traditional gulings are made of braided bamboo, to create

an open structure that ensures the bed stays cool and ventilated in warm climates. It is an object that merges everyday habits, traditional and contemporary crafts, and historical cultural references.

British traders' mocking use of the term "Dutch Wife" to describe the cushion flags a problematic past, in which Dutch colonists sought female companionship during long periods away from home: in the 17th century, the Dutch government encouraged Dutch colonists in Indonesia (then known as the Dutch East-Indies) to marry Indigenous women, based on the belief that they were less likely than European women to ask their husbands to leave the colony. For those Dutch colonists who didn't want to take a concubine, the guling was a replacement. Lee engages with the guling through a process of re-appropriation, reclaiming an objectified female body with a view to healing colonial trauma. Part of this process involved Lee travelling to Indonesia to trace and collect oral stories surrounding the guling and remaking the object with craftspeople from the village of Sumedang in Western Java.

The sculptural installation *Dutch Wife Part Two* sees Lee manifesting her journey through the remaking of a single object. She used a method known as "blanketing," using textiles to recreate the guling. While doing so, she positions the guling in such a way that it is embraced by a series of knitted tubes. The pieces have soft and welcoming qualities, and the overriding gesture of the *Dutch Wife Part Two* is that of the caring hug. "To blanket" generally means "to cover" or "to obscure," but here it means to offer an embraceable presence, and an opportunity to open up. The map woven into the body of the object is based on historical landscape paintings such as *A View of the River Brantas* (c. 1890) by the Dutch artist Maurits E.H.R. van den Kerckhoff. Made in Java, the painting is now part of the collection of the Netherlands' National Museum of World Cultures (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, NMVW). This *Mooi Indië* ("Beautiful



ARAM LEE

an institutional object's singular hegemony through material realities, geographical bodies, plasticity, and mediality. Objects that act as pre-modern technologies when act as interlocutors, as new media to re-channel time away from the preformed futures contained within them.

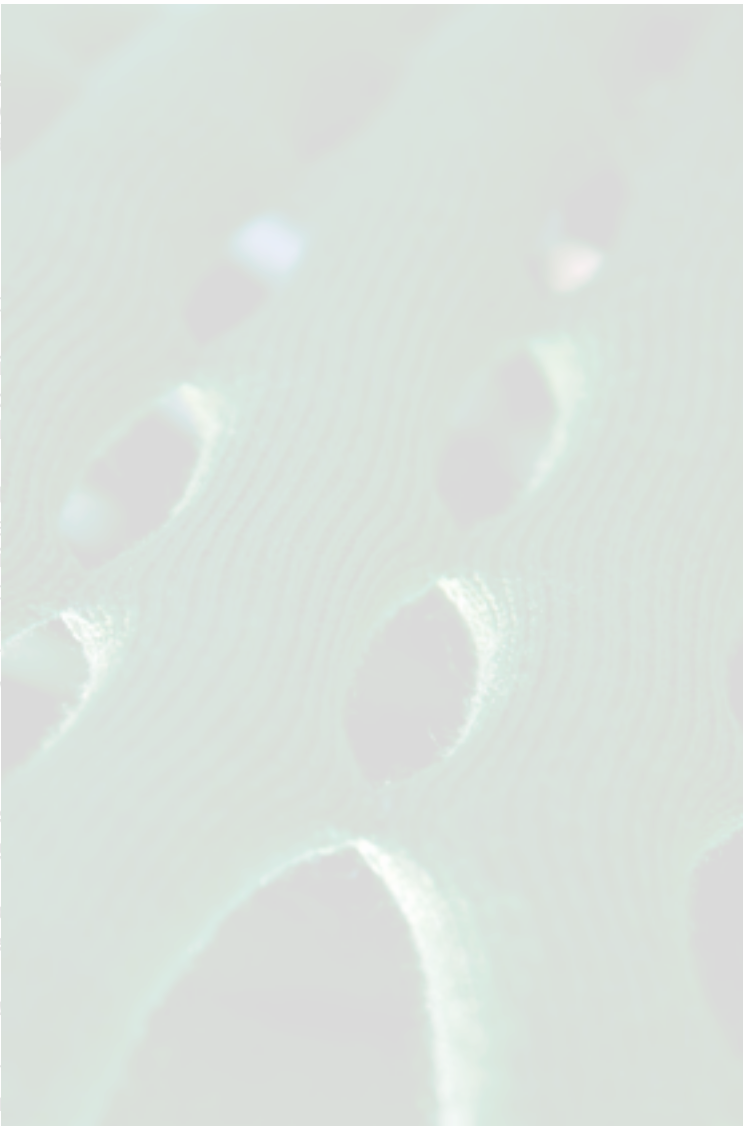
Aram Lee, (detail) *Dutch Wife Part Two*, 2017 - 2022. Textile installation with guling. Courtesy of the artist.

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ARAM L

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Indonesia") genre painting presents nature from a colonizer's perspective. By applying night vision to the painting (a technique to detect images at night), Lee envisions an object's hidden narrative. The gesture of the embrace provided by the textile blankets counteracts the threads of colonialism woven into the genealogy of the guling as an object.

ARTIST CONTRIBUTION

An object's role can be a potential protocol of dominant historical narratives and their associated power. I use the act of remediation to open up and create new relationships in an institutional object's singular hegemony through material realities, geographical bodies, plasticity, and mediality. Objects that are treated as oppressed, unknown, or pre-modern technologies can then act as interlocutors, as new media to re-channel time away from the preformed futures contained within them.

SHANI LESEMAN

Shani Leseman explores the role of magic in everyday life. The central themes in her paintings, drawings, and ceramic sculptures are witchcraft, rituals, and the object as a bearer of meaning. Her interest in these topics stems from *brua*, a core component of Antillean folklore involving magic and spirituality, as well as everyday customs and rituals. Leseman applies associative and intuitive strategies to create her work and infuses the objects she makes with intention.

Shani Leseman explores the role of *magick* (spelled here with ck to refer distinctly to spiritual magic) and supernatural presences in everyday life. Her practice centers on witchcraft and rituals, and assigns to objects the role of carrier of agency and meaning. Growing up in Curaçao, Leseman encountered the magical thinking of *brua*, an Antillean religion (similar to Voodoo and Winti) which is an important part of the island's folklore. This led to an interest in magic, rituals, and witchcraft that is reflected in her work. The outcomes of this associative and intuitive process take the form of paintings, drawings, and ceramics that are infused with specific intentions.

Leseman is currently attempting to become sufficiently educated and informed about these magick practices to be able to fully incorporate them in her art, and let the two practices to become one. Implementing spiritual practice in her art enables Leseman to gain a

better understanding of the visual and performative aspects of witchcraft. Spiritual practices such as brua manifest themselves around the world in a wide variety of forms with different names. Leseman believes that they all connect with the same universal forces or energies.

Leseman's approach to composing her artworks resembles the way an altar is constructed: it is an intuitive and complex process that cannot be planned or drawn out in detail beforehand, and that relies heavily on symbolism. The process is intuitive from start to finish, with each step executed through active intention, or even meditation, to help an object achieve its desired form. By putting herself into a receptive state in which she opens her mind to both spiritual and non-spiritual thoughts, Leseman is able to welcome images and ideas that try to get into contact with her, and channel these images and ideas into the creation of an object.

The manner of presentation of *Talismagic*, a series of one hundred ceramic objects, echoes displays of *milagros*, the ex-voto metal figures used in religious ceremonies to express gratitude, to protect against evil, or to prevent undesired events occurring. Similar figures have been commonly used in many countries and times: in the Mediterranean region, Medieval Europe, Mexico, Buddhist Japan, Ancient Greece, India, and the Antilles. People carry the objects for their universal and specific personal significance. Leseman made her sculptural ceramic talismans, which are based on these metal predecessors, with a similar purpose or intention. When making the charms, the artist first defines the goal or intended function of each, then works with the object as an entity, to arrive at its desired form. Together, the objects form an abundance of questions, hopes and wishes.



SHANI LESEMAN

A TALISMAN FOR cutting unwanted bonds or connections
A TALISMAN FOR the happy person
A TALISMAN FOR the green species, protection,
and
A TALISMAN FOR saying yes when it is needed, for saying no
when it is needed

Shani Leseman, (detail) *Talismagic*, 2022.
Series of 100 glazed ceramic objects. Courtesy
of the artist. Photo: Trees Heil.

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Shani Leseman, (detail) Talismans, 2022. Series of 100 glazed ceramic objects. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Trees Hell.

SHANI L
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ARTIST CONTRIBUTION

- A TALISMAN FOR infinite divine love
- A TALISMAN FOR domesticity, generosity, and ritual
- A TALISMAN FOR friendship, comfort, and solidarity
- A TALISMAN FOR fast luck and good fortune
- A TALISMAN FOR a growing garden
- A TALISMAN FOR warding off bad energies
- A TALISMAN FOR cutting unwanted bonds or connections
- A TALISMAN FOR the happy person
- A TALISMAN FOR connections between species, protection, and loyalty
- A TALISMAN FOR saying yes when it is needed, for saying no when it is needed

SABINE MARCELIS

Designer Sabine Marcelis's practice involves product, installation, and spatial design with a strong focus on materiality: her work is characterized by pure forms that highlight their material properties. Applying a strong aesthetic in her collaborations with industry specialists enables Marcelis to intervene in the manufacturing process, using material research and experimentation to achieve new and surprising visual effects. Her designs become sensorial experiences, and the experience becomes the function.

Designer Sabine Marcelis seeks to make the impossible possible in the material realm. In her search for magical moments within materiality and production processes, her design projects have a strong experiential and aesthetic focus. Highlighting the material properties of her creations in a minimalist formal language that steers clear of ornamentation, Marcelis works in close collaboration with industry specialists to intervene in the manufacturing process, continually evolving her approach to form and material. All this is made possible by the high-spirited dynamic at her studio, where she works in close collaboration with a team of designers. Their collective methodology focuses on problem solving and mutual trust, which enables the artist to infuse her practice with continuous experimentation and innovation, exploring new material effects to create moments of wonder. Marcelis uses the silent inner forces of objects to captivate the viewer, referring to their powers of

attraction to induce a sensorial experience far removed from mere function.

The artist's mirrored wall sculptures—a signature feature in her body of work, which extends from interior and furniture to spatial design—hint at otherworldly shapes or organic systems. They look familiar yet remain open to interpretation, like celestial bodies floating through space. Often, these works are activated by light, deploying the duality of reflection and transparency to engender an interaction with their environment and the viewer, in a constant interplay of depth and perception. She activates the materiality of the object to draw in external light—and the viewer's gaze.

The illusive depth and shape of the flat surface of *FOLD*, the object on show at the Stedelijk, make it appear to be folded. This gives rise in the viewer to a skewed perception of space and self, effectuating an all-enveloping bodily experience. When external light strikes the piece, its mirrored surface casts colorful reflections, and the light source embedded in the object itself emits an equally magical inner glow. This layering of light reveals unexpected material qualities that elude direct observation, urging the viewer to examine the *FOLD* from all angles. Geometric shapes have previously been prevalent in other works by the artist, such as her *SOAP* tables and cubes. In *FOLD*, she re-introduces these geometric angles and their folded effects, deviating from her more organic and rounded mirror lights, making this piece an interesting new gesture in her body of work—on show here at the Stedelijk for the first time.



Sabine Marcelis, (detail) *FOLD*, 2022. Mirrored glass with led light. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Titia Hahne.

CHEQUITA NAHAR

Artist and jewelry designer Chequita Nahar creates objects whose forms are inspired by tradition, and in which new customs and stories are embedded. Nahar connects ancient and new values, going back to the roots of jewelry objects as bearers of magical powers and symbolism. Some of the stories with which she connects have not previously been shared in the public domain, and her work provides insight into Surinamese heritage, traditions, and customs.

Chequita Nahar sees jewelry as a bearer of meaning, and of hidden or elusive powers. She makes each of her pieces for individuals who connect with similar rituals or the specific intentions behind the pieces and, on request, taking into account their personal situation, wishes and preferences. In this way, Nahar's jewelry becomes a direct form of communication between the maker and the wearer. She sees her jewelry pieces both as cultural symbols and as sources of magical powers: they tell stories about specific habits or customs and they have protective properties. The inner force of each piece empowers its wearer-owner, and its value lies in its inherent symbolism, rather than its material worth.

Nahar makes jewelry inspired by the rituals and customs associated with Marron, Creole, Chinese, Muslim and Hindu cultures in Suriname. Beads form an important focal point in her practice for the important role they play

in both Surinamese culture and in the designer's own life. She often places beads that already have an entire life within them into a new context, giving them new meaning. Nahar also often combines organic materials such as wood with gold, silver, and rope. Certain materials and shapes play an important role in Surinamese heritage, Winti customs and traditions, some of which have not been shared with the wider public or have been kept hidden. Nahar embeds these values in the objects and lets the objects speak for themselves. She wants the wearer of her jewelry to do so with pride, and in so doing present their identity to the world.

For this exhibition, Nahar has created an installation based on the *wasi* cleansing ritual through which the practitioner lets go of what no longer serves them and/or that strengthens and spiritually empowers the practitioner in times of need. The work she is presenting here translates this ritual into a visual language, through which the various attributes enter into a conversation with one another and reference other cleansing rituals derived from the Netherlands, China, and various regions in Africa. This reflection of globalization manifests itself as the fusion of diverse influences and cultures in contemporary everyday life, where traditional and new values are interconnected. The installation consists of multiple glass tubs, wooden objects, porcelain calabashes, and ceramic bowls, referring to traditional calabash water containers, and *pangi* textiles that she has embroidered and screen-printed with protective symbols, as well as necklaces, pendants, beads, and glass objects. Alongside these newer pieces, the artist is presenting earlier work comprising two porcelain calabashes containing necklaces made of porcelain, wood, rope, and silver from her *krala* collection.



Chequita Nahar, (detail) Wasi Sani, 2022. Installation with jewelry and objects. Courtesy of the artist.

ANA NAVAS

Multimedia artist Ana Navas traces the historical or fictional genealogical tree of an object, taking into account its possible ancestors as well as emergent contexts. A recurrent metaphor in her practice is the domino effect, through which objects and the subject matter they embody constantly interact and impact on one another. Navas sees art as a dialogue that not only resonates with its direct environment, but also creates a wider echo that continually reverberates in the social domain.

Art can generate dialogue between strangers. This dialogue is not limited to the direct participants or environment: it creates a wider echo that reaches into other aspects of everyday life. Ana Navas thinks of her practice as the act of tracing an object's genealogical tree, looking for its ancestors and influences, and potential future contexts. She continuously questions how art can be perceived outside its own context, and searches for encounters in which appreciation, imitation, and transformation of existing artworks, objects and everyday images are ever-present.

The notion of the *aura* plays an important role in Navas' practice. Driven by a fascination with the relationship between "high art" and "popular culture" and the way they exchange and intermingle in everyday life, Navas investigates the historical and fictional influences that determine the aura of the object. The concepts,

ideologies, and imaginaries that lie hidden within the objects that accompany us in our daily lives are whispered to us through immaterial notions such as elegance, good or bad taste, the modern, the civilized, or the uncivilized.

Navas often uses costuming to amplify this whisper—to give the object a louder voice. This strategy makes the costume a tool that enables the object to speak, and imbues it with a personality or a soul. Each costume references an aesthetic from a certain period or zeitgeist and relates to icons of “high art” that still wander among us in the visual form of souvenirs or printed fabrics, for example. Navas questions the construction of icons in art and the way they crystallize in everyday life. What makes these works iconic? Do we keep repeating and reproducing them for their intrinsic qualities, or does the process of reproduction itself give them their iconic status?

Navas mainly uses domestic objects for the sculptures on show at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. They include a drying rack, an ironing board, a clothing rack and an easel. She dresses them up in various guises—one as a Barbara Hepworth sculpture, for example. Modernist formal vocabularies meet mundane materials and techniques in Navas’s work—sometimes even going full circle, such as when she paints directly on fabric in imitation of a printed pattern by the artist Kandinsky. This copy of a copy marks the form’s return to the materials with which it was originally developed—paint on canvas—closing the circle of reproduction. Navas’s sculptures thus become thing-paintings and installation-beings, with traces of images creating new images that continue to echo beyond their physical skin.



Ana Navas, (detail) *Fishbowl*, 2019, from the *Excuses* series, 2019 - 2022. Multi media sculptures with domestic objects. Courtesy of the artist, tegenboschvanvreden, Amsterdam (NL), and Sperling, Munich (DE).

SALAWAKU, ACTIVE PROTECTION THROUGH COMPASSION

HATUTAMELEN

Visual artist Hatutamelen (James Noya) started his practice carving and building Moluccan *tifa* drums. As a member of the Awareness Moluccan Identity artists' collective he works in multiple disciplines, drawing inspiration from Moluccan symbols and motifs dating back to pre-colonial times. Hatutamelen gathers spiritual knowledge and narratives that he transfers through storytelling. His current goal is to revive the Moluccan woodcarving tradition.

2022
Hand-carved wooden sculpture.

Hatutamelen has developed his artistic practice in multiple disciplines, such as linoleum printing, painting, video art, and making traditional Moluccan tifa drums. Fueled as his art is by spiritualism, Hatutamelen draws inspiration from Moluccan symbols and motifs and often lets himself be led by intuition. Through a creative process drawing on his love and fascination for woodworking and the knowledge about this craft within his family (including his ancestors), the artist creates contemporary interpretations—rather than exact copies—of traditional Moluccan objects.

Salawaku, Active Protection through Compassion is a contemporary interpretation that highlights the power of the *salawaku*, a narrow shield originating on the Maluku Islands. Used in combat in combination with a *parang* (machete) or a *tombak* (spear), the salawaku is nowadays mostly destined for

ceremonies or ritual events, such as the *cakalele* war dance. The front of the shield is often painted or inlaid with fragments of shell in a pattern specific to the owner or their family's social status or clan. Certain salawaku can provide additional protection—both spiritual and physical—fostering security and prosperity.

Hatutamelen kept the front-facing side of his salawaku rather simple, to highlight the object's invisible power, rather than its physical power. Facing the salawaku, the viewer is met with the radiance of light represented by the inlaid sun motif. The forces emanating from the surface are thought to transform ill intent into gentleness and compassion, preventing the need for conflict altogether. Hatutamelen points out that the salawaku serves as a reminder to always engage with other people and our environment from a place of compassion.

The woodcarvings on the rear of the shield represent knowledge and power. They are concealed from the outsider's view, and only the shield's owner can see and understand them. Some practices were banned under colonial rule, and much Indigenous knowledge has been lost. Hatutamelen believes these objects, rituals, customs, symbols, and functions deserve to be protected by those to whom they belong, and that outsiders have to accept and respect that they don't need to know or understand them. The ways in which the salawaku protects its owner and conceals knowledge and power remind us that Indigenous knowledge owes no explanation to anyone from outside the community. As long as we act from a place of compassion, Hatutamelen will allow the light from his salawaku to radiate into the museum gallery.

In 2018, Hatutamelen co-founded the artist collective Awareness Moluccan Identity. His current goal is to revive the Moluccan tradition of woodcarving. With this in mind, the artist is focusing his practice on



Hatutamelen, (detail) Salawaku, Active Protection through Compassion, 2022. Hand-carved wooden sculpture. Courtesy of the artist.

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goal is to revive the Moluccan tradition of woodcarving.
With this in mind, the artist is focusing his practice on



safeguarding the Moluccan legacy, which led to his
inclination, for this exhibition, to create an object that
radiates light and protective force.

THE STATUETTE COMB: AN UNTOLD ORAL HISTORY

WENDY OWUSU

Artist and designer Wendy Owusu questions social constructs, heritage, and transmissions in her multidisciplinary practice, working across video, textile, and installation. The topic and research process determine the medium she chooses for each project, and she engages with design using a speculative and conceptual lens. Owusu applies multiple techniques including writing to stimulate multiple modalities—thinking, seeing, touching, hearing—enriching both herself and the outcome of her work.

2022
3D-Printed combs and cotton-canvas book with UV printed text and photographs.

Wendy Owusu takes a speculative and conceptual approach to design. Through a multidisciplinary practice that takes in video, textile, installation, and publishing, she focuses on personal and cultural heritage, as well as socio-cultural issues and questions of identity. In her previous project *From Abena to Gloria*, Owusu translated objects and memories from her childhood home into a series of clothing pieces. She based her first collection for the project on her home in suburban France, while for the second she traveled to Kumasi, Ghana, where part of her family lives. This intimate documentation through textile sees Owusu investigate the multiple meanings of “home.”

Owusu’s exhibit at the Stedelijk, *The Statuette Comb: An Untold Oral Story*, comprises a cotton-canvas book containing text and photographs printed on textile, as well as 3D-printed combs. The work is an extrapolation

of Owusu's most recent project, *Hidden Heritages*, a short film presenting contemporary conversations with women of African descent discussing the impact of natural hair in their lives. This film containing narrative elements that resemble YouTube tutorials explores the relationship between hair and identity. Through conversations with women whose hair is being tied or braided, the film explores how their styling choices reflect different aspects of their lives, and how Afro hair has been used as an active communication tool, revealing information about the wearer's identity. In this way, the film touches upon the social meanings and long history of hairstyles worn by people of African descent such as the Baoulé and Bantu-Luba peoples. Owusu celebrates and affirms the importance of personal style and identity, which the artist perceives as often unseen, despite their value as tools of communication.

The combs are traditionally sculpted from specific materials, and Owusu regards them as statuettes rather than solely utilitarian objects. *The Statuette Comb* highlights the symbolic value and meaning of the traditional African comb, which has a great variety of shapes and uses—a traditional comb can be an important ritual object in various socio-cultural contexts. Combs are also bearers of information about the user: they are often given as gifts in celebration of the recipient's identity. *The Statuette Comb* also reflects on Owusu's exchanges with women and a man of African descent about their hair and identity, their many and varied relationships with the comb, and the rituals that surround it. The work draws a parallel between the sacred function of the traditional comb and the contemporary, mass-produced plastic comb used in Afro-descendant communities. *The Statuette Comb* is an important step in Owusu's quest to engage with oral history traditions. Her conversations with women and men of African ancestry about their personal rituals are part of these oral histories and heritages, which are intimately documented on the textile pages of this work.



WENDY OWUSU

Wendy Owusu, (detail) *The Statuette Comb: An Untold Oral Story*, 2022. 3D-Printed combs and cotton-canvas book with UV printed text and photographs. Courtesy of the artist.

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with oral history traditions. Her conversations with women and men of African ancestry about their personal rituals are part of the *Comb* project and heritage, which are intimately documented on the textile pages of this work.



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GINEVRA PETROZZI

Ginevra Petrozzi is a designer whose experience is rooted in a desire to expand the notion of magical thinking, and a quest for enchantment. Her work focuses on infiltrating systems of control and reclaiming animistic, ancestral knowledge to create new hybrid rituals for the contemporary era. Petrozzi is currently assuming the role of “digital witch,” reclaiming the archetypal role of the witch as healer, conjurer, and political rebel for the purpose of providing digital care.

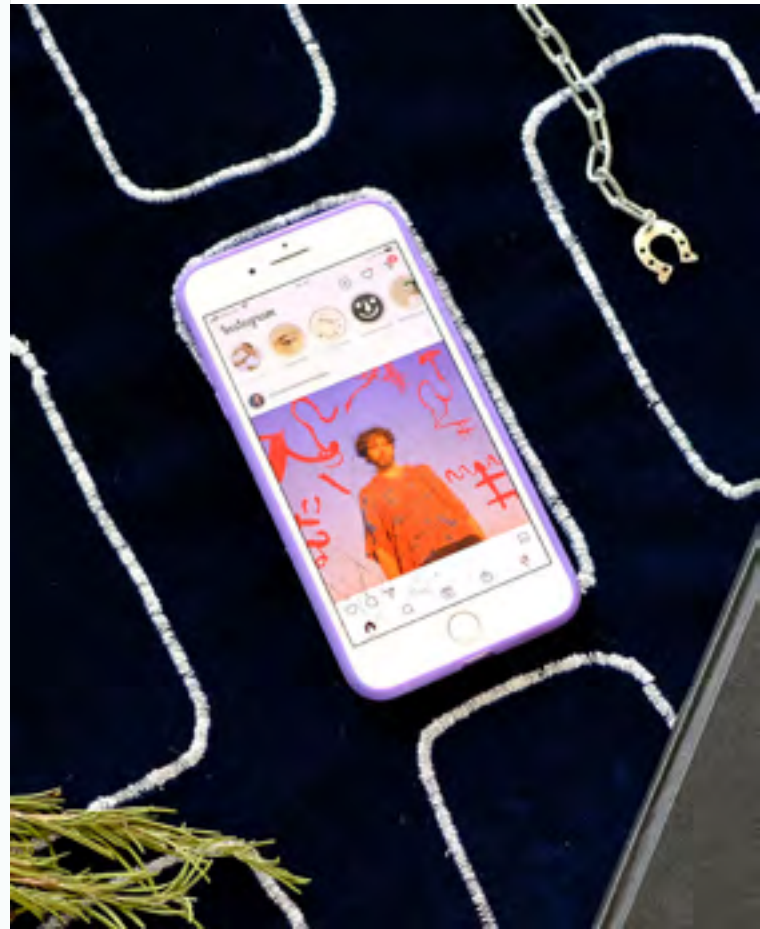
Designer Ginevra Petrozzi is on a quest for enchantment, fueled by a desire to expand the notion of magical thinking. In Petrozzi’s home country of Italy, Catholicism and magic are deeply intertwined in everyday society because ancient folk magic had to assimilate the Catholic faith and incorporate its saints in order to resist annihilation by the church. Folk magic rituals were passed on within the domestic space by generations of women. This significant process of informal knowledge production was by necessity clandestine, however, because these typically patriarchal and misogynistic societies persecuted knowledgeable women, who were deemed “devilish”.

Petrozzi bases her practice on research into her ancestral history and heritage. She investigates the role these rituals might have played in everyday reality. Fascinated as she is by the juxtaposition of the secular and the sacred, Petrozzi creates new rituals for the

contemporary era in which she sets out to reclaim magical thinking. Rather than designing objects and assigning functions to them, she thinks of objects as magical allies, as tools with intrinsic world-making qualities. She takes an interdisciplinary approach in her attempts to restore a sense of interconnectedness within the world of the ineffable. Her current focus is on the possibilities of alliances within and hybridization of the magical world in our daily life, and she investigates how magic and ritual practice could serve as a political tool to interfere with current technological systems of control.

Petrozzi's 2021 installation and performance *Digital Esoterism* reclaims witchcraft as an anti-capitalist tool, and considers the potential for using divination to regain agency in an era of surveillance capitalism and big data. Historically, divination was used to gain a sense of control over a mysterious and intangible future. Inspired by the question of what it might mean to be a "digital witch," Ginevra Petrozzi created a space that makes it possible to perform tarot readings using the smartphone.

When entering the exhibition space the visitor "signs" a contract: by physically stepping through—and across—an Accept All notice they accept all terms and conditions. A tablecloth on the table invites the visitor to place their smartphone into an embroidered layout inspired by tarot card spreads such as the Celtic Cross. With this gesture, Petrozzi transforms the smartphone into a divination tool. At set moments throughout the exhibition period, visitors are welcome to attend a reading by the artist, who uses the results of algorithmic predictions—such as targeted advertising and recommended posts on the querent's social media channels—as signs that can be interpreted and used to read their past, present, and future. Next to the table stands an altar or candleholder containing candles, in the shape of smartphones, chargers, and fingers, which were made in Rome and when lit give off the signature scent of a Catholic church.



Ginevra Petrozzi, (detail) *Digital Esoterism*, 2021. Performance and installation for smartphone tarot readings. Courtesy of the artist.

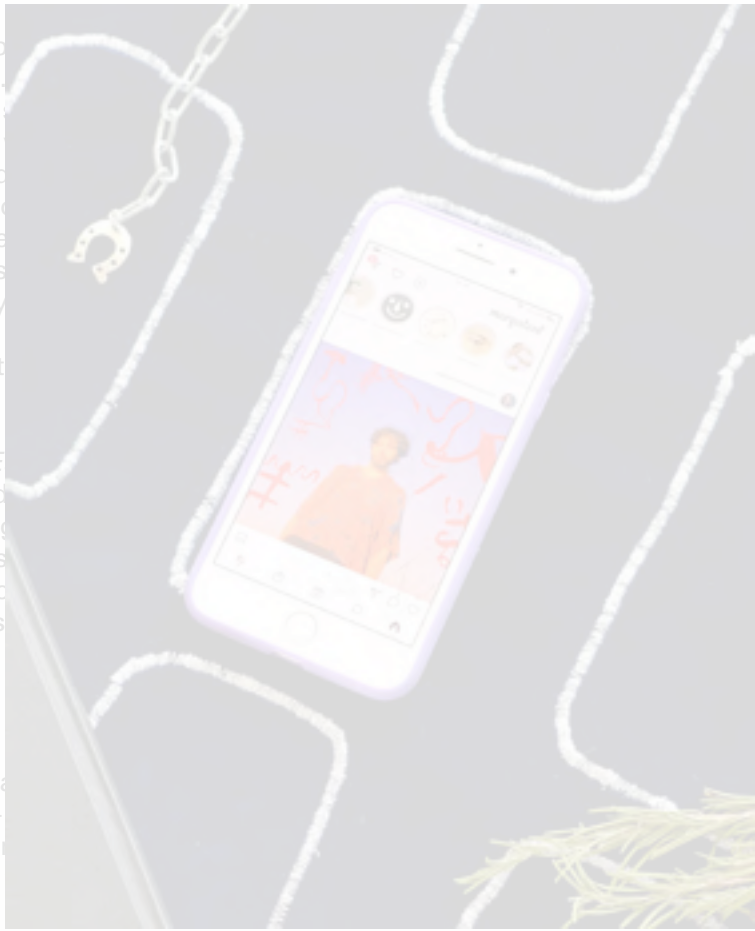
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In our current capitalist reality, many of us believe that we can escape fate, that our future is makeable, and that our destiny is determined solely by our personal actions. *Digital Esoterism* resists this capitalist myth. The artist suggests that in fact the future lies in the realm of predictive analysis, algorithms, and artificial intelligence: all technologies that have now assumed the role of fate-makers in a digitally regulated cosmos. Although *Digital Esoterism* might not provide an actual escape from our techno-capitalist reality, it does create a space for social action and for an awareness of our online behaviors and how they shape our existence.

MAGALI REUS

The work of visual artist Magali Reus often begins with familiar objects. Applying a sensuous material intelligence and precise compositional grammar, Reus coaxes out relationships between the characteristics of objects and our conventional, habituated encounters with them. Physical transformation and display sets the stage for an object to shed its function and perform a different image of itself. Newly liberated, these objects and forms take on a strange, disobedient agency.

The artistic practice of Magali Reus is characterized by a conceptual and purposeful visual language. Her works are charismatic and sometimes enigmatic through the use of openended symbolism and oblique connectivity. This leads to a visual and material layering, with which Reus creates a poetic dissonance between the meaning and use of everyday objects to arrive at an aesthetic that is at once familiar and seemingly out of context at the same time.

For her series of wall sculptures *Settings* (2021), Reus takes as her visual referent the 'No Parking' road sign, a familiar object usually encountered in the public sphere. Here, the object is remade in such a way that it complicates the message communicated by the original design. Reus used a combined process of powder coating, sanding, and airbrushing to deliberately create the suggestion of use, weather and erosion on the surfaces.

This results in a slippage of the sign's original function or purpose, altering its meaning. It's an example of how Reus executes the fabrication and finishing of her works with exacting precision using manual and industrial processes. Some of the objects may appear to be ready-mades, but nothing makes it into her work without first being altered or manipulated. This re-making enables the objects to reflect on their functional aspects, and to step out of their servile role. By acting out different versions of themselves they gain a sense of autonomy and agency.

The exhibition *When Things Are Beings* presents three wall sculptures from the *Settings* series, placed in different rooms at face-level. Upon closer inspection, they feature 3D printed familiar objects, such as a corkscrew, a sink plug, and a car air freshener, enshrined into small recessed cavities within the steel surfaces. Like place markers at a table (hence the title *Settings*), these items become replicas—or rather, performers—of their real-life selves. Imbued with layers of undefined symbolism, the objects in *Settings* assume an emergent and unsteady identity, with an abstract and associative aesthetic. Placed at mirror height, they seem to shapeshift into faces staring back at us in an attitude of observation, or even surveillance.

Through this process of animation, the work compels us to question our conceptions of the ability of inanimate things to act, react, and communicate. Although static, the materials in Reus's sculptures are imbued with vitality and vibration, and reject the boundaries and social constructions between the human and the non-human or inanimate. Her work speaks of an environment that engages with the human production—consumption culture and the bounty of our material world, and the evident role it plays in our everyday experience.



Magali Reus, Settings, 2019 - 2021. Mixed media wall sculptures. Courtesy of the artist, The Approach, London (GB), and Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam (NL). Photo: Mark Dalton.

HOME 404

SONDI

Media artist and designer Sondi (Anke Sondi Rumohr) uses new technologies as tools for investigating storytelling. Her focus is on 3D animation, which she juxtaposes with analogue techniques. Sondi explores the concept of worldbuilding outside the white patriarchy. She researches new modes of being in these hybrid spaces, using the imagination as a strategy for resistance and a tool of liberation.

2022

Three-channel video installation with 3D animation and ceramics.

Home 404 (2022) by Sondi (Anke Sondi Rumohr) is a video installation that rethinks the concept of home and diasporic identity. Sondi uses new technologies throughout her practice as tools for investigation and storytelling, with a focus on 3D software. Her work is often inspired by the aesthetics of popular media such as video games, because the manner in which we consume these entertainments says a great deal about how we view people and how we are represented.

What are we adding? What are we removing? And what do the answers to these questions say about us? Asking these questions has led Sondi to explore notions of fiction and worldbuilding, imagining a space outside the white patriarchy through the creation of hybrid spaces. This act transforms imagination into a form of resistance, and creates space for healing.

Home 404 is a three-channel video installation consisting of three screens with 3D animation, surrounded by ceramics objects placed throughout the exhibition space. The ceramics, which Sondi shaped and constructed from memory, represent different types of objects from Cameroon. With three digital masks for the audience to engage with, the work invites each viewer to navigate the story and experience it from their own perspective. This emphasizes the hybridity of identity, especially in relation to the diaspora. Moving from the first mask to the second and third, the viewer is gestured to explore the concept of displacement, the loss of the motherland, and unfixed ideas around the meaning of “home.” Moreover, by ensuring that a plurality of people can interact with the masks, Sondi raises questions about the ownership of cultural heritage.

The work is a reconstruction of memories from Sondi’s home in Cameroon, and is inspired by rituals that are embodied as masks inhabited by spirits. The installation is an imaginative and visual memoir of “home” suggesting it could be a non-space that is dynamic and in flux, constructed by history, language, culture, music, time, and, above all, memory. This fluidity of home and identity is emphasized by the constant movement of the digital landscape. Objects and spaces appear and disappear, transform and metamorphose, pointing to the fragmented and subjective nature of memories. The result is a virtual dreamscape that explores diasporic identities and memories that resound in the physical space, the digital space, and, suggests Sondi, the non-space—or the imaginative space in which the non-space exists. *Home 404* creates in this way a hybridity that is filled with new modes of being, in which the imagination becomes a tool for liberation.



SONDI

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Sondi, (detail) Home 404, 2022. Three-channel video installation with 3D animation and ceramics. Courtesy of the artist.

AMY SUO WU & ELAINE W. HO

Art-research duo Amy Suo Wu and Elaine W. Ho share a multi-headed practice that involves sound, writing, and textile. The complex structures of their shared affinities and backgrounds intersect at the irreducible struggles of diasporic history and a refusal to be easily packaged. Their most recent experimentations involve feminist labor practices, the rituals of the interpersonal, expanded notions of publishing, and the skins of text and texture.

radio SLUMBER asks whether downtime can be productive beyond capitalist logics, and whether it is possible to enter a place where turning inwards becomes a form of resistance and, whether self-care can be seen as a form of collective care. The installation began as a series of physical gatherings over the winter of 2020, during the residency of Hong Kong-based Elaine W. Ho and Rotterdam-based Amy Suo Wu at the former art space Motel Spatie in Arnhem. Part sleepover, part social practice, part “diasporadic” coven, and part study group, these informal gatherings created an environment of protectiveness and were devoted to particular urgencies at the time. In this way, the *radio SLUMBER* activities—then enigmatically titled *PWSSSRFS*—created a moment for a group of women artists, activists, and academics of diaspora backgrounds to have conversations about the relationships between social and personal struggle, and to nurture forms of trust and intimacy in the realm

of the diasporic. As well as being a space of intimacy in a physical sense—created through the use of cozy fabrics and bedsheets—*radio SLUMBER* involved sharing meals and engaging in experimental learning and relaxation activities, such as the self-designed guided meditation titled “Racial Facial”.

Besides the installation presented at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *radio SLUMBER* takes the form of a series of radio pieces (or “aural seances”) and an online grimoire, or manual of magic, that advocates rest, self-care, and gossip as informal formats for knowledge production.¹ The audio was initially broadcast over three days around the lunar new year of 2020 across four radio stations—in Hong Kong, Amsterdam, Utrecht, and Vienna. This audio collection now functions as an immersive textile and textual archive of the first physical gatherings that took place in the midst of the pandemic. Resisting linear consumption, these hours-long aural artefacts instead offer an immersive meander through information bubbles and academic discussions interspersed with poetry, personal stories, and narrated experiences, as well as fragments of ASMR recordings and *mukbang* eating shows.

Wu and Ho nurture their collectivity in ongoing “negotiations of care” that take place through the media of sound, the written word, and textile. Their experimental and subversive publications draw on forms of feminist labor practices that explore rituals of the interpersonal and the intersections of text and textile. They are drawn to feminist philosopher Silvia Federici’s redefinition of gossip as a sharing of informal knowledge within the friendships between women.² Their *radio SLUMBER* opens up a space for otherwise gossip as a political act of solidarity amidst

1 “Radio Slumber” <https://radioslumber.net>.

2 Federici, Silvia, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2018).



Amy Suo Wu & Elaine W. Ho, (detail) *radio SLUMBER*, 2022. Mixed media installation with multi-channel audio and textile. Courtesy of the artists.

3 The word “otherwise” is used here in the sense, proposed by Elisabeth Povinelli, of opening up possibilities outside traditional understandings while avoiding the use of the word “alternative”.

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feminist philosopher Silvia Federici's redefinition of gossip as a sharing of informal knowledge within the friendships between women.² Their *radio SLUMBER* opens up a space for otherwise gossip as a political act of solidarity amidst



patriarchal systems,³ and the artists explore whether such sociality can serve as an informal environment for knowledge production. The practice of sharing information between women and their friends was and remains crucial for establishing intimacy and connection. The urgency of the ethics of care becomes especially apparent in times of crisis and upheaval. *radio SLUMBER* forgoes productivity and performance, choosing instead to embody gestures of friendship, rest, and solidarity by slowing down and resisting capitalism-inspired feelings of guilt surrounding productivity.

This iteration of *radio SLUMBER* as an installation that is now open to the public sees Wu and Ho propose a "diasporadic" session that simultaneously calms and disrupts the pace of a visit to an exhibition. The artists share their enclosure with museum visitors, invite them to sit down, to let their guard down, and to consider the political powers of intimately shared friendships.

1 "Radio Slumber" <https://radioslumber.net>.

2 Federici, Silvia, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2018).

3 The word "otherwise" is used here in the sense, proposed by Elisabeth Povinelli, of opening up possibilities outside traditional understandings while avoiding the use of the word "alternative".

COVERT EIGHT IMMORTALS 'AN BA XIAN'

2022
Sculpture made of paper mache, metal, wood.

WEI YANG

Wei Yang's work draws on diasporic collective memory, layering myth, history, and domesticity to create transcultural images. Using materials sourced from close to the body and home, he portrays and reimagines the domestic as a site of resistance, where otherness is blurred and dominant narratives are challenged.

After moving to Europe and becoming intrigued by the pervasive entanglement of modernity and coloniality in European society, Wei Yang felt driven to explore through his practice the notion of exile and diaspora. Yang creates hybrid spaces that disrupt gender binaries and notions of race and class, and question the location of the normative. Frequently drawing inspiration from Chinese collective memory and Asian tales and mythology, Yang investigates the queer struggle in the search for community in today's China. He makes his sculptures using domestic materials and do-it-yourself techniques to question the construction of value (whether material or otherwise) and the symbols of authority.

Diasporas stress the fluidity of identity and cultural exchange, and the object Yang created for this exhibition symbolizes a new form of cultural melting

pot. It refers to the specific subculture of the Peranakan people, descendants of male Chinese traders from the southern provinces of China who migrated to the Indonesian archipelago and in many cases married local women.¹ This resulted in a subculture that blended Chinese and Indonesian customs and traditions. The colonial powers oppressed the Peranakan, silencing them and forcing them to assimilate. Only traces of their cultural identity survived. The discriminatory anti-Chinese political climate continued to haunt them even after Indonesia became independent, and Yang, who is of Chinese rather than Chinese-Indonesian descent, is using this project to draw attention to their history and the archival normativity.

Yang drew inspiration from a silver betel nut set in the collection of the National Museum of World Cultures (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, NMVW) that was shown in the 2015–2016 exhibition *Connecting Cultures: Chinese from Indonesia in the Netherlands*, curated by Francine Brinkgreve and Johanna Leijfeldt. The chewing of betel nut for its mild stimulant effect is a widespread custom throughout Southeast Asia. The silver containers or vessels in a betel set are used to hold the ingredients for betel quid: the preparation combining the betel nut itself (from the areca palm), the leaves of the betel vine (sirih), and slaked lime. Tobacco or extracts from other plants are sometimes added to this concoction. Betel sets often played a role in rituals, and they were kept in special places in the home to protect against malevolent spirits.

The custom of betel chewing was widespread in the Indonesian archipelago, and it was adopted by

1 Peranakan Chinese men married local Indonesian women—China did not permit Chinese women to emigrate until 1860. Emigration from China increased in the period from 1860 to 1925, when Chinese women were also allowed to leave the country.



Wei Yang, (detail) *Covert Eight Immortals 'An Ba Xian'*, 2022. Courtesy of the curators.

2 The custom of *menginang* or betel nut chewing dates back more than 3,000 years and remains widespread in communities throughout Indonesia, especially in Java and Bali, as well as in Malaysia. Chinese travelers recorded the consumption of betel as early as the 2nd century BCE.

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1 Peranakan Chinese men married local Indonesian women—China did not permit Chinese women to emigrate until 1860. Emigration from China increased in the period from 1860 to 1925, when Chinese women were also allowed to leave the country.



Chinese communities living there.² Chinese artisans started adapting the silver holders using their own techniques, decorating Indonesian-designed betel sets with Chinese motifs. These objects are now a typical symbol of cultural assimilation in colonial society. *Covert Eight Immortals 'An Ba Xian'* sees Wei Yang re-appropriating the form of the betel leaf holder and enlarging it, using domestic or low-cost materials such as chicken wire and cardboard, rather than Javanese silver, to build up the inner structure of the object. He covered this structure in papier-mâché using mixed materials from Asian supermarkets in Amsterdam's Chinatown, thereby enveloping the betel case / melting pot with a new cultural skin in a queered pattern showing a motif of the Eight Immortals from Chinese Taoist mythology.

2 The custom of *menginang* or betel nut chewing dates back more than 3,000 years and remains widespread in communities throughout Indonesia, especially in Java and Bali, as well as in Malaysia. Chinese travelers recorded the consumption of betel as early as the 2nd century BCE.

Sunday November 27, 2022

Three performances that are part of the exhibition will take place on Sunday November 27 during the opening weekend.

Jae Pil Eun will perform his sound piece *Blue Moon* to “activate” his installation in the exhibition. It tells the story of the reflection of the moon in water: the moon’s reflection is so beautiful that people try to grab it, causing the water to ripple and the reflection to disappear.

The performance by Antonio Jose Guzman & Iva Jankovic takes the form of an Afrofuturist procession, and Ginevra Petrozzi will be holding tarot-like readings in the museum.

Saturday February 11, 2023

Book launch, screenings, and artist talks

A full day dedicated to the exhibition *When Things Are Beings*. With several events in which artists and designers, whose work is presented in the exhibition, go deeper into the background of their projects.

Friday January 27, February 24, March 31, 2023

Readings

Ginevra Petrozzi performs Digital Esoterism as either a group or one-on-one reading. Tarot card reading is the quintessential divination practice. Petrozzi drew on this tradition for an installation comprising antique chairs and a table, at which she performs tarot-like readings using the visitor’s smartphone instead of cards.

Sunday April 2, 2023

Antonio Jose Guzman & Iva Jankovic will perform *Messengers of the Sun* a second time during the closing weekend of the exhibition. This Afrofuturist ceremonial procession tells a mythical tale about the “messengers of the sun,” the lost children of the prophet Sun Ra. They live in the Sirius-B solar system—their ancestors migrated there during times of turmoil in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Audio Guide

Soundcloud

The education program includes a free audio guide narrated by Ikenna Azuike and Zaire Krieger, available in English and Dutch.

Pick up your free audio guide in the museum, or listen online here: <https://on.soundcloud.com/nEi2e>

Made Ngurah Amanda Pinatih (b. 1987)

is an art historian, curator and PhD candidate. As the Stedelijk's Curator of Design, she brings new perspectives to the museum's vast design collection. Her experimental working method is driven by an interest in developing new formats for knowledge transfer and exploring new ways in which historical collections can engage young and future generations. Pinatih's exhibitions and projects explore the intersections of social, political, (de)colonial, environmental, and economic issues. Her research as an external PhD candidate at VU Amsterdam studies the affordances of Indonesian objects around social and political contestations of belonging for diasporic communities with roots in the Indonesian archipelago. Amanda Pinatih is also co-founder of Design Museum Dharavi, the first museum of its kind based in the homegrown neighbourhood in Mumbai.

Britte Sloothaak (b. 1984)

is an art historian, Curator at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and doctoral researcher affiliated with the Curatorial Research Collective at Eindhoven University of Technology. Her projects explore interdisciplinary perspectives on the construction of knowledge in museums of modern and contemporary art, with a special interest in the known and unknown shared history of Indonesia and the Netherlands in the Stedelijk's collection and exhibitions. She developed this interest while conducting archival research and curating exhibitions for the museum, including *When Things Are Beings: Proposals for the Museum Collection* (2022-2023, with Amanda Pinatih) and *In the Presence of Absence: Proposals for the Museum Collection* (2020-2021, with Fadwa Naamna). She is currently developing the theoretical framework for her doctoral research, focusing on the differences in thinking about art history, cultural theory and heritage studies, and how these discrepancies have led to mechanisms of exclusion in art museums.

Mira Asriningtyas (b. 1986)

is an independent curator and writer. She completed the De Appel Curatorial Program (Amsterdam) in 2017 and RAW Academie 6: CURA (Dakar) in 2019. Asriningtyas' curatorial practice combines her interests in collective counter histories and the mapping of anomalies in everyday life, grounded in socio-political arguments around equal access, site specificity, and post-colonialism. She has curated exhibitions and public programs at off-sites and art institutions such as De Appel Art Center (Amsterdam); Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; FSRR (Turin); KKF (Yogyakarta); ISCP (New York); and MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum (Chiang Mai). In 2011, Mira Asriningtyas co-founded LIR Space in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and in 2017 she started the biennial site-specific project *900mdpl* in Kaliurang, Indonesia, inviting local and international artists for a research residency to create a socially engaged archive of this village at the foot of the Mount Merapi volcano. The third edition, *900mdpl: Genealogy of Ghosts and How to Live with Them*, ran from June to July 2022.

Jasmijn Mol (b. 1996)

is an art historian, writer, and editor. During her curatorial internship, she worked on the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam exhibition *When Things Are Beings: Proposals for the Museum Collection*. Her interests lie in trans-historical and paradoxical concepts such as the use of historical and archival materials in contemporary art practices, as well as the application of ancient occult practices as solutions for contemporary issues. Lately, her research has shifted towards spirituality in the age of big data and surveillance capitalism, through which she investigates notions of cyber-witchcraft and occultism in the techno-capitalist condition.

Credits

This publication was prompted by the exhibition *When Things Are Beings. Proposals for the Museum Collection*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, November 26, 2022 to April 10, 2023.

Exhibition

Exhibiting designers and artists: Ayo / James Beckett / Yinka Buutfeld / Jae Pil Eun / Eric Giraudet de Boudemange / Laurids Gallée / Antonio Jose Guzman & Iva Jankovic / Seán Hannan / Hatutamelen / Saskia Noor van Imhoff / Iris Kensmil / Sebastian Koudijzer / Marcos Kueh / Aram Lee / Shani Leseman / Sabine Marcelis / Chequita Nahar / Ana Navas / Wendy Owusu / Ginevra Petrozzi / Magali Reus / Sondi / Amy Suo Wu & Elaine W. Ho / Wei Yang

Curators: Amanda Pinatih and Britte Sloothaak
Project manager: Niels Staats
Project officer: Marieke van den Belt
Floor manager: Marc Claeijs
Registrar: Katinka Duffhuis

Exhibition design: Studio LA (Lorien Beijaert, Arna Maćkic, and Quita Schabracq)
Graphic design: Eva Heisterkamp

Jury: Aric Chen (Het Nieuwe Instituut), Roos Gortzak (Vleeshal), Prince Malik Jewiti-R (Artskop3437), Aude Christel Mgba (freelance curator), and the Stedelijk curators Amanda Pinatih and Britte Sloothaak.

The exhibition *When Things Are Beings. Proposals for the Museum Collection* is made possible with the generous support of:

The City of Amsterdam



Design Statement Studio The Future

A book is a medium. It is made up of pages, placed one after the other. It differs from the (online) scroll in that it affords for the action of “flipping through.” We like to equate this action to time travel. The reader is a passive observer, jumping with ease from one point in the book to another, backwards or forwards. It is a hack to navigate through linearity. Perhaps, all this considered, a book is a magical object in and of itself.

Rather than focus on any possible shortcomings of the digital “book”, with this project we wanted to take the opportunity to reflect on this medium and see what would be possible within the digital context. In essence, trying to evoke an optical link between the pages, while conjuring the tactility of the printed form into the digitalscape. For us this means focusing on the “relational” aspects of a book—certainly not coincidentally, these same aspects seem to be peppered throughout the works, the essay, and the curatorial vision. These being: transparency, overlay, and the hidden.

Intangibility is an important theme in the exhibition and throughout the works. It is not only about the physical forms, but rather what hangs in the air—the strange aura of the objects. These individual auras of the works bleed into each other, overlaying meaning and sensibility into becoming a parallax where it is not one or the other anymore. This emphasizes that which we know is there, but cannot be seen or touched. Is that not the essence of a digital book?

Publication

Concept: Amanda Pinatih and Britte Sloothaak (eds)
Contributors: Mira Asringtyas, Jasmijn Mol, Amanda Pinatih, and Britte Sloothaak

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