

MADAT

Museum
Art
Architecture
Technology

Black Ancient Futures



MAAT Garden

Jota Mombaça

Não Esqueço Nunca Mais, 2024

Nolan Oswald Dennis

Recurse 4 [3] Worlds, 2018 – ongoing



MAAT Central

Baloji

Altar / Peau de chagrin / Bleu de Nuit,
2018–2024

April Bey

*We Learned to Love Ourselves until We Were
Full until We Did Not Need Yours until
We Realized Our Own Was Enough*, 2023

Jeannette Ehlers

*We're Magic. We're Real #3 (Channeling
Re-existence into Hallowed Grounds
of Healing)*, 2021
We're Magic. We're Real #2, 2021

Kiluanji Kia Henda

*The Cloak of the Presentation
(According Arthur Bispo do Rosário)*, 2020

Sandra Mujinga

And My Body Carried All of You, 2024

Nolan Oswald Dennis

Eclipse Study Chart, 2024



MAAT Gallery

Evan Ifekoya

Ritual Without Belief, 2018
The Welcome (from "Resonant Frequencies"), 2022

Lungiswa Gqunta

Sleep in Witness, 2024

Kiluanji Kia Henda

Icarus 13. The first journey to the sun, 2013

Gabriel Massan

& Collaborators
Third World: The Bottom Dimension,
2023 – ongoing

Jota Mombaça

Seu Sangue É Terra que Ninguém Pisa, 2024

Tabita Rezaire

Peaceful Warrior, 2015
Ultra Wet – Recapitulation, 2017

The exhibition *Black Ancient Futures* brings together works by 11 artists from the vast African diaspora, many of them shown for the first time in Portugal, exhibited in various spaces of the museum – in both buildings, MAAT Gallery and MAAT Central, and in the MAAT Garden.

The works on display are the result of the combination of specific features of African culture with other cultures and geographical spaces, and reveal the original energy of the itinerant fate of the African condition – of exile and settlement in the context of slavery, or of voluntary or forced migration as a result of the current global economic, political, and climate crises – offering a universe of creative possibilities.

Their works re-imagine a past, a present, and a future for the black artistic experience in its transcontinental reality, contributing to the global development of contemporary art. These proposals neither illustrate a historically defined trend or movement nor advocate a specific ideological reading; rather, they call on diverse techniques, disciplines and languages, combining frenzied fantasies of form, colour, and sound, material experiences, thematic and temporal leaps, and direct references to non-Western spiritualities with the use or evocation of post-industrial technology to create magical or science-fictional narratives.

In these works, historical, political, social, and cultural critique, satire, and irony, lyricism and epic intersect to rehearse positive futures, not simply from the pain or suffering still implicit in the legacy of slavery, but also through the summoning of abundant (pre-colonial) pasts. The artists thus seek to overturn the trajectories of history,

making possible other cultural and social imaginaries, integrating today's resources and issues into non-materialist realities that manifest as oneiric strategies, of collective healing and well-being, suggesting the possibility of a universe of utopian spaces favourable to shifting perspectives on both the racial and historical justice they assume and the hierarchies and geographies of contemporary creation they navigate.

João Pinharanda and Camila Maissune

Baloji (Democratic Republic of Congo, 1978) lives in Belgium, where he works in various fields. His work uses elements of Congolese culture, exploring the combination of its traditions with the languages of European avant-gardes. Contemporary global issues are approached through complex narratives centred around identity and its plurality. Baloji uses magical and oneiric realism to represent his vision about these intense themes more indirectly, allowing him to create work with a surrealist character. His work, whether in the form of music, film or other media, is renowned for its innovative use of African masks and symbolism, colours and sounds, linked by synaesthesia, to create stimulating and immersive narratives, for which he often calls on traditional African symbols together with modern and futuristic elements, associating the familiar with the extraordinary.

April Bey (Bahamas, 1987) lives and works in Los Angeles as a visual artist and teacher. Her artistic work is an introspective and social critique of American and Bahamian culture, feminism, social media, postcolonialism, Afrofuturism, Afrosurrealism, and the racial structures internalised by supremacist systems, imagining alternative futures where African technology and culture interconnect in innovative and emancipatory ways. Bey's works form an audacious critique of the integration and monetisation of radical politics through a wide range of media, manifesting in painting, textiles, photography, and installation. With a view to challenging patriarchal norms, she celebrates female affirmation. Referring to social and political themes, her practice also reflects on ecology and sustainability,

looking, for example, at hyperconsumerism and pop culture, and examining the impact and influence of the media and consumerism on the formation of identity and social values.

Jeannette Ehlers (Trinidad and Tobago, 1973) is a Danish-Trinidadian artist who lives and works in Copenhagen. Her work deals with themes and questions related to memory, race and colonialism, often using self-representation and image manipulation to provoke post-colonial spectres and disturbances. Articulating material and affective consequences of the colonial impact of Denmark on the Caribbean and their participation in the transatlantic slave trade, realities often forgotten in historiography, she reminds everyone who contemplates her works that historical events are not confined to the past.

In her artistic practice, **Lungiswa Gqunta** (South Africa, 1990) deals with questions relating to South African postcolonialism and her country's contemporary political scene. She simulates multisensory experiences that attempt to demonstrate the social imbalances derived from colonialism and patriarchy. In exploring these themes, the artist creates a feeling of discomfort or unease through rituals that carry collective memories of resistance, such as the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. These rituals not only help to preserve and honour the history of community struggle but also define a vision of an idealised future or a refuge from harsh reality, functioning as means of psychological and emotional resistance. Gqunta often questions what happens during sleep and during dreams, conceiving sleep as a space that allows for

new ways of being. In her works she uses found materials such as empty beer bottles, petrol, ripped sheets, and used wooden pallets.

Evan Ifekoya (Nigeria, 1988) lives and works in London. Through their art, Ifekoya challenges implicit rules and hierarchies in public and social spaces, reflecting on their role as an African spiritual practitioner to redistribute and negotiate resources and to investigate healing (as something we can achieve on our own), resistance and collective memory. Their work often challenges gender and sexuality norms, seeking to create spaces of visibility and affirmation for queer communities. They work with the abundance of identities, experiences and spiritualities, especially in black and LGBTQIA+ communities. As an artist and spiritual practitioner, Ifekoya seeks to contribute to the demystification of spirituality and esoteric principles, arguing that these are eminently connected to our mental health.

Sound is a substantial element in Ifekoya's work. It is through sound that they practise healing, like a divine inheritance, exploring resonant frequencies and inviting the visitors to discover themselves.

Kiluanji Kia Henda (Angola, 1979) lives and works in Luanda. In his works, Kiluanji Kia Henda incentivises critical thought about today's society, dealing with themes like politics, identity, and Africa's complex relationship with the West, evoked poetically or satirically, often using unexpected humour. Surrounded by photography and arts enthusiasts in Angola, his work has grown more conceptually refined due to his connections with music and theatre and

participation within a collective of artists. Much of Kia Henda's work is based on history, appropriating, and manipulating public spaces and structures, as well as the various representations that comprise collective memory, in order to reproduce complex and impactful images. Fact and fiction are woven together with humour, with fiction becoming a tool to consider important questions from new perspectives. These characteristics are identifiable in his works through the creation of characters and stories from his imagination that interact with real contexts, merging reality with fantasy.

Gabriel Massan (Brazil, 1996) lives and works between Paris and Berlin. Through the use of digital tools, Massan creates worlds that simulate and narrate situations of inequality in Latin America. They combine narrative techniques and world building to create a conceptual practice they call "fictional archaeology", digital sculptures, 3D animation, games, sounds, and interactive installations simulating black-indigenous and Latin American life experiences. This allows them to reinterpret and recontextualise stories and create new characters and visually impactful landscapes, with a euphoric digital aesthetic that includes elements of mythology, history, and science fiction. These virtual worlds also serve as spaces of resistance and imagination of stories that challenge existing structures of power and pave the way for new possibilities. With this, Massan invites the public to actively participate and interact with the characters and virtual environments they create, and to come into contact with the experiences of marginalised societies.

Jota Mombaça (Brazil, 1991), “non-binary queer, born and raised in north-eastern Brazil,” lives and works between Fortaleza, Lisbon and Berlin. Mombaça defines herself as an interdisciplinary and “non-disciplinary” artist whose work unfolds in a wide variety of mediums and techniques. Her work reflects the tensions between the desire for visibility and the impulse of self-preservation experienced by radicalised trans artists, approaching themes from poetic and theoretical critical perspectives and the lenses of queer community studies, anticolonial justice and the redistribution of violence. It also looks at the continuity of traumas provoked by the transatlantic slave trade and the growing impact of the climate crisis on social and cultural reality. Mombaça is inspired by the concept of visionary fiction as a tool to imagine and create alternative realities, allowing for the speculation about post-apocalyptic or utopian futures and exploring new possibilities of existence, in an artistic practice that makes space for the voices and opportunities of marginalised people, constituting an invitation to think beyond the limitations of the present and an attempt at future salvation.

Sandra Mujinga (Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1989) lives and works in Norway, expressing herself primarily through video, sound, sculpture, and performance. Her work deals with questions of self-presentation, preservation, and appearance by means of an interdisciplinary approach, in which she usually convokes themes such as identity politics and visibility, questioning how black people are represented in the real and digital worlds. She also associates anthropocentrism with ecological issues to understand the ephemeral world we occupy

today and how technology can affect nature and the environment.

Mujinga’s multidisciplinary practice is driven by an interest in the body or by its absence. Hooded, ghostly figures appear in her terrifying installations, sculptures that resemble animal skins and fantastical hybrid creatures. The artist draws inspiration from animal survival strategies, like camouflage and nocturnality, the science-fiction concept of “world building,” post-humanist thought, and Afrofuturism. Mujinga proposes an imaginary world in which the existence of cyborgs does not constitute a threat to humanity but rather serves to protect it.

Nolan Oswald Dennis (Zambia, 1988) lives and works between Johannesburg and the United Kingdom. His works expose the modalities of action of colonialism and how the latter continues to influence contemporary social and political structures, impacting the organising infrastructures of society. Through a language of diagrams, drawings and structural models, he imagines alternative futures, creating utopian (and also dystopian) visions of future societies. Oswald Dennis develops a grammar of world building: using indexical, analytical, and educational devices as enigmatic tools to study possible meanings. Through his diagrams, the artist provides a unique and captivating way of visualising and understanding the intrinsic and often hidden dynamic that defines our world. These diagrams allow various things to be interrelated, forcing us to think about unconsidered objects and conveying complex ideas with simple shapes. This approach invites spectators to engage with the ideas presented, demanding an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the relationships between bodies.

Tabita Rezaire (France, 1989) has Guyanese and Danish ancestry. Many of her works explore the intersection of technology, spirituality, and decolonisation, questioning how digital technologies can be tools of oppression and colonisation and, simultaneously, powerful means of resistance and liberation. Inspired by quantum and cosmic mechanics, Tabita's work is rooted in space-times where technology and spirituality intersect, bringing together ancient knowledge and contemporary technological practices. Spirituality is crucial to Rezaire's work, which frequently incorporates African and indigenous spiritual practices and philosophies. The artist often includes herself in her videos and digital works, considering the body as a technology. She considers herself a tool for healing and uses art as a means to develop the soul.

Rezaire deals with the interconnectivity of all things, through both technology and spirituality, recognising that technology can be a means to achieving a deeper understanding of our interconnection. She also imagines an optimistic Afrofuturist world where technology and spirituality, mutually reinforcing one another, enable the empowerment of African communities.

Black Ancient Futures
18/09/2024-17/03/2025

Artists

Baloji, April Bey, Jeannette Ehlers,
Lungiswa Gqunta, Evan Ifekoya,
Kiluanji Kia Henda, Gabriel Massan,
Jota Mombaça, Sandra Mujinga,
Nolan Oswald Dennis, Tabita Rezaire

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Agenda

Guided Tour with Lungiswa Gqunta,
Evan Ifekoya, Kiluanji Kia Henda,
Camila Maissune, Jota Mombaça,
João Pinharanda: 18/09/2024, 18.30.
Performance by Jeannette Ehlers
with Laura Beaujour, Marisa Paulo
and NANV: 04/10/2024, 18.00.

Publications

Catalogue to be published by Hirmer
Publishers during the exhibition.

More information
and other content
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exhibition guide



18/09/2024 → 17/03/2025

