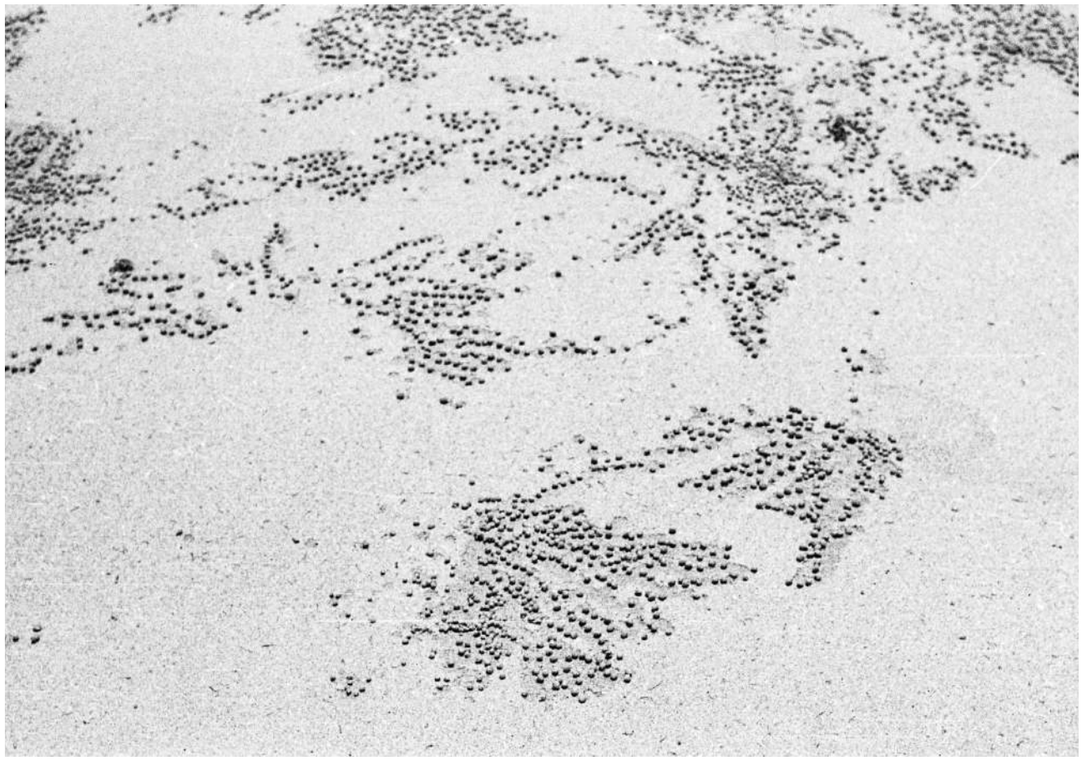


Tide of Returns

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll,
Christopher Williams-Wynn, and
Verena Melgarejo Weinandt (eds.)



Peter Worsley, *Crabs on the Sand*, 1952. Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. Accession number: 2009.10.68.

Thyssen Bornemisza Art Contemporary

HATJE CANTZ

14 Foreword
Rosa Ferré and Markus Reymann

26 Carried by the Seas, Held by the Earth
Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Christopher Williams-Wynn

38 Between Tides: Gatherings on Return
Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Njabulo Chipangura, Manuela Ciotti, Rosa Anna Di Lella, Laimi Kokololo, Noeleen Lalara, Wietske Maas, Jesse Weaver Shipley, Francesca Tarocco

48 The Stories Continue and the Films Remain
Britten Andrews

54 History of the Dadikwakwa-kwa Shell Dolls and the Warnindilyakwa People
Tamara Newton

66 From Film to Ritual: Extending Dialogue Through Creative Practice
Kaudife Haikali and Sophie Haikali

80 Water and Braids: Transformations Through Time
Verena Melgarejo Weinandt

94 Ozeba, or Return My Belongings Unharmed or You Will Be in Trouble
Samson Ogiamien

108 Exploring Identity, Memory, Human Archives: A Conversation with Sènami Donoumassou
Adéwolé Faladé

118 A Feast: Reclaiming
Claudia Peña Salinas

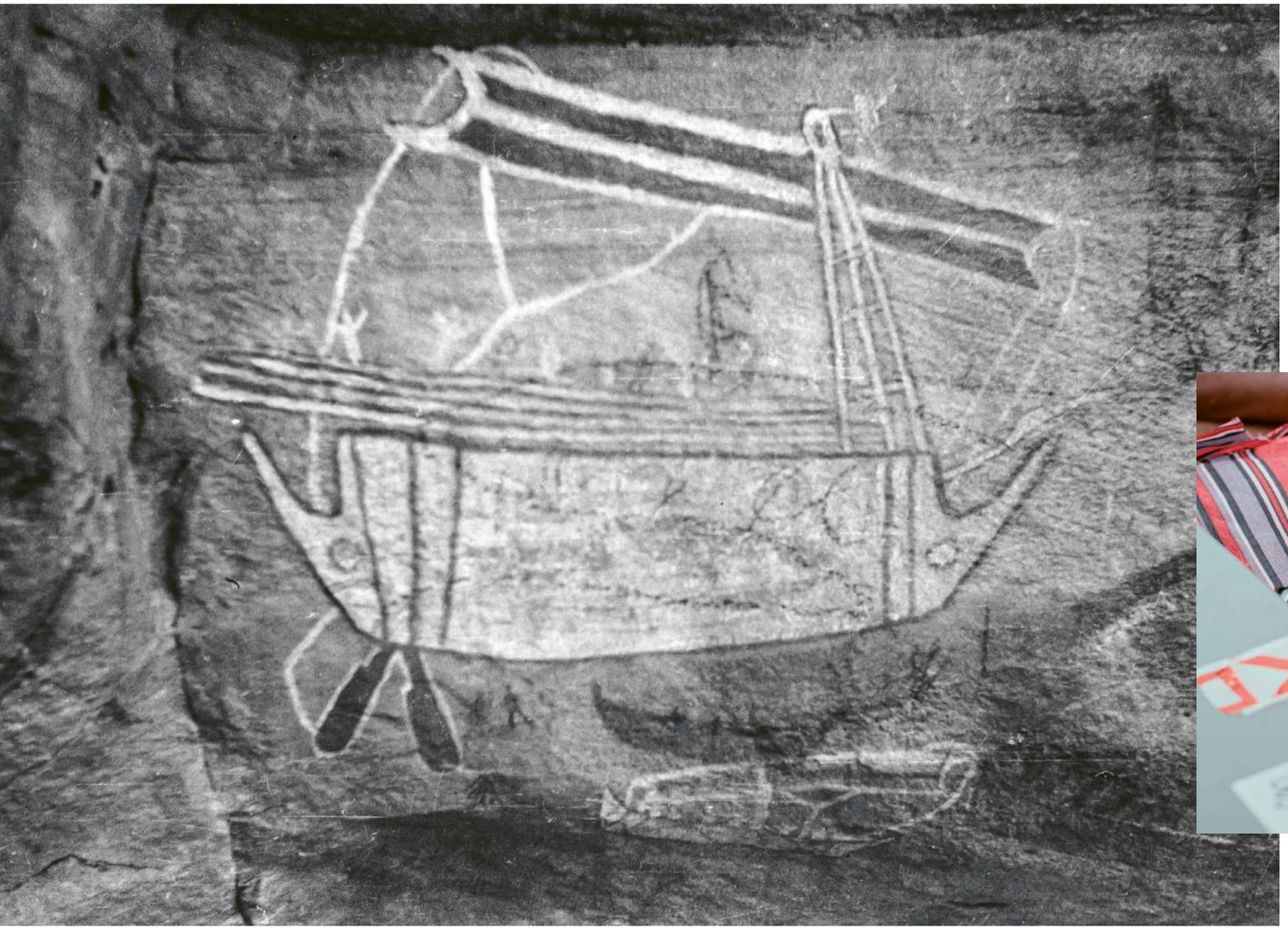
128 Museum Souvenirs Featuring Quetzalapanecáyotl: Sustainable Traces with a Holistic Approach
Nina Höchtl and Yosune Miquelajauregui

135 Biographies











Acknowledgments

This book is one outcome of our five-year journey in the Repatriates project. We are deeply grateful to many souls who accompanied us on circuitous and not always smooth, sometimes downright thorny, paths. Many routes were overgrown or underwater, and we had to wade through while watching for the beady eye of a hungry crocodile. But the rough seas bathed us, and we surfaced far from where we began, free to carry on together.

Tide of Returns is launched on the occasion of the exhibition of the same title at Ocean Space in Venice and for this honor we thank the visionary foundation TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary. This book would not have become ink on paper if not for the support of the Director Markus Reymann, together with the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung, and Lena Kiessler, our publisher at Hatje Cantz. Eva and Carlos of Toledo i Dertschei, our designers, tirelessly birthed our motley crew into this book-object and www.repatriates.org site.
I could not have wished for a better architect with whom to embark on the daunting task of building a sand dune. Philipp Krummel would come with the nerdiest sources like P. Gerhard's *Handbuch des deutschen Dünenbaues* to help define the 4–33-degree slopes that I was modelling in Piju's magic sand, on Lido, Philipp Island, and in Qatar.

I am endlessly grateful to those whose organizing was a form of activism and care for us: Kate Martin, Martha Flemming, Kriszta Szabados, Daniel Gyori, Wolfgang Knoepfler, Jelena Micić, Ursula Maria Probst, but most of all Verena Melgarejo Weinandt who steered Repatriates with me for four years as Project Manager of this big and complex collective. Eleni Tsopotou and Madalena Corrêa Mendes were brilliant producers and coordinators of the exhibition together with the whole TBA team: Petra Linhartova, Sara Mattiazzi, Clairssa Spoladore, Giulia Marzorati, Mattia Biadene, Ludovic Assemat, Giulia Caruso and Ola Czerniak among many more.

Thanks to Sam Moody for sending me the first bit of mail art supplies from Groote, which started our exchange between doll makers. We were guided by the intellectual input given during conferences hosted by Jesse Weaver Shipley in Lagos, Dacia Viego-Rose in Cambridge, Gro Ween in Oslo, Anna Mossolova in Barcelona, Tom Trevor and William Gallois in Exeter, Karin Harrasser in Linz, Alex Flynn in Los Angeles, Karmen Franinovic in Zurich, Philipp Schorch in Munich, Gina Flores in Mexico City, Anna Seiderer in Porto Novo Benin and in Paris, Julia Binter in Berlin, Golda !Ha-Eiros in Windhoek, the team at Wien Woche festival, and dear colleagues at the Central European University.

My friends, Matisse Mittelman, Susi Rogenhofer, Julian Reinisch, Jonas Tinius, Phoebe Rosehope, Stephanie Winter, David Rych, Manu Ciotti, Oliver Cmyral, Eleonora Crola, guided my process. Detailed curatorial and editorial smarts came from Wietske Maas and Christopher Williams-Wynn, as I reluctantly also worked in the role of curator for this exhibition. While the art world hangs onto such appointments, I dreamed of an artistic collective based on a horizontal structure.

The sound that Rebekah Wilson composed for the exhibition came from an enchanting process of sensitivity and delicacy. Repatriates was blessed with the magic of collaboration. For their brilliant camera work I thank Britten Andrews and Konstantin Kormann. This project came at a time when my own mother, Charlotte Zinn von Zinnenburg, departed this world from her island in Australia and I reached instinctivly to the collaboration with my brother Kasimir Burgess.
I give thanks to all our film crews. On Groote Eylandt the film grew in the loving sphere of the starring aunties you see on screen, known as the 'Golden Girls', Noeleen Lalara, Maureen, Elsie, Rita and Sue Bara, with their grandchildren Alitana Herbert and Kamille Bara and all those that joined to make Dadikwakwa-kwa: Bernadette Watt, Nikisha Wanambi, Sheanah Marawili, Kaysheanne Murrugun, Annabell Amagula, Lusanne Murrugun, Marcia Mamarika, Arabella Wanambi, Lily Yantarrnga, Charmaine Kerindun, Meaghan Wanambi, Angela Robyn Williams, Maicie Lalara, Lucinda Murrugun, Janelle Mamarika, Noelita Lalara, Shirly Yantarrnga, Stephanie Durilla, Natalie Yantarrnga, Chailene Yantarrnga, Charlene Wanambi, Alice Durilla, Sharna Wurramara, Rebecca Yarntarrnga. Thanks to everyone involved in making the dolls on the Namibian side, especially Laimi Kokololo, together with Joel and Sophie Haikali, for leading the development of workshops that formed the basis, with the guidance of Maria Caley and Loini Iizyenda.

Thank you to the advisory board of Repatriates, in particular AIATSIS, Charlotte Joy, Larissa Foerster and Julia Binter. Repatriates' researchers Jessyca Hutchens, Nina Höchtl, Samson Ogiamien, Laimi Kokololo, and Ade Falade, as well as the students Jasmine Coelho and Tamara Newton, contributed brilliant work.

I joked that Piju was my closest collaborator in this project because he was always there with me, drawing and filming, traveling and yarning, dreaming and installing. I could not wish for a better partner, from the first film in Aoteoroa, where he made my belly so big that it worked as a tripod, to giving the Weltmuseum the gift of a way to repatriate, as he would say, "they verloved it".

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll

Images previous pages:

Ocean-Lady and Bush-Lady posing for my camera in *From My Mother's Country* film. Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, 23 November 2025.

Peter Worsley, *Turtle on Groote Eylandt*, 1952. Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. Accession number: 2002.10.234.

Peter Worsley, *Girls Playing with Shell Dolls in the Sand*, 1952, Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. Accession number: 2009.10.249.

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, *From My Mother's Country*, film still, 15 March 2025.

Peter Worsley, *Rock Painting on Groote Eylandt*, 1952–1953 Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. Accession number: 2009.10.115.

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, *Golden Girls use superglue – dressing the old and new Dadikwakwa-kwa in Namibian fabrics for their journey to Venice*. Umbakumba, March 2025.

Foreword

Rosa Ferré and Markus Reymann

Objects are taken. They are traded. They cross the ocean, enter vitrines and vaults, acquire new names, and fall into new silences. The communities that made them, the ceremonies they animated, the landscapes they once inhabited — none of these travel with them. What remains is a gap in memory, dressed up as preservation.

The logic behind this removal is familiar and pernicious: that some cultures are better custodians of others' heritage, that distance equals safety, that a climate-controlled vault constitutes care. This is the thinking that builds museum collections, shapes restitution negotiations, and the legal architectures that separate objects from the communities to which they belong. These ideas are not relics of a colonial past. They still operate today.

The Repatriates Collective has spent years working against this grain — through film, installation, performance, and sustained collaboration with communities in Namibia, Australia, Mexico, and more. What the artists have done is simple: they have followed the objects. Not as inventory, not as cultural audit, but tracing the afterlives of taken things to understand what displacement does to memory, to belonging, to the possibility of self-determination. Their work does not resolve the question of repatriation. It makes it porous enough to admit the contradictions that any honest engagement with the question of return must confront.

Tide of Returns brings this research to Ocean Space, and the Church of San Lorenzo in Venice, which has been TBA21—Academy's home for exhibition-making and experimental programming since 2019. The Church of San Lorenzo is not a white cube. It is a building shaped by centuries of trade, faith, empire, and the restless circulation of political ambitions, people and goods over the Mediterranean; it breathes with the lagoon and carries within its walls the residues of histories that demand to be read differently. The encounter between the Collective's practice and the church of San Lorenzo produces something that exceeds documentation: a confrontation with the forces of displacement that are as much present in Venice's own history as they are in the archives and communities with which the artists have engaged.

Objects are not inert. They carry memory, intention, agency. Archives are never neutral. And the act of returning — slow, contested, laden with institutional friction — is itself a form of creation, a remaking of relations that were once severed but never fully dissolved.



Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, *Te Moana*, installation in Ocean Space, curated by Chus Martinez and Markus Reymann, 2019.

This publication records the exhibition and the broader research journey behind it: the field work and the silences, the negotiations and the discoveries, the moments when art and reparative justice converged. It is a document of what becomes possible when artists follow a question to its source, however uncomfortable the destination.

TBA21 is committed to cultural production that refuses the comfortable distance between aesthetics and accountability. This book is part of that commitment. The tides do not simply come and go. They carry sediment, memory, the possibility of reconstitution — and they ask us to attend to what they bring back.

Rosa Ferré and Markus Reymann
Co-Directors, TBA21
Madrid, 2026







***From My Mother's Country*, 2026. Ocean Space, Venice. Commissioned and produced by TBA21–Academy.**

Installation of sand dunes with dolls and single-channel-video (color, 8.1 sound).
Overall dimensions variable

Video
Lead artist: Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll
Co-Directors: Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Kasimir Burgess
Starring: Noeleen Lalara, Alitana Herbert, Kamille Bara, Sue Bara, Rita Bara, Maureen Bara, Elsie Bara.
Director of Photography: Britten Andrews, Kasimir Burgess
Sound Design: Rebekah Wilson, Kasimir Burgess
Editing: Kasimir Burgess, Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll
Co-Producer: Wolfgang Knoepfler
Color Design: Lee Niederkofler, Jacob Jabornig
Field Recordings: Susi Rogenhofer, Manni Montana, Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Konstantin Kormann

Sand Dunes
White and red sands, honeycomb cardboard, cork powder, mica, rubber foam, polystyrene
Design: Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll
(with the permission of Noeleen Lalara)
Realizzazione / Fabrication: Attosecondo (Anita Accorsi, Martina Casonato, Nicola Fraticelli, Enrico Mancini, Sarah Menichini, Francesca Paltrinieri, Ludovica Sitti) with Rinaldo Rinaldi and Maria Grazia Cervetti

Doll Makers
Lead artists: Noeleen Lalara, Laimi Kokololo
Anindilyakwa artists, Australia: Nikisha Wanambi, Sheanah Marawili, Kaysheanne Murrugun, Annabell Amagula, Lusanne Murrugun, Marcia Mamarika, Arabella Wanambi, Elsie Bara, Lily Yantarrnga, Charmaine Kerindun, Meaghan Wanambi, Angela Robyn Williams, Maureen Bara, Maicie Lalara, Bernadette Watt, Lucinda Murrugun, Janelle Mamarika, Noelita Lalara, Shirly Yantarrnga, Stephanie Durilla, Natalie Yantarrnga, Chailene Yantarrnga, Charlene Wanambi, Alice Durilla, Sharna Wurramara, Rebecca Yarntarrnga, Rita Bara, Sue Bara.

Tide of Returns

Repatriates Collective for *Tide of Returns*:
Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Verena Melgarejo Weinandt, Laimi Kokololo, Noeleen Lalara, Samson Ogiamien, Kasimir Burgess, Britten Andrews, Rebekah Wilson, Christopher Williams-Wynn, Wietske Maas, Georg Oberlechner, Nick Prokesch, Miae Son, Alfredo Ledesma Quintana, Marisel Orellana Bongola, Auro Orso, Pêdra Costa, Klara Neuber, Piju, Konstantin Kormann, Julian Reinisch, Susi Rogenhofer, Manni Montana, Jesse Shipley, Jasmine Coelho, Krisztina Szabados, Tamara Newton, Nina Hoechtl, Wolfgang Knoepfler, Larissa Foerster, Julia Binter, Jessyca Hutchens, Nikisha Wanambi, Sheanah Marawili, Kaysheanne Murrugun, Annabell Amagula, Lusanne Murrugun, Marcia Mamarika, Arabella Wanambi, Elsie Bara, Lily Yantarrnga, Charmaine Kerindun, Meaghan Wanambi, Angela Robyn Williams, Maureen Bara, Maicie Lalara, Shianne Lalara, Bernadette Watt, Lucinda Murrugun, Janelle Mamarika, Noelita Lalara, Shirly Yantarrnga, Stephanie Durilla, Natalie Yantarrnga, Chailene Yantarrnga, Charlene Wanambi, Alice Durilla, Sharna Wurramara, Rebecca Yarntarrnga, Rita Bara, Sue Bara

Curated by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll
Exhibition coordination: Eleni Tsopotou
Exhibition production: Madalena Corrêa Mendes
Communication coordination: Sara Mattiazzi
Communication: Barbora Horská, Giulia Marzorati, Katarina Rakušček, Clarissa Spoladore, Leticia García Vilamea
Development and advancement: Miriam Calabrese, Anna Numi, Carolina Profilo
Production and project management: D.H. office
Project architect: Philipp Krummel
Technical coordination: Mattia Biadene, Philipp Krummel
Graphic design: Toledo i Dertschei
Translations: Clara Ciccioni
Copy editing: Orit Gat
Photographer: Jacopo Salvi
Video maker: Kinonauts
Media relations: Nicola Jeffs, D.H. office

Carried by the Seas, Held by the Earth

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Christopher Williams-Wynn

From Manchester to Australia's northern Pacific coast, from Berlin to Namibia's Atlantic coast, the shells and songs of the oceans are returning. These echoes of the sea wake memories of place — ancient yet contemporary, rooted in both the weight of history and the fleetingness of the present. Through the lens of *Tide of Returns* at Ocean Space, we take you to a specific location in the Gulf of Carpentaria, where land and water meet at the edge of a world in flux. Off the northern coast of Australia, this shoreline is nestled within the low-lying Groote Archipelago, caught in the relentless rise of the sea level. Here, the tide brings with it the detritus of global industry: tangled nets discarded from fishing vessels drift along the shore. Once tools of sustenance, these ghost nets now threaten life — the turtles, the birds, the fish. They leave a trail of destruction in their wake, suffocating the coastline.

This exhibition is more than an artistic expression; it is a ceremonial act of reclamation. It is a form of homecoming that moves beyond activism, offering a more profound form of resistance. Without abrasive rhetoric or the heavy jargon of decolonial theory, it speaks with a gentleness, an unfolding, a softness — a poetic articulation of cultural survival. The stories told here are shaped by the language of the land, the sea, and the bodies that create them. This is also a portrait of possible relations between humans and the sea, and the ways in which communities teach their children about those relations, using sculptures made of shells, through stories of their families, practices, ancestors.

On Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria, life is lived with and from place. Women like Noeleen Lalara, who tends her mother's sand dune overlooking the vast expanse of the Pacific, show us the resilience of communities and the ways they cultivate the resources that sustain them. In the accompanying film, you see a woman fishing alone, casting a line from the beach — a place of deep connection, where the ocean itself is a source of life, providing food, stories, and sustenance to generations of families. The woman casts her line into the water with a grace that speaks of tradition, knowledge, and survival. It does so through the *everywhen* of "Groote time" where daily life unfolds in circles, like the looping film that follows the women's gestures.[1] The movement of the scenes in the film follow the wind and the elements on the island, the way life is lived with the tides. It begins with the digging for materials, preparing for the careful making of Dadikwakwa-kwa.



Above and previous pages: Repatriates Collective, *From My Mother's Country*, 2026. Installation views, Ocean Space, Venice. Commissioned and produced by TBA21–Academy. Photo: Jacopo Salvi.

Commonly translated from Anindilyakwa, the language spoken by the Warnindilyakwa people on Groote Eylandt, as "shell dolls," they carry ancestral stories. The makers are deeply focused on their process and the film bears intimate witness to that. They are not performing for the camera, but absorbed in the labor of adorning the shells. The particular shells that are chosen are so intimately part of the environment that, at first, it is hard to see them amidst the deep piles that the ocean delivers to that and only that spot along the coast. Glimmering in the sun, the shells, Noeleen Lalara explains as she presents four "dolls" for safekeeping, form the skin of the Rainbow Serpent, a creator deity responsible for land, water, and life. The sound of these expert hands digging is a song that needs no language; we feel the ways that the earth opens.

The Groote Archipelago, a series of islands abundant in manganese, is also a site of profound conflict and negotiation. Among the most pressing concerns for the Warnindilyakwa, the Indigenous occupants of the archipelago, are the incursions from mining companies. Since 1965, over 150 million tons of manganese have been extracted from the land. For the inhabitants of the islands, this is













Previous pages: Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Kasimir Burgess and Britten Andrews, *From My Mother's Country*, film stills, 2026.

more than an economic struggle; it is an intricate dance between extraction and preservation, between the forces of industry and the rhythms of ancestral land. Here, Indigenous communities engage in ongoing negotiations with mining corporations over their lands and seas as they try to safeguard their heritage in the face of invasive commercial practices and the problems posed by Western notions of conservation and education. Those practices and notions have tended to render natural sites as locations for exploitation or "wilderness" reserves, and so displaced Indigenous communities from the very lands integral to community building and knowledge formation. Yet amid such challenges there is empowerment. In Umbakumba, a town on the edge of the dunes — an hour's drive from Red Sands, Noeleen's mother's country in the northern area of Groote Eylandt — the community has cultivated its own voice and vision. They have established two art centers, a radio station broadcasting in their Anindilyakwa language, and a collective commitment to honoring their place, their people, and their future. Oral history camps also facilitate helicopter trips for residents, enabling them to reach locations otherwise difficult to access and so maintain close bonds between land, songlines, and stories.

Transferred from the shores of Australia to Venice, the dolls created from ghost nets, shells, and other material sourced from the ocean are living presences — vessels of memory, spirit, and resistance.[2] Born from the shores of Namibia and Australia, these dolls are recast in Venice, on their own sand dunes, bridging two continents, two cultures, and two histories. This Namibian-Aboriginal joint exhibition is not merely an art show but a living testament to survival and transformation. The ancestral wisdom of these peoples speaks through these dolls — a reminder of the enduring strength of Indigenous knowledge, of the ongoing resistance against forces that seek to erase it.

The installation features figurines made by Laimi Kakololo and others, which emerged from workshops in Windhoek on traditional doll-making practices in Namibia. The dolls "speak" in their native tongues, sharing stories, songs, and wisdom from the past. Each doll embodies a specific clan or totem embodying natural and spiritual forces. They wait, as if in anticipation, to share their stories. These are not just sculptures, but sacred vessels of memory, fertility, and beauty. Through them, young girls are taught about the cycles of life, the significance of their bodies, and the importance of honoring the wisdom of their ancestors. In Australia, the gender of the dolls is clearly marked. Males are represented as sticks in the sand, while the females are decorated in clan designs and dressed in a myriad of styles that can be seen in the exhibition. Considered living beings by the women who fashion them and care for them, Dadikwakwa-kwa are used to teach children about numeracy, literacy, and kinship systems. The children who play with them learn about relationships to their land, food, practices, bodies, family, and ancestral ties. In parts of Namibia, a doll was given to a girl and the name it was given also became the name of her first child, conveying precolonial knowledge and practices of ornamentation. These dolls are seen to bridge history and identity, ensuring that cultural legacy persists and shapes the future.

Possible futures can be seen in the exhibition's interplays of light, shadow, and sound. As the visitors move through the space, they encounter the voices of the dolls, voices that speak of deep connections to land, ocean, and ancestors. The force of sandstorms, the calls of desert birds, the rhythm of the ocean itself — these sounds create an atmosphere that underscores the urgency of preserving cultural heritage in the face of climate change. Seeming to emerge from the sandstone walls of the deconsecrated Church of San Lorenzo, the dunes intimate the return of built form to the earth. They bear witness to the bonds between objects, land and materials, and so gently insist on an understanding of heritage as necessarily interweaving of the natural and the cultural.

The dissolution of European empires in the twentieth century sparked impassioned debates about the vast accumulation of cultural property in metropolitan museums in the West. Though countries and communities once subjected to imperial rule have demanded the return of stolen artifacts, they are often met with skepticism and resistance from museums, politicians, and the public in the nations that now possess these objects. This can invoke incredulity and anger for the "generation that has only known restitutions by way of painful struggles."[3] Since the 1954 Hague Convention and the 1970 UNESCO Convention defined "cultural property" in international law, repatriation has shifted from a moral obligation to a legal process. It's a debate that defies simple answers. In addition to the deep historical grievances caused by colonialism, conflicting notions of ownership render the issue of cultural restitution particularly intractable. This complexity has produced a form of stasis. Governments, legal experts, and institutions across Europe have implemented a mélange of disparate measures in response to specific repatriation claims but have been unable to offer a definitive solution to the issue.

Repatriation demands — which encompass a wide range of cultural, ethical, and legal factors — have tended to elicit impromptu gestures and preliminary mission statements.[4] Museums and other cultural institutions have typically responded to these claims in three ways: maintaining that the rightful ownership is uncertain; arguing that the circumstances of the original acquisition are often unclear; and asserting their duty to preserve and provide access to the items. To debunk these claims we have shown, for example in the Mexican case study that makes up the final part of this book, that we can solve these so-called conservation barriers to repatriation.











Communities demanding repatriation have stated that ownership of items cannot be based on records institutions often know are incomplete; that oral histories must be considered valid; and that access and maintenance is best provided by local communities. This exhibition, and the wider research project of which it is part, aims to find new ways to navigate these debates. While conversations about repatriation have often been mired in legal aspects, the exhibition fosters a deeper encounter between different object ontologies and cultural perspectives, emerging from intensive work with communities and artistic practitioners.

Like the shifting dunes, the tides of return run through communities in very different ways. The frequency with which cultural objects are transported around the world in the twenty-first century has often reduced scholarly discussions of repatriation to deceptively straightforward economic and scientific rationales.[5] This neglects the intellectual complexity, emotional resonance, and specific socio-cultural circumstances that frame the broader public debate, resulting in partial knowledge and flawed conclusions about European, non-Western, and cross-cultural artifacts.[6] As in other places around the world, Indigenous communities in Australia and Namibia continue to advocate for the return of cultural objects. In May 2022, following years of advocacy from communities in Namibia, the Ethnological Museum in Berlin returned twenty-three objects. Largely plundered during the era of German colonization (1884–1919), this group of jewelry, tools, and other fashion pieces were selected by a group of Namibian experts for their aesthetic, cultural, and historical significance. Although the return was originally structured as a long-term loan, it became a permanent repatriation three years later. By 2024 the tensions between the Namibian artists, museum and repatriation professionals from both continents seemed ossified and unwavering.[7] In retrospect, the strain of past expectations could be traced to the disciplinary differences between museology and artistic practice, between ways of organizing in Germany and Namibia, and to differing expectations of artists in the commissioning process and of museums as hosts. Beyond the objects themselves, this repatriation also involves capacity building in the National Museum of Namibia. The goal is not only to research the provenance of these objects and conserve them from a Namibian perspective, but also to illuminate their contemporary relevance to artists and students and to facilitate broader community access.

Around the same time in 2022, the Warnindilyakwa in Australia identified a large collection of Dadikwakwa-kwa — commonly translated as shell dolls — held by Manchester Museum. These objects were kept in the museum as artifacts to be viewed, not used, reflecting a set of cultural practices far removed from those of the Warnindilyakwa. In September 2023, following a campaign by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Return of Cultural Heritage program, which proactively approaches institutions abroad with repatriation claims and supports the process, Manchester Museum returned 174 cultural heritage items to the Anindilyakwa community. These items had been given to the museum by the anthropologist Peter Worsley in the 1950s. As part of the repatriation process, members of the Anindilyakwa community produced and donated twelve Dadikwakwa-kwa to the museum, with the specification that children must be allowed to play with the objects once a year — a stipulation that unsettles conventional practices of conservation and curation.

The installation, and the wider research project from which it emerges (www.repatriates.org), explores methods that move beyond the forms that identity politics have taken in recent decades. The confrontational mode of decolonial discourse has been necessary to demand the repatriation of objects and to assert the positions and rights of Indigenous groups. Yet, as the exhibited artists demonstrate, its mode of operation can also be re-envisioned. Rather than concentrating on institutions, a group of predominately women artists has decided to teach their cultural histories by working with materials that were always in use — employing the dolls and creating games made to convey stories to the young. This relationship is shaped by women who have a knowledge of traditional culture that teaches healthy relationships to nature and the body, and fosters respectful practices of naming and growing. Thereby the space of repatriation we inhabited in Windhoek and Berlin, Manchester and Umbakumba, in politically fraught territories, was brought to a scale in which the vital work of raising healthy future generations within caring communities could be developed. This is the major achievement of the collective, echoing the activist saying that “organizing is a way of loving each other.”[8]

The organizing that underpinned this project was enlivened by the hope that collaboration, intimacy, and trust could emerge through the creative process. Working together meant finding ways to overcome well-founded misgivings about outside power and influence. Unsurprisingly, suspicion is often expressed by individuals and communities living in places where unequal power relations have tyrannized less privileged groups. Overcoming it took time, allowing for intensive discussions, for finding common ground and negotiating disagreements. The aim was not to smooth over dissenting views but to navigate among them, to maintain points of friction while channeling them toward more fruitful ends. These ideas are expanded in the Haikili’s chapter in this book, in which they stress that conflicting views between community members must be confronted and worked through if artistic and cultural practice is to claim to be collaborative. In a similar way, preparation for this exhibition involved working closely with artists as they carried out this project, rather than adopting the more distant position of the anthropologist or traditional curator.

Previous pages:

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, stills of the Ocean-Lady and Bush-Lady scene in the making of *From My Mother's Country*, 35mm, 2026.

Green turtle at Amjakikba Beach, Dalumba Bay, 2023. Photo: Britten Andrews.

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, forraging in mangroves on the way back to Umbakumba from Dingala.

Next page: Repatriates Collective, *From My Mother's Country*, 2026. Installation view, Ocean Space, Venice. Commissioned and produced by TBA21–Academy. Photo: Jacopo Salvi.

Tide of Returns opens a space in which relations — both material and social — can come together. The sandstone of Venice surrounds them, as if the sand of the dunes on which they were born has crystallized into architecture. Manganese dyes mirror the rough red brickwork of the exterior walls of the Church of San Lorenzo, while the polychromatic ochre and powdery pink sands echo the polyphony of calls and replies from the dolls.

What stories are they telling?

Narrating an exchange between two of them in the film, Bush-Lady and Ocean-Lady, Noeleen observes them "listening to the sound of the sea and the wind." Bush-Lady mentions that the "red sand is telling me a story for the future for our children," but, before she can go on with Ocean-Lady, she must "wait for these people," for us, to listen, to come along on the journey.

1 Everywhen was thematized by Indigenous Australian art historian Stephen Gilchrist in his exhibition *Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia* (2016) at Harvard Art Museums. "Groote time" was explained by Britten Andrews to the author on Groote Eylandt in March 2025.

2 As in the case of the work from Australia, the word *doll* is inadequate to capture the nature of these miniature figures, which are often self-portraits and are always treated as people rather than things. They have different names, each with its own inflection, in various languages. The design scholars Loini Iizyenda and Maria A. N. Caley discuss the Otjiherero terms *Ounona* and *Ozombopi* for ritual and play dolls in the Namibian context. In Contemporary Art and Repatriation, Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Jessyca Hutchens, Verena Melagarejo Weinandt (eds), "Engaging Repatriated Namibian 'Dolls': Creative Responses from Namibian Artists," *Art Journal*, forthcoming.

3 Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics*, trans. Drew S. Burk (Paris: Ministère de la Culture, 2018), 17, www.about-africa.de/images/sonstiges/2018/sarr_savoy_en.pdf.

4 German Museums Association, *Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts* (German Museums Association, February 2021); Jisgang Nika Collison, Sdaahl K'awaas Lucy Bell, and Lou-ann Neel, *Indigenous Repatriation Handbook* (Victoria: Royal BC Museum, 2019); Honor Keeler, ed., *A Guide to International Repatriation: Starting an Initiative in Your Community* (Association on American Indian Affairs, 2014); International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, *United Republic of Tanzania: Country Technical Note on Indigenous Peoples' Issues* (2012); Neil G. W. Curtis and Steph C. Scholten, "Repatriation from Scottish Museums: A Short Report," *Santander Art and Culture Law Review*, no. 2 (2022): 427–42; Arts Council England and Institute of Art & Law, *Restitution and Repatriation: A Practical Guide for Museums in England* (2023); Iain G. Johnston, Tamarind Meara, Lyndall Ley, Christopher Simpson, Jason Lyons, Rose Rutherford, and Diana Quadri, "The AIATSIS Return of Cultural Heritage Project: Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Material Held Overseas and the Initial Challenges to Repatriating Material to Custodians," *Museum Journal* 64, no. 4 (2021): 653–74; UNESCO Round Table, *New Forms of Agreement and Cooperation in the Field of Return and Restitution of Cultural Property* (June 27, 2023).

5 James Cuno, ed., *Whose Culture? The Promise of Museums and the Debate over Antiquities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, "To Feather the Shock: Extraction, Copying and Rebreeding of Ethnographic Materials for Museum Collections," in *Arts and Extractivism in the Global Present*, ed. Liliana Gómez and Alexander Brust (Routledge, 2026).

6 Nicholas Thomas, *The Return of Curiosity: What Museums Are Good for in the 21st Century* (Chicago: Reaktion, 2016); Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, ed., *The Importance of Being Anachronistic: Contemporary Aboriginal Art and Museum Reparations* (Naarm/Melbourne: Discipline, 2016).

7 This was continued in the public forum at the Internationales Frauen Film Fest Dortmund+Köln. Sophie Haikali, Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Yasemin Şamdereli, and Helga Binder, "Discussion: Co-Productions | Best Practice," April 5, 2025, https://frauenfilmfest.com/event/diskussion-co-produktionen-refraiming-und-best-practice/.

8 Stephen Zachs, personal correspondence from Mexico City, 2025.

Between Tides: Gatherings on Return

We gather the more-than-living amongst us. Dadikwakwa-kwa carry the story of the Warnindilyakwa people to Venice. Namibian dolls hold the space un-faced so that spirit moves through self, community, and ancestry. In solidarity with objects as collective biographies, we listen to powerful nonhuman bodies, as sacred vessels of memory that refuse to lie dormant in vitrines or in the cold recesses of museum storage. For between these tides of reason they sing together of waves of migration and exile. What follows are reflections written in preparation for *Between Tides: Gatherings on Return*, a public program within the context of the exhibition *Tide of Returns*. Convened at Ocean Space in Venice, the gatherings bring situated Indigenous and transversal practices of return to reflect on Italy, with a method of comparative history that the Repatriates project has developed further as the following chapters in this book unfold.

The contributors — Elders, artists, historians, anthropologists, and cultural workers — speak from within return as living, ceremonial and polyphonic practice: from the inheritance of ancestral languages of craft, to the calling into being of new networks of circulation, entering the slow institutional labor of tending to collections whose gaps and silences are as telling as what remains. Repatriation here is understood not as a transaction to be concluded but as an unfolding and unpredictable process of justice, healing, and translation that reweaves time, place and cosmologies of life.

The first section opens with statements by artists Noeleen Lalara and Laimi Kokololo whose making of dolls in Australia and Namibia respectively sets the tone in this polyphonic chapter as it did in the exhibition itself. Zimbabwean curator Njabulo Chipangura reflects on a conversation that we have been having for some years about African doll making practices, and on his best practice models developed at Manchester Museum during his experience of repatriating the Dadikwakwa-kwa from there back to Groote Eylandt. Jesse Weaver Shipley, collaborator and advisor of Repatriates, draws a historical and theoretical arc around the agency of objects displaced from the African continent. The second section turns to the Italian context, framed by the anthropologist Manuela Ciotti and grounded in critical examples by Rosa Anna di Lella and Francesca Tarocco — together wayfinding through tides of return that are still nascent and deeply fraught.

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Wietske Maas

Eningilukwakwa / The Ephemerality of Movement

Noeleen Lalara

Going to England to bring the Dadikwakwa-kwa back home was a very emotional and sad day for me but at the same I was very proud as a Warnindilyakwa woman to bring them back home for my community. I was not doing it for myself. I was doing it for my people.

The shell dolls have meanings and stories in them about us, the Warnindilyakwa people. By sending the new ones to Venice we want to show the world where they have come from, to teach the world about us. The old ones coming back from Manchester belong here. They are safe now, back at home, but now it is the new ones' turn to travel, to let the world know. The new ones continue to carry on our culture, our stories, our everything. It is carrying on, still making it alive for our future.

For me it has been a pleasure working with all the ladies from Umbakumba and Angurugu, working together as one yarnumamalya (one people). As an Arts and Cultural leader I am so proud of everyone for keeping it alive. It is not for us, it is for community and future, and other cultures can see how we do it. We cannot get rid of the Dadikwakwa-kwa; they are with us forever.

The Unseen Face of Inheritance

Laimi Kokololo

This collection of traditional dolls, both self-portraits and imagined visions of future womanhood, is a profound conversation with the past, present, and anticipated future. It is a tribute to the enduring legacy of my late grandmother, who first gifted me the language of craft through beading and jewelry-making. The techniques woven into these figures are an inheritance, a living memory of our time together.

My grandmother's hands not only taught me how to create waist beads and necklaces, but also how to apply the formidable, gleaming weight of ouputu (iron beads) to my Odelela skirt (traditional attire). This heavy, beautiful embroidery became a central inspiration, signifying the enduring strength and beauty of our tradition and the weighty, cherished responsibilities of womanhood. Each doll serves as a vessel for these deep connections, celebrating the grace of culture and its beauty, and the profound appreciation of maternity. The materials and techniques used, the abstract beading and the careful stitching, celebrate memories. They are a physical acknowledgment of where I came from and the cultural inheritance I carry forward.

The faces of the dolls remain intentionally unworked, a visual embodiment of the idiom, "Shekupe pamba tambula, Kalunga kaNangobe

Shambekela nomaoko ameshe," which means, "What God gives you, take and appreciate with both hands." By omitting the features, I shift the focus from a defined individual persona to the spirit, the materials, and the inherited tradition itself. The un-faced dolls compel the viewer to look beyond the superficial and appreciate the value of one's journey, the richness of one's culture, and the unspoken beauty of accepting one's life and legacy as divine. The dolls, therefore, are not merely a display of craft. They physically embody my inheritance as layered, beaded, and celebrated appreciations of self and ancestry.

Circulation: Excess, Overflow, and Reversal

Jesse Weaver Shipley

Spiritual practitioners debate what happens when nonhuman bodies of power are stolen, lost, or hidden. If spiritual force remains in them, it does not stay dormant. Objects retain power invested in them, but it is transformed by new contexts and, in turn, reshapes these worlds. If spirits and materials are forced to travel, in response they flood the aesthetic universe with multivocal, excessive signs that patiently, over time rechart and reverse the channels of circulation that brought them into new worlds and institutions.

Chinua Achebe once told me that African masks and aesthetic materials are invested in their making and performance with profound spiritual and ancestral force. While some thought that when they are stolen and encased in European institutions, their spiritual force is confined and frozen, Achebe argued that their power did not simply inhere in their material form. Trafficked non-Western objects confined in European collections were not waiting to be freed but rather took creative initiative in their new contexts to take on new meanings and new significances. They do not maintain their old meanings nor are they rendered mundane inanimates. Stolen, decontextualized objects reimagine themselves as circulating spirits, lost souls, and angry but wise travelers. Their power focused on understanding the new worlds where they were captives.

Meanwhile the original spiritual and aesthetic contexts on the African continent were not depleted of power by the European theft of powerful objects. Through the long-term imperial project, Africa became, in the European imagination, a space of extraction. People and materials taken seemed to promise pure value for use and require nothing in return. Bodies of enslaved laborers, gold, timber, object d'art. But forms of extraction are, in fact, modes of exchange that, contrary to European understanding, all entail a debt. Collectors did not steal the spiritual powers when they stole the objects. African worlds were not frozen in time. Rather, the loss provided African artists and spiritual experts opportunities to reimagine new performances and remake new objects of power. With theft, then, power multiplies. It proliferates, reinvested into new materials and performances in contexts across Africa and Europe that spin a growing web of interconnection.

Art objects in European museums patiently study how to reverse circulatory flows. They demand a complex set of spiritual, aesthetic, and economic values. But not in a straightforward exchange. Their semiotic excess overloads the institutions they enter; their patience and affective complexity short circuit the systems that claim them in the name of cultural preservation and artistic contemplation.

European art and ethnographic institutions had thought to silence and transform them. In 1970, young Ghanaian filmmaker Nii Kwate Owoo heard the persistent angry voices of captives confined in the basement of the British Museum. He listened. They told of being hidden in wooden crates and plastic. They asked him for help. He voiced their needs and tricked their captors in his guerrilla film *You Hide Me*, which revealed their struggle to the world.

When objects travel, they are forced to invent new performances forged in violence, loss, and history. These objects no longer belong. They are misapprehended in their new locales. In response, they compel semiotic excess and dissonance. They short-circuit networks and reverse flows. Objects in European museums reanimate themselves as spiritual custodians not of their original worlds but of vast realms of global circulation where they speak of rituals of restitution and new expansive forms of aesthetic and economic value. The power of these objects does not disappear, nor does it remain the same. Instead, it creates new aesthetic languages to match the networks in which they find themselves.

They speak familiar languages to those who can hear. Anticipating the migration of Africans to Europe, they talk to them of home, of Europe's violence and possibilities, of how to elude the epistemic-aesthetic logics meant to hold Africa and its diasporas in place. They call-into-being new networks of circulation and carve new paths of migration, return, and trade (in everything from fashion to e-waste to minerals). They provoke artists and curators to invent new performances and modes of circulation.

While some aesthetic works have returned from across European states and institutions that hold them, this process has been uneven. British, French, German, and Italian legacies vary in their modes of colonial rule and by extension in their decolonizing projects. Each colonial order has an internal logic reflected in its collecting and repatriation practices. If British returns of non-Western art reflect a pragmatic defensiveness and ongoing fetish for the non-Western, French returns are transactional exchanges relying on an unwavering belief in universal hierarchies of civilization and taste, and German returns manifest an excessively ordered

and displaced guilt, then nascent Italian returns refract a late, incomplete colonial project and thus an ambivalence to reconstituting new pathways.

Performances of museum contemplation and aesthetic transcendence create debts that accumulate and overflow into works seeking repatriation, and the art world more generally. With each visitor staring at masks in glass vitrines and each museum director hiding non-Western objects in dark basements, value is accrued that becomes so excessive it clogs old paths and carves new ones. As they seek new routes, powerful nonhuman objects know that the language of freedom is also a tool of confinement. And self-actualization is a form of dangerous control that orders desires for further mobility while exceeding any legible logic of circulation.

Beyond Aesthetics: A Biographical Reading of Dolls at the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences

Njabulo Chipangura

Inspired by the South African philosophy of *Ubuntu* — emphasizing connectedness (across people, collections, and time) — I propose a new curatorial framework: flipping the traditional primacy of the collector's narrative and legacy in conventional practice, and articulating a new, alternative provenance research methodology; one which centers the biographies of the people from whom the dolls were taken. Beyond aesthetics and artistic interpretations, African dolls were keepers of time with specific types used for various spiritual rites depending on the season. Dolls were also libraries that documented and encapsulated experiences communities would have gone through over time. In terms of the spiritual realm, dolls were used as active symbols of contrition and humility. Personal identities would remain hidden behind the dolls. Dolls were also used by medium spirits when they were evoking people to go to war. At the same time some of the dolls were taken into rituals where the very spirit being evoked was dressed up and embedded into the doll. In this way dolls were not just a piece of African artwork but rather they literally embodied living spirits. Dolls were a direct expression of the interaction between the physical and the spiritual.

There is a long history to how secret, sacred, and ritual dolls were collected from Africa during the colonial period and ordered according to regimes of Western knowledge that erased Indigenous communities' ways of knowing and doing. My work investigates the biographical meanings of dolls at the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences (ZMHS). ZMHS, formerly Queen Victoria Museum (QVM), opened in Salisbury (now Harare) in 1903. It was part of attempts by the white minority government in Rhodesia to maintain their imperial heritage and imprint their vision of modernity in the capital city Salisbury. ZMHS has developed into a general museum, mainly focusing on cultural histories as represented in its archaeological and ethnographic collections. The museum hosts the largest ethnographic collection in the country including the ritual dolls.

The collecting practices of African objects such as dolls that found their way into colonial museums such as ZMHS cannot be disassociated from colonial violence in its different supporting formats spanning from appropriations, looting, trophy hunting, grave robbing, punitive expeditions, salvage anthropology, pseudo donations and missionary activities. Such extractive circumstances rendered many of these objects vulnerable to erroneous provenance, absent biographies, and with real barriers in tracing to whom they belonged: materials are frequently recorded as originating from a community, a country, a region, or simply from 'Africa' as with the case with many of the objects at ZMHS. Ritual dolls were collected during the colonial period for scientific purposes, devoid of their meaning, and presented as part of the ethnographic gaze.[1] Subsequently, spiritual values associated with their uses were ignored upon collection. In their original context, these dolls were rich archives and reservoirs of knowledge beyond their aesthetic appeal. They were interwoven with cultural narratives; proverbs, songs and dances.[2]

Restituting Futures? Human and Nonhuman Worlds in Devastating Times

Manuela Ciotti

At a time of heightened imperialism and settler colonialism, the utter disregard for the rule of law brings re-appraisals of restitution debates into sharp relief. Firstly, the ongoing wanton destruction of life forms, heritage and material culture across many temporalities in countries affected by warfare leads to an increase in the value of objects from past colonial plunder that are safely stored in museums in the Global North. Secondly, such disregard annihilates the right to human and non-human proximity, which Ariella Azoulay posits as being at the core of restitution requests.[3] Thirdly, this disregard further undermines the fragile connection between past, present and future among communities, limiting the potential for rebuilding societies. Against this backdrop, I view the present moment as a time to think of restitution as a global constellation of interconnected instances and vectors, generating novel possibilities. As a case in point, the exhibition *Tide of Returns* offers affective approaches to restitution that extend beyond legal realms, redefining restitution as an embodied practice. Together with other claims around the world, this suggests that certain moral wrongs (such as the transatlantic slave trade) are irreparable, as is the destruction of objects and their forcible removal from their original contexts.[4]

As a historical node of human and non-human traffic, Italy has had cultural sites plundered, but also hosts collections from regions of the African continent that it brutally conquered, among others. Similarly, Italy has been a source of migration as well as a destination for immigration. Italian museums still house countless objects from former colonies. Tightening immigration policies, though, prevent migrants from living alongside objects representing their heritage in the very country that previously took them away from them. The separation of people from objects is also enforced through detention centers and normalized by deportation discourse.

The recursivity of empire and settler colonialism in the present era do not only point to "a world without civilians," but also a world where contexts ravaged by war are increasingly depleted of heritage and material culture.[5] Warfare, then, could impose a further burden: Authorities may use it as a justification for the continued sequestration of plundered objects in museums in the Global North. Thus, projects seeking restitution and reparation could aim to challenge the hierarchies that see such objects well preserved in museums vis-à-vis those that are considered expendable in warzones and interrupt the chain of violence that pushes migrants out of Italy and sutures together past and present forms of dehumanization.

Opacities: Curating From Within and Beyond a (Former) Colonial Collection

Rosa Anna Di Lella

The MUCIV — Museo delle Civiltà in Rome began working on the collections of the former Colonial Museum in 2017, when these were incorporated into the museum's institutional framework. Since then, a series of initiatives has been developed to engage critically with this complex and sensitive heritage — opening storage collections to researchers and external partners, progressively activating archival and catalogue information, and developing participatory practices alongside provenance research. These collections encompass objects, artworks, archives, photographs, and visual materials produced, collected, and classified within the apparatus of Italian colonialism, and subsequently integrated into the national museum system.
Within this wider framework, *Museum of Opacities*, an exhibition project currently in progress, represents one of the curatorial and research strategies through which the museum is exploring these legacies.[6] Rather than presenting collection materials as stable historical evidence, the project approaches them as historically stratified and epistemologically unstable assemblages. Many objects and documents are marked by incomplete documentation, institutional silences, and classificatory regimes that reflect the ideological frameworks of colonial governance.

The project employs opacities as a critical methodological tool — illuminating the limits of archival knowledge and the ongoing influence of colonial epistemologies in contemporary institutions. The plural notion of "opacities" signals the ways in which colonial heritage has been forgotten, concealed, fragmented, or rendered institutionally invisible in Italy. By highlighting gaps, contradictions, and discontinuities between the circumstances of collection, the histories of objects, and their subsequent musealisation, the project creates conditions for polyphonic engagement with colonial archives rather than a single authoritative narrative.

This takes shape, for instance, in participatory workshops developed during the residency of Wissal Houbabi, in dialogue with Afro-descendant communities in Rome, where everyday objects from the former Colonial Museum were reinterpreted and later presented in the installation *phonomuseum.rome*, re-situating them within domestic contexts and challenging their earlier propagandistic framing.
At the same time, the ongoing study of two paintings removed from the Ethiopian Parliament during the Italian occupation foregrounds the status of contested and displaced heritage, raising unresolved questions of ownership and restitution, and pointing to the need for shared interpretative frameworks with Ethiopian partners.

For me, as a curator working with these collections, the question of return is not only a matter of physical restitution but a lens through which to reconsider institutional practice. Engaging with these materials involves ongoing provenance research, collaborative enquiry, and a gradual reconfiguration of museum authority. By opening a space to curators, researchers, and the public — inclusive of diaspora communities and source communities — to collectively reflect on the ethical, historical, and epistemic implications of colonial collections and their future within contemporary museum practice.

Talanoa in Venice: Unfinished Dialogues

Francesca Tarocco

During the 59th Venice Biennale, NICHE Centre for Environmental Humanities at Ca' Foscari University partnered with *Talanoa Forum: Swimming Against the Tide*, an online and in person gathering organized alongside Yuki Kihara's exhibition *Paradise Camp* curated by Natalie King at the Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion.[7] Talanoa is a pan-Pacific word that describes a process of inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue. Using talanoa as a point of conceptual departure, we aimed to produce radically new approaches to small island ecologies, intersectionality, oceanhood, colonization, and collections. At the heart of the *Talanoa Forum* was a conversation

on Pacific and Indigenous communities' struggles for restitution and reparation. The removal of cultural artifacts, ancestral remains, and traditional knowledge from peoples of the Pacific Islands were and remain injustices. Communities' efforts to obtain rights to the safekeeping of objects were foregrounded in the Forum as acts that seek justice, healing, and decolonization, a set of demands that center both material returns and the restoration of dignity and sovereignty. The second half of the Talanoa Forum took place in the Netherlands and was developed in close partnership with curators Fanny Wonu Veys and Erna Lije from the National Museum of World Cultures in The Netherlands. Activities there included reviewing the Oceanic collections held at the Museum Volkenkunde and a panel discussion about the new permanent exhibition *Our Colonial Inheritance* (2022—ongoing) at what is now the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, which illustrates the enduring impact of colonization on objects and communities.

Examining where Pacific art could be found in Venice was part of the discussions leading up to the on-site meeting. The Museo di Storia Naturale di Venezia Giancarlo Ligabue (Natural History Museum of Venice Giancarlo Ligabue), as Veys notes, holds a significant collection assembled by businessman, paleontologist, and politician Giancarlo Ligabue (1931-2015).[8] It includes an Asmat soul canoe from New Guinea, which is on display in the 13th century Palazzo Fontego dei Turchi. That is but one example of material from the Pacific that is held in Venetian institutions, including the Peggy Guggenheim Museum. While the Natural History Museum was, problematically, not at all receptive to attempts by Kihara and me to see the objects together with artists and activists from the Pacific, which would have been a unique possibility for them to reflect on the colonial legacy of their collection, the Peggy Guggenheim Museum exhibited its nine Pacific artworks for the delegates of the Forum.[9]

Art played a crucial role in these discussions, with many participants using creative practice as a form of resistance and reclamation. Yuki Kihara's *Paradise Camp* exposed the absurdities of colonial representation and asserted Pasifika and Queer stories against the grain of such narratives. But what did it mean to stage these conversations in Venice — a city whose ollections hold colonial legacies that remain largely unacknowledged and unquestioned? Talanoa — as process, as ethic of dialogue — found Venice a partial listener. For restitutions and repatriations to truly take hold there, much more work remains — led by artists like Kihara, whose practice offers ways to visualize loss, assert presence, and imagine futures beyond colonial erasure.



Repatriates Collective, *From My Mother's Country*, 2026. Installation view, Ocean Space, Venice. Commissioned and produced by TBA21—Academy. Photo: Jacopo Salvi.

1 Njabulo Chipangura, "Co-curation and New Museology in Reorganizing the Beit Gallery at the Mutare Museum, Eastern Zimbabwe," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 63, no. 3 (2020): 431—46; Jesmael Mataga, Farai Mudododzi Chabata, and Charity Nyathi, "Sepulchered objects and their decolonial futures in African Museums: The 'Robert Edward Codrington Collection' at the Zimbabwe Natural History Museum," *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals* 18, no. 1 (2022): 1—17.
2 Njabulo Chipangura and Patricia Chipangura, "Community museums and rethink the colonial frame of national museums in Zimbabwe," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 35, no. 1 (2020): 36—56.
3 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism.* London: Verso, 2019.
4 David Scott, *Irreparable Evil: An Essay in Moral and Reparatory History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2024.
5 Elyse Semerdjian, "A World Without Civilians," *Journal of Genocide Research* 28, no. 1 (2026): 32—37.
6 *Museum of Opacities: Documenting the Complexity of the Colonial Past, Researching It in the Present, Sharing It for the Future*, MUCIV — Museo delle Civiltà, Rome, June 6, 2023—ongoing, https://www.museodellecivilta.it/en/riallestimenti/museum-of-opacity-documenting-the-complexity-of-the-colonial-past-researching-it-in-the-present-sharing-it-for-the-future/.
7 The three-day in-person talanoa in Venice was developed by Yuki Kihara in close partnership with Francesca Tarocco and Cristina Baldacci (NICHE Centre for Environmental Humanities, Ca' Foscari University) and Natalie King, October 11—13, 2022.
8 Fanny Wonu Veys, "Peggy Guggenheim and the Pacific," *Lagoonscapes: The Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2023): 306.
9 These and related issues were investigated in greater detail in "Swimming Against the Tide," a special issue of *Lagoonscapes*. See Natalie King and Francesca Tarocco (eds.), *Lagoonscapes* 3, no. 2 (2023): 177—333.

The Stories Continue and the Films Remain

Britten Andrews

The word ngeniyerriya expresses an insatiable nostalgia felt by the Anindilyakwa people — for the past, memory, and their homelands. As Traditional Owners of the Groote Archipelago, their lives have changed greatly over the past hundred years, from traditional hunting and gathering to a way of life shaped by outside influences and modernity. It is within the feeling of ngeniyerriya that memories are held, and where the knowledge and existence of the people lie. We look toward this "long time ago," working to document and keep stories alive so that the passage of time does not stain them.

~

The gentle lapping of waves receded in constant rhythm upon the white sand where Umbakumba, a remote Indigenous community on Groote Eylandt, softly meets the sea. Postcard palm trees arranged themselves around the bay, stretching into the distance. We are on an island in the tropics of northern Australia.

The oldest lady in Umbakuba, Edith, sat in the warmth of the shade beneath a tin overhang. She cast her gaze across the bay, her bay. A place where fish occupy the deep and claws scuttle in the shallows. I, a filmmaker, had come to record a story, and I made tea, memories stirred in tea. I was with Edith's grandson, Albertson, a filmmaker himself; he brought Edith support and an Anindilyakwa audience to hear her words

Edith's life had witnessed the arrival of missionaries, mining, tinned food, and Toyotas. Memories transferred to Edith from her grandmother's time made her a treasure trove of atavistic knowledge — a living cultural continuum. She had a fondness for filming and could turn words into brilliance; the old lady was a gift to storytelling.

Dadikwakwa-kwa, or shell dolls, had been dormant for decades; some were in institutions, and surface-level details existed only in field notes. A repatriation of Dadikwakwa-kwa from a collection at Manchester Museum had inspired conversations, and some Anindilyakwa artists began creating contemporary versions. There were minute details around their use, and we had been directed, as usual, to see the old lady Edith to get the full story of the Dadikwakwa-kwa.

The consumption of tea suggested readiness, and I wondered what may unfold. I nodded to begin, and Edith busily smoothed a patch of sand in front of her. From a small woven bag she drew the Dadikwakwa-kwa, one by one, assigning name and extending kinship to







the dolls. It was a lesson in family structure, a genealogical chart, the topography of sand.

Men were simple sticks, unadorned, upright. The women, by contrast, were detailed, painted with motifs in ochre, wearing cloth or woven fibers. The children sat in clusters, watched over by mothers and aunties. The scenes mirrored life; they were drawn from lived experience, camp life, social structures, long journeys. Narrative interwoven with cultural customs and compunction. Each figure was a mnemonic, etched in her memory from when she was a young girl, on this beach, arakba-wiya, a long time ago. We could see she was enjoying herself. When the stories ended, Edith put the Dadikwakwa-kwa to sleep and smiled.

The dolls were emblems of the memory of her grandmother, a deep connection to her stories told with sand and shell more than seventy years ago. The bond with the Dadikwakwa-kwa was so significant that Edith buried her childhood dolls' garments, gifts from her grandmother, alongside her grandmother when she passed away. It was a climactic revelation, unearthed during recording. The old lady had "brought moonlight into the chamber" in a storytelling sense, illuminating the influence the Dadikwakwa-kwa had on her and linking the memento in cloth form with the life of her grandmother.

Edith had breathed life and meaning into the Dadikwakwa-kwa, sparking a global resurgence of the practice. The film we made, *Dadikwakwa-kwa-Alawudawarra* (2023), inspired a new generation of artists to create and reimagine their Dadikwakwa-kwa. As they arrived on the tide lines, they were hand-picked, painted, clothed, and carried by granddaughters, laying new stories in the sand.

Now they travel, like the shells they once were, carried on tides across the country and the world. People are captivated by their meaning, by their life. Anindilyakwa women are proud to share their culture in workshops, galleries, and museums. Edith's film remains a guide; the feelings that day were passed on.

Films like these, capturing knowledge with lasting impact, lie at the heart of what we do. I have worked with the Anindilyakwa people for six years in a cultural space guided by their desire to record and preserve heritage. It is a media-culture program, offering elders and knowledge holders a platform and giving Anindilyakwa filmmakers the chance to express themselves through the moving image.

The small team of Anindilyakwa film workers is central to the responsibility of documenting culture. They provide oversight and guidance in our daily work. Directors like Albertson, Edith's grandson, along with translators and editors, shape the language and direction of each project. They act both as filmmakers and as audience, ensuring that culturally significant moments are recorded with care.

We film in the Anindilyakwa language as much as possible. The language holds knowledge and comes from the land. It is a world-giver for the Anindilyakwa people, and like all Indigenous languages, it is at risk. Contributing to a growing body of work in the traditional tongue is vital to its preservation.

Anindilyakwa stories can follow different structures, and my approach to cultural documentation is to record stories the way they are told.

Connection to land is embedded in introductions; kinship announcements come next. The details must remain, as the viewer needs them to place themselves in relation to the orator, to be assured by their link, their belonging to the story. These stories often contain circular elements; they repeat, and through repetition, they emphasize.

Creation stories, known as Dreamtime stories, are nebulous, leaping through time and place, rarely following a linear structure. Their ambiguity is deliberate; all is not revealed. They are an invitation to interpret. These stories work best as whole forms, not as raw footage to be cut, but as complete expressions. Editing them can interrupt or alter important details, so I leave them whole, as if the viewer were present, listening to the orator.

It is delicate work, the world we work in. Culture is a spiritual connection, deeply personal. The screen is flat, and the camera is an outsider, unforgiving. I am always conscious of the presence of the camera, of how it can alter the mood or affect a moment. I withdraw if necessary; the camera can always be put away. Some experiences are best lived off camera. Some stories never make it to tape, and there is weight in experiences lived off camera.

The acceptance of our work is evident in our offices, living spaces of overlapping creativity, ideas, and access. Films flow across dilatory waves through Bluetooth, we fill USBs that fill televisions with films, and the internet carries our work further still. Our films are aired in classrooms, enriching lesson plans with the local language and the knowledge of ancestors. The students are engaged, and the classrooms open to the environs they inhabit.

Time is ethereal, and stories that might otherwise disappear into it are caught and preserved. The older generation grows older, and with them, knowledge risks being lost. There is urgency in this work. This realization of a life nearing its end is heartfelt, explained to us with clarity and care by the elders. We record and house these words for descendants, digital keepsakes entrusted to the responsibility of the archives. A place that Anindilyakwa people present and future can watch and recognize themselves in.

~

I would always say a slow goodbye to Edith with an extended gaze, never knowing which farewell might be our last.







She would look at me and say:

"Come back when you need more stories."

And then, one day, she left this earth.

At her funeral, Edith's family invited me to honor her filmic work with a eulogy. I named the countries where her stories had traveled, to film festivals and museums around the world, and thanked her for the time we shared. Understanding the reach and significance of her work, her family granted a rare permission: for her image and voice to remain in her films during the mourning period. This was an extraordinary gesture in Aboriginal protocol. For Anindilyakwa people and a global audience, her stories would continue to be told.

~

These days, as I sit with the old ladies, slightly younger old ladies than Edith, they chat about when they were young and the Dadikwakwa-kwa they are working on. As Dolly Parton plays in the background, one of the ladies turns to me and says:

"That old lady Edith had a story about the Dadikwakwa-kwa."

I nod, waiting for what might come next.

"It's on YouTube," she says. I smile.

Ediths words nourish the landscape, and I still feel them in places we had been together. Now other stories continue, and the films remain.

Previous pages: Edith Mamarika, film stills by Britten Andrew.

Britten Andrews, *Noeleen Lalara unwrapping and smoking the repatriated*, Manchester, September 2023.



History of the Dadikwakwa-kwa Shell Dolls and the Warnindilyakwa People

Tamara Newton

The cultures of First Peoples in Australia date back approximately 75,000 years, making them some of the oldest continuously in existence today. The Warnindilyakwa people have called Groote Eylandt their home for over 8,000 years. The enduring relationship with land, seas, cosmology, people, flora and fauna, ancestors, community, materials and memory are all an interconnected whole.[1] This foundation ensures that, even in the face of disruptions, memories and stories endure, continuing to speak and guide through materials from land and sea, and always returning to Country.

Dadikwakwa-kwa (shell dolls) are vital to forging and continuing these cultural connections, illustrating the complex interplay of tradition, memory, and family relationships. In this exhibition, the Dadikwakwa-kwa are standing, sitting and lying in sand dunes. The shells are formed by mollusks and painted with pigments sourced from Groote Eylandt quarries, dressed in hand-woven silk dyed with native plants, and decorated with native bush string. Each element — from the sourcing of materials to the dolls' creative use, intergenerational teaching, strengthening of relationships, Ancestral wisdom, and their eventual return to Country — illustrates the harmony between the Dadikwakwa-kwa, the Anindilyakwa people, and Country.

Repatriation and Revitalization

Europeans have been aware of Groote Eylandt's existence since 1623. The Warnindilyakwa community knew about the influx of white Australians in the Gulf region between 1879 and 1916 but were not directly affected until the 1920s. In 1921, the Eylandt's isolation and independence ended with the arrival of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) when the first mission-station opened.[2] The CMS authorities intended to assimilate the Warnindilyakwa people into "English-speaking citizens of the Commonwealth of Australia" through training in agriculture, carpentry and domestic work. In the mid-1930s, children were placed into sex-segregated dormitories, attended schools forced to attend church and learn English.[3]

English sociologist Peter Worsley, accompanied by his wife Sheila, conducted doctoral research focusing on the kinship system and culture of the Anindilyakwa community between 1951–52.[4] His observations included the relationship between the Warnindilyakwa community and the white missionaries, with particular attention to



instances of mistreatment towards the community. Specific sources of conflict involved the separation of children from their parents, interference with marriage customs and burial practices, which contributed to the community recognizing they were not being afforded the respect and autonomy due to all peoples with rights and the capacity to govern their own affairs. Historically an independent and self-sufficient community, the CMS enforced a system whereby the Warnindilyakwa people became dependent on external assistance, needing to request support for basic needs, and told to follow directives rather than make decisions or assume responsibilities for their own lives.[5] Worsley documented the decline of traditional practices and ways of life, noting the increasing disconnect between older and younger generations concerning cultural customs, and observing a waning enthusiasm for traditional arts and crafts, including the practice of making Dadikwakwa-kwa, which declined after the 1950s.[6] Cultural erosion was compounded by the lack of practice of these skills among the youth, contributing to a deterioration of Warnindilyakwa cultural heritage as a result of the CMS's presence and interference on Groote Eylandt. The situation further worsened after the abundant manganese deposits on Groote Eylandt came to the attention of white Australians, who initiated mining operations from the mid-1960s, leading to an increased influx of settlers.[7]

During his time on Groote, Worsley wrote about the toys being made within the community, his primary focus being those made by fathers for sons. In his observations, his did not consider Dadikwakwa-kwa to carry any special symbolic or ceremonial significance; he reported that only male dolls were noted by Anindilyakwa interlocuters, with reference to girls' dolls being vague

Peter Worsley, *Playing in the sand*, 1952, Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. Accession number: 2009.10.110.

Dadikwakwa-kwa (shell dolls). Photo: © Michael Pollard, Manchester Museum, 2022.

and simply “said to exist’, which appeared consistent with the broader context of Anindilyakwa culture.[8] It is possible that Worsley, as a man, was not permitted access to the cultural knowledge concerning the importance or creation of Dadikwakwa-kwa. Alternatively, his interpretation might have been influenced by a preconceived bias of his own. Either way, it is evident from the stories told by Senior Women, such as Edith Mamarika, Elizabeth Mamarika, Millie Mamarika, Maureen Bara, Jennie Barabara, Selena Maminyamanja and Noeleen Lalara, that Worsley’s conclusion of Dadikwakwa-kwa lacking special significance was incorrect.[9] During his fieldwork, he collected and traded various Anindilyakwa belongings. As well as painted Dadikwakwa-kwa, he took possession of enungkuwa (spears), ajamurnda (bark baskets), and errumungkwa (woven armbands), which he later brought to England. In 1983, Worsley donated these belongings to Manchester Museum, England. Unfortunately, after being stored in Worsley’s damp cellar for over thirty-one years, some of the materials were destroyed due to mould.[10]

From 2020 to 2023, members of the Return of Cultural Heritage (RoCH) project (part of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, funded by the Australian Government) engaged with Anindilyakwa leaders and Manchester Museum, England, regarding the Anindilyakwa collections held in Manchester. In September 2022, Manchester Museum curatorial staff and members of the RoCH project had consultations on Country with the Anindilyakwa community. In September 2023, a delegation of three Anindilyakwa representatives, Senior Elder Noeleen Lalara, and Emerging Leaders Amethea Mamarika and Maicie Lalara, travelled to Manchester to receive the formal return of 174 Anindilyakwa belongings from Manchester Museum’s Worsley collection.

Senior Warnindilyakwa woman, Edith Mamarika, also known as Old Lady Edith (a term of respect) expressed difficulty in understanding how these belongings came to be so far from Country. Of particular interest were the Dadikwakwa-kwa. Seeing images of the shell dolls “clicked” and evoked vivid memories in the senior women about traditional practices and the Old People.[11] Only a few Elder women recall making Dadikwakwa-kwa, but they were eager to revitalize them and share their stories. After hearing these stories from the older women about their childhood experiences with Dadikwakwa-kwa, the women of Anindilyakwa Arts — under the leadership of Senior Artist and Lead Art and Culture Officer Noeleen Lalara; Anindilyakwa Arts Art and Culture Officer, Artist and Emerging Leader Maicie Lalara; and Anindilyakwa Art Centre Manager Samantha Moody — initiated a project to revitalize the cultural tradition of finding and decorating shell dolls, so they went to Eight Mile beach to collect shells.[12] Even the act of finding shells is connected with past teachings as Selena Maminyamanja was shown by her mother how to dig for venus shells.[13]

Materials and Making

Crafting Dadikwakwa-kwa is a meticulous practice that reflects thousands of years of accumulated knowledge and skill. Each shell doll is an intricate assemblage of natural materials sourced from Country.

The journey of each Dadikwakwa-kwa begins with the collection of shells found throughout Groote Eylandt, coming from marine life that has thrived in the ocean surrounding the archipelago for millennia. As Noeleen Lalara explains, the shells originate from the deep blue sea. During high tide, if the shells do not like it, they float and walk out of the sea to land on the dry sand. They travel long distances along songlines to share stories, communicate, and sing across land, seas, or rivers. After singing, they return to the beach, bury themselves in the sand, and rest, emerging again at sunrise. Once enough shells were collected for everyone to share and enjoy, the women and girls began decorating.[14]

During the 2022 on Country consultations, some of these methods were explained by Milli Mamarika and Jennie Barabara who shared their memories of playing with Dadikwakwa-kwa at the old Umbakumba camp, reminiscing about times spent on the beach with dolls draped in fabric to represent clothing.[15] The fabrics used were remnants from settlement stores, selected and decorated by fathers for their daughters, featuring designs of Anindilyakwa culture.[16] Edith Mamarika also mentioned that her father, Minimini, would paint the shells using pigments made from local quarries, processed by Anindilyakwa men. There are strict protocols governing art practices among men and women on Groote Eylandt; traditionally, men painted on bark and other objects, whilst women focused on fiber arts, such as weaving with pandanus.[17] In contemporary practice, the men continue to produce the paints in the Men’s shed, a male-only space where Anindilyakwa men create cultural objects, including paintings.[18] Women have taken on the painting of Dadikwakwa-kwa, encouraging Anindilyakwa women and girls to connect with their cultural heritage and Country whilst respecting traditional protocols.[19]

Anindilyakwa women and girls craft their own bush-dyed cloth and silk, which they sell, exhibit, and use to decorate their Dadikwakwa-kwa. Native plants are harvested from the surrounding area to produce colorful dyes used on all the silks. Each piece of silk is dyed using plants that naturally grow on the Eylandt and processed in rusted pots, representing everyday elements of community life. The knowledge of which plants to use, how to extract their colors through boiling, and the methods for applying them to silk to create beautiful patterns is a time-honored tradition among the Anindilyakwa women. Art consultant Lorna Martin engaged Darwin artist Aly de Groote, known for developing techniques in







Previous page: Britten Andrews, stills taken during the making of *From My Mother's Country*, March 15, 2025.

Aboriginal arts, ran workshops on Groote Eylandt to help expand bush-dying skills. The process of creating these dyes requires a deep relationship with Country, an awareness cultivated through guidance from Elders and close observation of natural forms.

Dadikwakwa-kwa embody all forces of nature: land, fire, air, water, stone, animal, and flora; all provided by Country. Mollusks create the shells in the ocean, which then carries these shells to the beaches. Clay, rock, and manganese are sourced from within the Earth, then heated, strained, and transformed into ochre paints by Anindilyakwa men. Manganese makes black, rock makes red and lilac, and clay makes white and yellow.[20] The colors of the paints portray Country, the same Country that has offered safety, security, and sustenance to the Anindilyakwa people for thousands of years. Plants, such as pandanus used for weaving around the Dadikwakwa-kwa, and natural dye colors extracted from bark, roots, leaves and berries, all start as tiny seeds that only grow with proper nurturing. The process of turning plants into dyes involves boiling them in water over the fire, and afterward, the silk is laid out in the sun's warm rays to dry. This careful choreography of materials, methods and transformations into Dadikwakwa-kwa is rooted in ancient wisdom that honors Country's gifts, ensuring that each Dadikwakwa-kwa is formed with the essence of nature, heritage, and portrays the forces of Country.

Dadikwakwa-kwa are also stark embodiments of human's dependency on nature. We all come from the Earth and will eventually return to her. We derive power, knowledge, and life from the Earth, and in turn we must show respect and gratitude. Whilst oceans, rocks, plants and animals do not need humans to survive, we cannot survive without them, and as the youngest beings, humans are the least wise.[21] The life of an animal or plant, or deposits of rock and minerals, are gifts that must not be taken for granted or they will no longer be offered. Selfishness and overconsumption threaten the Earth's capacity to give; respecting the Earth fosters an ethic of conservation and prevents exhaustion. Our society persistently exploits the natural environment, viewing Earth as a commodity to satisfy endless, trivial demands of industry.[22] Even parts of the environmental movement see the Earth as an object to preserve, rather than a living reality to respect.[23] Humans must support the planet's ongoing creative process by avoiding waste and helping to sustain life. When we harvest from the Earth, we engage in relationships with countless forms and dimensions. All the created/formed world is alive, sentient, and filled with power, including human beings, and it is because of keen respect and harmony with Country, the Earth and Ancestors that such communities as the Anindilyakwa have thrived continuously. When people feel the presence of life, Ancestors, or powers within nature's forms and forces, all aspects of the environment must be approached with reverence.[24] Together, these elements embody an ingrained

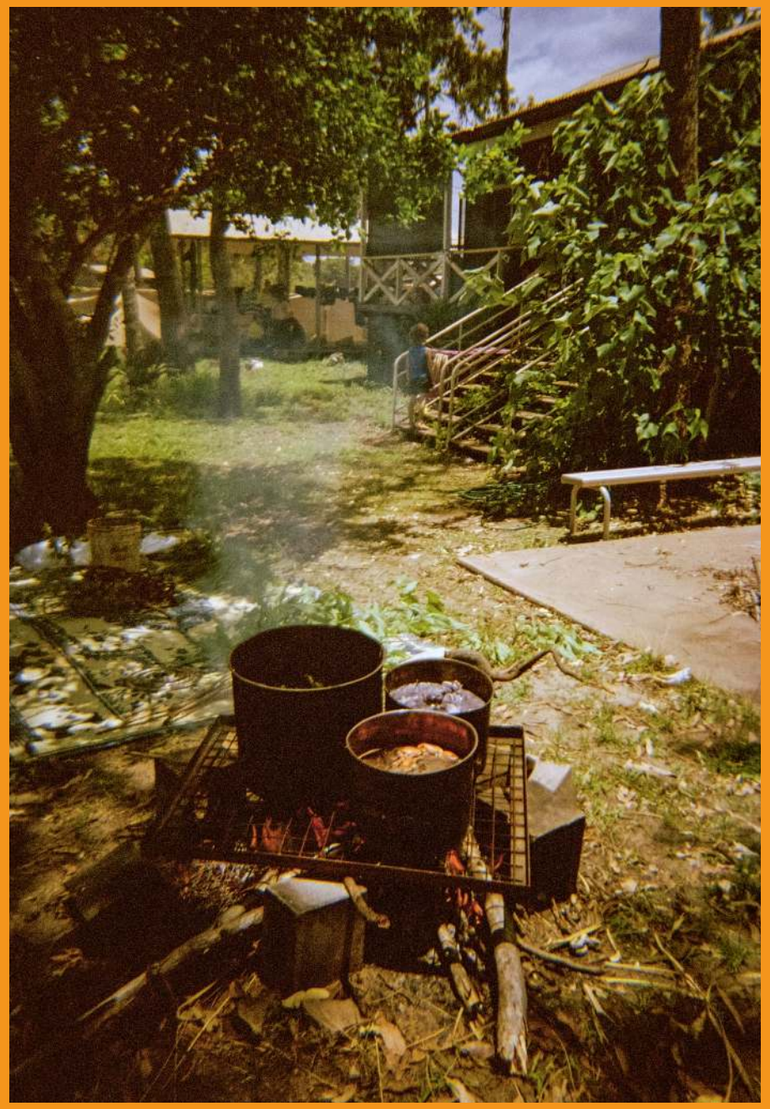
Next page: Bush Dye workshop at Anindilyakwa Arts Angurugu, led by Aly de Groot, 2025. Photo by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll.

relationship where each component contributes to a greater whole, reflecting the interconnectedness of existence that is manifested within Dadikwakwa-kwa.

Relations and Memory

Because Dadikwakwa-kwa are inextricably entwined with Country, they contain spirits. This is explained by Noeleen Lalara, the spirits of the shell dolls can communicate, and respond in ways resembling dreams; strong and meaningful. She encourages speaking to them, whether they are on a display wall, kept in a collection, or in an exhibition sand dune, because doing so fosters a connection. Trust and belief are essential; the Dadikwakwa-kwa hold and preserve knowledge, stories and meaning. When asked about their origins, they will reveal that they came from Groote Eylandt, as the spirits within them are present throughout the Eylandt and made with everything from Groote.[25] When Noeleen first crafted the fabric for the Dadikwakwa-kwa using bush dye and painted them, she later had a dream in which they sought to communicate with her. She responded within her dream, and upon waking, she visited the Anindilyakwa Arts Centre to create the Dadikwakwa-kwa she had envisioned: a man with four wives and children. The Dadikwakwa-kwa are vessels of history and cultural memory, carrying stories and significance, and ensuring that traditions are preserved and revitalized through art.

Dadikwakwa-kwa facilitate conversations about identity, belonging, and continuity, linking children to their Ancestors and reinforcing their roles as carriers of culture and knowledge. The shell dolls are used for educational and recreational purposes, embodying numerous stories and cultural significance. The enthusiasm to revitalize this tradition is not only for learning but for storytelling and remembrance. They were historically used for play, literacy, and numeracy development. Children would carry multiple Dadikwakwa-kwa representing their families, such as spouses and children, in a coolamon, imitating real-life relationships and family structures. They might make and play with twin shells to represent a mother who recently gave birth to twins, helping them learn about family roles and relationships through imitation.[26] The Dadikwakwa-kwa traditionally represent the 14 clans of Groote Eylandt and were used by parents and children to understand Anindilyakwa clan and kinship system. The dolls would exemplify a family unit: the largest doll being the father, the medium-sized doll being the mother, and smaller ones the children. In the past, a large shell could have many medium-sized shells and little shells, but not anymore. In this way, the Anindilyakwa kinship system could be played out with dolls and internalized by young girls. In a short video, Old Lady Edith demonstrated how she played with her dalyaurruwara (Dadikwakwa-kwa),



"Here's a man and a woman. They were sitting closely with each other and a[nother] woman. This woman had two kids," as she places two smaller shells next to the man and woman. "And she had one. And this one, she's an old lady, mother of these two ladies. These two young girls are visitors, they come and visit them every morning and sit with them. Husband for these two ladies, and their father too', Edith indicates two family units. She then arranged eight shells and a stick encircled around a turtle, "That's the turtle here in the middle, they're having lunch, turtle meat." Edith lays the shells flat on their back, one by one, and says "they're all asleep now, because they're full."[27]

When the Old Ladies were children, they would name their Dadikwakwa-kwa and take them along to play with friends, fostering cultural knowledge and understanding of family life. Now, the Old Ladies take their Dadikwakwa-kwa home and share them with their grandchildren, much like previous generations of parents and Elders. During an Anindilyakwa's Women's Business Camp, one young girl shared with Noeleen her experience of painting and decorating her own shells, which she named with an Aboriginal name belonging to a specific clan group. She expressed her intention to share these stories with her parents, cousins, sister, and brothers, which deeply pleased Noeleen.[28] The act of crafting and playing with Dadikwakwa-kwa creates bonds between generations, guiding younger members toward a deeper understanding of their roles within the cultural fabric of their community. Such experiences highlight the importance of intergenerational learning, wherein the wisdom of the past informs the present and ensures cultural continuity. These spiritual dimensions foster a holistic understanding that connects the present with the past, enabling children to perceive themselves as part of a larger continuum of existence.

Dadikwakwa-kwa embody the rich heritage of the Anindilyakwa community and serve as vital conduits of memory, identity, and tradition. As symbols of intergenerational knowledge, they carry the weight of Ancestral wisdom, facilitating connections between children and their unique heritage. Each shell doll is a testament to the enduring relationship between the Anindilyakwa people and Country, encapsulating the stories, laws, and spiritual significance that have shaped and sustained their existence for thousands of years. Through the revitalisation of Dadikwakwa-kwa, the community is actively engaging with their past, ensuring that the teachings and experiences of their Ancestors continue to resonate within the lives of younger generations. This emphasizes the interconnectedness of the community, reinforcing that culture is alive and needs to be nurtured. Moreover, the practice of crafting and playing with Dadikwakwa-kwa fosters familial bonds and collective identity, grounding the younger generation in their cultural roots. As Anindilyakwa children name and play with the shell dolls, they learn about familial structures and internalise broader principles of kinship, community roles, and cultural narratives. Such play becomes a tapestry of learning that integrates history, morality, and the significance of belonging to a wider citizenry.

Each Dadikwakwa-kwa is a living embodiment of an ancient connection to Country and identity. Each shell dolls tells a story, bridging past and present, anchoring the Anindilyakwa community in its rich heritage, and encouraging a harmonious relationship with the natural world, Country. By honoring these practices, the Anindilyakwa community affirm their resilience and the transformative potential of cultural continuity, inviting all to recognize and respect the wisdom that exists within tradition and Country.

1 "Anthropology," Anindilyakwa Land Council (ALC), accessed July 25, 2025, https://anindilyakwa.com.au/preserving-culture/anthropology/; "History," Anindilyakwa Land Council (ALC), accessed July 25, 2025, https://anindilyakwa.com.au/about/history/.

2 Peter Worsley, "The Changing Social Structure of the Wanindiljaugwa" (PhD Diss., Australian National University, 1954), 5, 18, 263; ALC, "History."

3 Laura Rademaker, "Language and Australian Aboriginal History Anindilyakwa and English on Groote Eylandt," *History Australia* 11, no. 2 (2016): 227-28; Worsley, "Changing Social Structure," 271.

4 AIATSIS, *MS 1857: Peter Worsley; fieldwork with Anindilyakwa people on Groote Eylandt,1952–1953,* Report, accessed June 20, 2025, https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/catalogue_resources/MS%201857_Worsley.pdf.

5 Worsley, "Changing Social Structure," 286–92, 340–41.

6 Ibid, 59, 66, 354.

7 David H. Turner, "An Aboriginal Outstation Movement in Arnhem Land and the Perils of Advocacy Anthropology," *Nomadic Peoples* 3, no. 1 (1999): 13.

8 Worsley, "Changing Social Structure," 148; Peter M. Worsley, "Material Symbols of Human Beings Among the Wanindiljuagwa," *Man* 54 (November 1954).

9 Interviews made by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll in the making of From My Mother's Country for Tide of Returns: "Noeleen Danjibana Lalara | Dadikwakwa-kwa," 3'34"., https://vimeo.com/1077014258/c28b8a5eb1; "Elizabeth Mamarika | Dadikwakwa-kwa," 1'9"., https://vimeo.com/1080432643/09233dc95b; "Maureen Bara | Dadikwakwa-kwa," 1'33"., https://vimeo.com/1077013494/b38802bdf1, posted by Anindilyakwa Media 20 April 2025; "Cultural Revitalisation: Dadikwakwa-kwa Project," Anindilyakwa Arts, accessed July 25, 2025, https://anindilyakwaarts.com.au/blogs/stories/cultural-revitalisation-dadikwakwa-kwa-project; Anindilyakwa Arts, "Women's Business Camp 2023," accessed November 19, 2025, 7'42"., https://anindilyakwaarts.com.au/blogs/stories/women-s-business-camp-2023; Anindilyakwa Media, "Dadikwakwa-kwa Alawudawarra (Doll Shell Stories) | Edith Mamarika," Vimeo online, posted October 12, 2023, 3'54"., https://vimeo.com/873591130; Anindilyakwa Media, "ALC Anthropology | RoCH | AIATSIS Summit 2023," Vimeo online, posted November 30, 2023, 27'48"., https://vimeo.com/889738067; Edith Mamarika quoted in AIATSIS, *Annual Report 2022-2023*, (2024), 65; Edith Mamarika quoted in AIATSIS, *Annual Report 2023-2024*, (2025), 32, 68; Edith Mamarika quoted in AIATSIS, *Return of Cultural Heritage Program 2020-2024*, (2025), 40-43; Anindilyakwa Land Council, "Stories from Groote: Edition 12," News Release, May 16, 2025; Britten Andrews, "Engku-Wa Angalya," Vimeo online: Anindilyakwa Media, posted July 20, 2025, 17'27"., https://vimeo.com/1089947122?from=outro-local

10 George Bankes, "Introduction to the Ethnology Collection at the Manchester Museum," *Museum Ethnographers Group*, no. 20 (February 1987): 79.

11 AIATSIS, Acquisition history of the Anindilyakwa material by the Manchester Museum, Draft Report, 2023.

12 AIATSIS, Acquisition history report, 17; Anindilyakwa Arts, "Cultural Revitalisation"; Moira Simpson details the revitalization of ceremonies after the repatriation of sacred medicine bundles from Glenbow Museum to Blackfoot ceremonialists in Moira G. Simpson, "Is there Space for Spirituality in the Contemporary Museum?," *Museums & Social Issues* 8, no. 1-2 (2013): 29, https://doi.org/10.1179/ 1559689313Z.0000000004; She discusses museum repatriation as a mechanism for cultural revitalization and health benefits in Moira Simpson, "Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation and Cultural Education," *Museum International* 61, no. 1–2 (2009), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0033.2009.01669.x; For further cases of revitalization, see Michelle Horwood, "Worlds Apart: Indigenous Re-engagement with Museum-held Heritage: A New Zealand – United Kingdom Case Study" (PhD Diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2015); Louise Tythacott and Kostas Arvanitis, *Museum and Restitution: New Practices, New Approaches* (Ashgate, 2014).

13 Interviews made by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll in the making of From My Mother's Country for Tide of Returns: "Selena Maminyamanja," Vimeo online, posted May 1, 2025, 1'2", https://vimeo.com/1080433408/05fd5333b5 Anindilyakwa Media.

14 Anindilyakwa Media, "Noeleen Danjibana Lalara"; Anindilyakwa Arts, "Business Camp"; Anindilyakwa Arts, "Cultural Revitalisation."

15 "Anindilyakwa Art Centre's Dadikwakwa-kwa (Doll Shells) 2023 entry finalist for the prestigious Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (NATSIAA)," AIATSIS, updated August 28, 2023, https://aiatsis.gov.au/whats-new/news/anindilyakwa-art-centres-dadikwakwa-kwa-doll-shells-2023-entry-finalist-prestigious; Recollections by Edith Mamarika, Jennie Barabara and Millie Mamarika in AIATSIS, *Annual Report 2023–2024*, 32.

16 AIATSIS, "Anindilyakwa Art Centre's Dadikwakwa-kwa"; Recollections by Edith Mamarika, Jennie Barabara, and Millie Mamarika in AIATSIS, *Annual Report 2023-2024*, 32.

17 "Bush Dyed Textiles from Anindilyakwa Art and Culture on Groote Island," Japingka Aboriginal Art, accessed August 7, 2024, https://japingkaaboriginalart.com/articles/bush-dyed-textiles-anindilyakwa-art-culture-groote-island/.

18 "Mens Shed," Anindilyakwa Land Council, accessed November 24, 2025, https://anindilyakwa.com.au/preserving-culture/mens-shed/.

19 Anindilyakwa Media, "Selena Maminyamanja"; Japingka Aboriginal Art, "Bush Dyed Textiles."

20 "Ochre paints made locally," Anindilyakwa Land Council, accessed November 24, 2025, https://anindilyakwa.com.au/orche-paints-made-locally/.

21 Sebastian C. (Bronco) LeBeau, II, "Reconstructing Lakota Ritual in the Landscape: The Identification and Typing System for Traditional Cultural Property Sites" (PhD Diss., Univ. of Minnesota, 2009), 83.

22 Joseph Epes Brown and Emily Cousins, "Relationship and Reciprocity: A Metaphysics of Nature," in *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions*, eds., Joseph Epes Brown and Emily Cousins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 85.

23 Brown and Cousins, "Relationship and Reciprocity," 85.

24 Ibid, 84.

25 AIATSIS, Acquisition history report, 17-18.

26 Ibid, 18.

27 Anindilyakwa Media, "Dadikwakwa-kwa Alawudawarra."

28 Anindilyakwa Arts, "Business Camp."

Ouma Sophia Herero and her community in Utuseb carrying the repatriated belongings back onto the land from which they were taken, May 2024, film stills, Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll.

These scenes range from north to south of Namibia in Utuseb, Swakopmund, Khorixas, Otjiwarongo, Gibeon, and Keetmanshoop. Following the community engagement designed by Golda !Ha-Eiros we travelled to many of the people who are connected to the belongings that were returned. As museum director Golda's process of community consultation included bringing photographs of the belongings back. She shared photographs of elders holding pieces of small paper on which they were printed. This reminded me of similar situations witnessed in Australia, where repatriations of photographs or rather of items through and in photographs, was also often a first step to giving communities access to their materials. It was a first sharing of the very existence of those things in the archives of some faraway museum. Often not aware that parts of their material culture has been preserved in a museum, the discussion around photographs of these is revelatory and exciting. High resolution made it possible to print them at human size and this enabled people to see the image as a group when we were in the communities. In the midst of our consultations and artistic experimentation they were laid out, carried, and putting them on textile also gave them a haptic quality akin to the forms of fashion, clothing and soft dolls that we were ultimately focussing on. The abstraction of contemporary art can in turn translate belongings back onto the land in a simple gesture of placement.













From Film to Ritual: Extending Dialogue Through Creative Practice

Kaudife Haikali and Sophie Haikali

Our work combines artistic interventions, filmmaking, and dialogue-based research to blur the boundaries between art, ritual, and social inquiry. Our contribution to the Repatriates project grows out of the film- and community-based dialogues we have developed over many years in Namibia through collaborations with artists, researchers, and cultural institutions, and, more recently, through our involvement in the Artistic Research and Communal Knowledge (ARCK) phase of the project *Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures* (CCPECF).[1] In particular, we followed the process through which Namibian communities and artists were invited to directly engage with the twenty-three cultural belongings repatriated from Germany in 2022.[2] Among these items was a small doll-like figure that resonated with some participants, opening an unexpected point of connection between debates within ARCK to the artistic explorations of Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll. The Namibian artist Tuaovisiua Katuuo included her interpretations in the ARCK exhibition in the form of different versions of the doll. When Khadija visited Namibia for the exhibition launch, she facilitated an initial doll-making session that tested how creative practice might serve as a bridge between repatriated heritage and contemporary artistic production. Building on this moment, we developed a doll-making workshop that focused not only on making new dolls but on revealing the meanings, memories, and ancestral stories that dolls hold across different regions of Namibia. In this context, our filming and photography formed part of the artistic process itself, documenting gestures, exchanges, and acts of making as forms of testimony, rather than producing an ethnographic record.

In partnership with Repatriates, we organized a three-day doll-making workshop in August 2024 at the Creative Industry Institute Africa (CIIA) in Windhoek, bringing together fourteen Namibian regional artisans and fourteen University of Namibia (UNAM) art students to work in pairs and create traditionally inspired dolls.[3] Each artisan arrived with locally sourced materials such as goat hide, offcuts of school uniform fabric, beads, plant fibers, and recycled wire, as well as with stories and memories. Rather than reproducing historical types, the participants transformed these traditions into new forms that reflected their regions, families, and beliefs.

We approached this process not as filmmakers collecting footage but as collaborators in a shared act of recovery and creation. The cameras, both still and moving, became a quiet witness to gestures of sewing, touching, and storytelling, recording making itself as testimony rather than illustration. This collaboration continued our commitment to exploring how creative practice can act as a form of restorative ritual, expanding restitution beyond institutions and into lived, participatory processes. Through witnessing the negotiations surrounding the returned cultural belongings, the many continued conversations, and the relationships and collaborations that formed from the doll-making workshop, we came to a shared conviction: True restitution can never just be symbolic. It must be rooted in agency — agency over our stories, our processes, and the evolution and healing of our cultures. This principle guided our contribution to Repatriates, where making and meaning-making became inseparable, and where artistic practice opened forms of repair that institutional processes alone cannot sustain.

Our commitment to collaboration is both philosophical and deeply practical. During CCPECF and ARCK, and later through the Repatriates doll workshops, we worked closely with the participating artists, artisans, and cultural practitioners both during the project and long after. Since we did not produce a final film from the doll workshop, there were no rough cuts to share. However, the conversations, feedback, and exchanges with participants continued. We remain involved with several of the artisans and students, supporting their work when possible, even beyond the boundaries or timelines of a single project.

For us, collaboration does not end with the formal conclusion of a program; it requires continuity, responsiveness, and care, especially in contexts shaped by historical erasure and unequal access to resources.

Our relationship to communities is never one of representation in the singular sense. Namibia is not one community but many, with different histories, languages, and lived experiences of colonialism and its aftermath. We do not claim to speak for each of these communities. We work in dialogue with the individuals, elders, artisans, youth, and knowledge keepers who choose to collaborate with us. Our perspectives as coauthors come from different but intertwined positions: one grounded in lived Namibian experience, the other shaped by diasporic realities. These perspectives sharpen our reflexive practice. For us, reflexivity means actively questioning how our locations, privileges, and limitations shape our work. Self-reflexivity is the practical work that precedes and follows, adjusting modes of engagement, filming (or choosing not to film), slowing down, stepping back, or shifting emphasis to uphold shared authorship and cultural agency.

Some of the most meaningful exchanges take place outside formal settings. Our office, kitchen, and garden often become informal studios where collaborators arrive as themselves rather than as representatives of institutions or communities. These conversations

rarely enter the final work directly, yet they ground our practice in trust, honesty, and sometimes necessary discomfort. This blurred boundary between life and work shapes how we cocreate, not only as partners in production but as facilitators of dialogue and collective healing within and beyond the repatriation process.

Kaudife: Namibia's very soil carries the weight of colonial conquest, apartheid segregation, and systemic exclusion wounds written into our languages, landscapes, and bodies. Growing up, I felt the echoes of forced land dispossession and erased spiritual traditions in every corner of my homeland. On camera and behind it, I confront that legacy. Playing the role of young Sam Nujoma in Namibia: *The Struggle for Liberation* (2007) was my way of stepping into history.[4] The film, based on the biography of Namibia's founding president, is regarded as a landmark pan-African film project and the only cinematic portrayal of Namibia's modern history at that scale. The production employed hundreds of Namibians across the acting, technical, costume, and art departments, pairing local crews with international collaborators, especially from African countries and the diaspora, and significantly expanding the capacities of the national film industry. As the first state-funded cinematic retelling of the liberation struggle, it marked a turning point in how Namibians saw themselves represented on screen and how the local film industry imagined its future. Being part of that project shaped my understanding of storytelling as a political and communal act — one rooted in reclaiming voice, memory, and historical agency.

Later, serving as executive producer for *The Measure of Men* (2023), a brutal reenactment of German colonial atrocities, became my way of forcing us to face the past.[5] The film follows a German anthropologist through the genocide in Namibia in the early twentieth century while acknowledging the role that science and academia played. It also positions the Holocaust as a continuation of colonial violence.

Each film is an act of lived resistance, an effort to surface hidden stories, give form to inherited trauma, and amplify the resilience pulsing through Namibian communities. My camera becomes both a mirror and a bridge. When I speak of "my camera," I refer not only to literally holding a camera but to my relationship with it in front of it as an actor and behind the scenes as a producer, shaping, contributing to, and at times negotiating what the camera attends to, enables, or silences, even when the final decisions are made elsewhere.

As both actor and producer, I experience the camera as reflecting the histories carried in my own body while connecting collective memory and creative expression, a bridge that joins local experiences to global conversations about memory, justice, and belonging. However, I never assume the role of spokesperson for Namibia's diverse communities. Instead, I work in dialogue with them, recognizing that representation is always negotiated, shared, and incomplete. I am not neutral behind or before the camera. My positionality is deeply intertwined with the stories I help tell. My belonging is personal yet shared, shaped by a collective history, by communities who continue to negotiate what it means to see and be seen, to remember and to represent, and to create meaning.

Sophie: My work as a producer has evolved alongside Kaudife's. I was born and raised in Germany to a German Hungarian mother and a Congolese father who immigrated during the wave of socialist solidarity and Pan-Africanism in the 1960s. My dual African and European upbringing taught me early on how colonial histories transcend borders, shaping daily life with both opportunity and exclusion. As a producer in Namibia, I've worked with artists, activists, and community elders to create safe spaces for dialogue, bringing together church leaders, youth, and knowledge keepers to confront trauma and imagine creative futures. Initially, these conversations were inspired by our collaboration with the broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) on trauma-informed storytelling in Colombia and South Africa.[6] We continued this process locally, holding dialogues with elders on the church's role in healing and hosting discussions at CIIA in Windhoek as well as in our home, where cultural practitioners, researchers, and artists gathered to exchange ideas.

From Extraction to Co-creation: Shifting Power in Practice

African artists too often appear in Western-funded projects as tokens of "diversity," yet remain excluded from decision-making. Across the continent, we have encountered projects where communities were filmed on location but post-production took place entirely abroad, or where artists contributed research, interviews, or performances, yet contractual frameworks prevented them from reviewing edits or having any overall editorial "power." For instance, in one southern African project we are familiar with, editors abroad removed key community perspectives due to time constraints, despite the participants' requests to be consulted first. These are not isolated cases. They reflect systemic structures that shape many international collaborations.

While extractive models are common in international collaborations, our experience with Repatriates, particularly the doll-making workshop, was notably different. Here, we were trusted to design the workshop, determine how funds would be allocated locally, and define the outputs in ways responsive to Namibian participants. This autonomy enabled a process grounded in local relationships rather than externally predefined deliverables.

At the same time, the broader collaboration was not without friction. Working across continents, institutions, and expectations means navigating differences in pace, communication, and decision-making that reflect wider structural tensions in transnational cultural projects. These dynamics shape how "co-creation" unfolds in practice. Rather than hinting at individual shortcomings, we highlight them, because they are symptomatic of systemic patterns: even in well-intentioned partnerships, local practitioners often carry the emotional and logistical weight of making projects and processes legible to multiple audiences while negotiating uneven power dynamics, visibility, and recognition.

We seek to counter that extractive model by embedding co-creation at every stage of our work. Before editing the CCPECF film, we convened elders, youth leaders, historians, and artisans across Namibia. These gatherings became the foundation for our film's structure. Participants defined the key questions and influenced both content and cinematographic approach. We filmed these meetings primarily for documentation, not for inclusion in the final film, and produced a report and photographic record that were shared with participants.

Co-creation, however, is not always seamless. The doll-making workshop, for instance, required navigating practical imbalances as simple as material availability and as complex as differing expectations about authorship. Stakeholders in Namibia have repeatedly highlighted recurring challenges, from extractive collaborations and "toxic empathy" to visa inequalities and the emotional strain of working with traumatic histories.[7] These realities shape how co-creation can be practiced in the first place, reminding us that equity is not only an intention but also a structural necessity.

For Repatriates, this meant remaining attentive to how decisions about documentation, presentation, and narrative framing could reinforce or unsettle these dynamics. In practice, this played out in small but significant ways. Some artisans preferred not to have certain ritual gestures or practices filmed. It was jointly decided to have their dolls photographed only after a collective discussion at the end. We adjusted accordingly, turning the filming or photographing into a negotiated act rather than a default expectation. These micro-negotiations became as important as the workshop outcomes themselves. The workshop became an opportunity to practice co-creation within a more contained structure: artisans determined the narratives of their dolls, students navigated collaboration across generations and regions, and decisions about what was filmed or photographed were made collectively in the room.

For us, co-creation is not an ideal achieved, but a practice of friction and persistence within unequal systems of cultural production.

Confronting Power, Unearthing Voice

Documentary film has long been complicit in reinforcing colonial hierarchies, privileging "expert" commentary over lived experience. We intentionally invert that hierarchy. Our CCPECF film begins and ends with local voices — Namibians reflecting on the meaning of restitution rather than Western academics who approach the topic from an outside position. This structure compels audiences to question their own positionality: Who defines meaning? Who curates the archive? How is silence shaped by power and how does silence reinforce it?

By foregrounding community expertise and knowledge passed down orally, we challenge the notion that legitimacy must come from written or institutional sources. In the CCPECF project, that approach translated into working closely with community researchers, artisans, and cultural practitioners whose lived knowledge shaped both the process and the narrative. Among those filmed were poets and local researchers, some from academic backgrounds and others directly connected to the communities of the returned cultural belongings, each sharing stories that linked memory, craftsmanship, and cultural continuity. Their testimonies reframed restitution not as a bureaucratic act but as an ongoing dialogue rooted in community voices.

This approach also shaped our contribution to Repatriates. Although the doll-making workshop did not produce a final film, the same principles guided our documentation. Here, the "voices" were the fourteen artisans and fourteen UNAM students who brought their knowledge, lived memories, and personal interpretations to the making of their dolls. Their stories, ranging from childhood rituals and regional crafting techniques to the spiritual significance carried by materials, defined what was recorded and how. In this context, the workshop itself became a site, where intergenerational knowledge, embodied practices, and local expertise were centered, rather than curated.

The response to the CCPECF film has been deeply affirming, particularly among artists and researchers from the global majority, who felt empowered by the way the collaborators interviewed in the documentary openly addressed power imbalances. One tangible outcome has been a call for clearer frameworks that protect Namibian practitioners. CIIA has begun working toward such standards, advocating for transparency, equitable funding structures, and fair processes of accountability.

Toward Transformative Restitution: Tide of Returns

We understand genuine restitution as a living practice rather than a checklist. It must be transformative, not symbolic. Returning objects is only meaningful when communities gain tools and autonomy to

preserve, interpret, and innovate their own heritage. It must also be grounded in justice and dignity, involving ethical funding, skill-sharing, and transparency rather than tokenistic gestures of "cultural diplomacy." Our process insists on mutual respect, requiring Western institutions to cede curatorial authority and recognize the expertise of descendant communities. Above all, it is rooted in agency, ensuring that storytelling and interpretation are led by those to whom the heritage belongs.

These principles shape our filmmaking and curatorial gestures, countering extractive and representational practices that have long defined processes of repatriation and alleged co-creation. Our approach to restitution and filmmaking is grounded in co-creation at every stage, transforming participants into coauthors and redefining authorship as a collective act of interpretation. Shared ownership of footage and edits democratizes narrative power, ensuring that communities retain a stake in how their stories circulate. Through workshops and cocurated exhibitions, creation becomes an act of learning, blending art, research, and engagement. Establishing local editing suites strengthens creative sovereignty, enabling Namibian editors and advisors to shape both the narrative tone and ethical framing. Finally, reciprocal screening rights guarantee that represented communities can host and benefit from the films, turning screenings themselves into acts of return.

Co-creation is demanding, slower, costlier, and more complex, but these investments are essential. Without them, claims of decolonial practice risk remaining surface-level. In the Repatriates doll-making workshop, these principles took on a tangible, material form. Rather than arriving with a preset framework, we invited the fourteen artisans and fourteen UNAM students to lead the process: to decide what they wanted to make, which stories should accompany their dolls, and how much of that process should be documented. Many of the most meaningful moments unfolded in conversation while hands were busy with thread, hide, beads, and plant fibers. In this way, the workshop became a space where making and meaning-making happened simultaneously, and where documentation followed the pace set by the participants.

Laimi Kakololo engaged with the process in especially meaningful ways. A Namibian textile and jewelry artist with a Diploma in Visual Art and a Bachelor of Arts (Honors), her work bridges traditional craft and contemporary material practices. Having worked with her beyond the initial workshop, we witnessed how the act of making opened up layers of memory and embodied knowledge, renewing connection to practices she has long carried but does not always articulate formally.

Co-creation here means allowing each voice to define its own form of expression, ensuring that artisans' stories remain paired with their creations, and treating the dolls not only as objects but



as vessels of lived knowledge. Our role was to provide the space, support the process, and document only what participants consented to share, translating the principles of restitution, agency, dignity, and creative sovereignty into an embodied artistic practice grounded in the makers themselves. We did not put together a final polished film, which would have required us to reinterpret the artisans' work, but rather let the footage and the dolls speak for themselves.

Windhoek Workshops, coordinated by Laimi Kakololo, Kaudife Kaudife and Sophie Haikali at their studio in Windhoek, Namibia. Photo by Willem Very.

This portrait of the last of a series of workshops shows participants who were brought from around Namibia as experts on the range of different doll making traditions to exchange techniques and ideas.

Next pages:
Dolls as Self-portraits.
In order of appearance:
Laimi Kakololo,
Grace Kasale,
Natalia Shihafe,
Olivia Moses,
Bernadette Thomas.
Photos by Willem Very.



1 CCPECF is a Namibian heritage initiative launched under the Museums Association of Namibia (MAN), in partnership with with Repatriates, the Ethnological Museum in Berlin and many others, to address colonial legacies in museum collections through repatriation, training, and decolonial collaboration. The initiative led to the return of twenty-three cultural belongings from the Berlin museum in 2022, strengthening national capacity in conservation and curation. Its offshoot, ARCK, brought together Namibian organizations, artists, artisans, and community knowledge keepers to reinterpret the narratives embedded in these repatriated belongings through creative practices such as poetry, performance, sculpture, and painting, fostering communal reflection and new ways of engaging with heritage. The project culminated in an exhibition in April 2024 at the National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAGN) and the symbolic signing over of the twenty-three cultural belongings.

2 See our short documentary film *Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures* (2025), posted on November 14, 2025, by Joe Vision Production, YouTube video, https://youtu.be/HntFVxmook8.

3 CIIA is a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering the growth and sustainability of cultural and creative industries across Africa and its diaspora.

4 *Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation* is a historical drama directed by Charles Burnett and produced by the Namibia Film Commission (NFC) and the Pan-African Centre of Namibia (PACON). Inspired by *Where Others Wavered* (2001), the autobiography of Sam Nujoma, Namibia's founding president, it portrays Namibia's fight for independence. It is the largest Namibian film made to date.

5 *Der vermessene Mensch* (*Measures of Men*) is a German historical drama written and directed by Lars Kraume and produced by Zero One Film. Sophie and Kaudife Haikali were executive producers. The film depicts the German colonial war against the Herero and Nama from 1904 to 1908 through the perspective of a young German ethnologist, exposing the violent logic of racial science. It was the first feature film to center the genocide in Namibia. It premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival, sparking a debate over colonial history, memory, and the portrayal of both.

6 The collaboration with DW Akademie was part of a needs assessment and analysis of the 2023 framework "Coping with Trauma Through Film," which had been developed for South Africa and Colombia. Conducted with Namibian media and creative professionals, the assessment examined how trauma-informed approaches could be locally adapted to strengthen ethical storytelling, psychosocial well-being, and healing. It revealed that, although Namibian filmmakers, creative practitioners, academics, and civil-society organizations frequently engage with collective trauma, few structured frameworks exist to support this work. These findings informed our continued engagement with film as both a space of confrontation and a potential medium for healing in Namibia.

7 The idea of "toxic empathy" emerged during an interview Kaudife Haikali conducted with the Namibian scholar and creative practitioner Patrick Sam on October 25, 2023. Sam used the term to describe situations in which well-intentioned white allies take on the role of interpreting or advocating for restitution debates, thereby unintentionally shifting attention and authority back to themselves. In his view, this overidentification, framed as solidarity, can reproduce the same hierarchies it seeks to undo.









Water and Braids: Transformations Through Time

Verena Melgarejo Weinandt

Belongings and ancestors, stored and confined in vitrines, cellars and depots of institutions, museums, or even private homes are often perceived as non-living objects. This perspective overlooks the deep connection, exchange, and interdependency that exists between us and those belongings and ancestors, even when we sometimes do not know who they are, where they come from, and to whom they belong today. How can we understand connections between ourselves and others, between human and non-human beings, beyond the logic of ownership? How can we unlearn the binary divisions that we were taught and have internalized?

Within my artistic vocabulary, water and braids serve as symbols for addressing interdependencies, relationships, and the processes of identity formation in constant transition. Through these elements, I explore our ability to understand such ties through practices and gestures, expanding our rational understandings of how we relate to one another. By working with performance and creating visual scenes that incorporate various textiles and techniques, I focus on moments of transition and change. I am interested in forming spaces where borders and definitions become blurred, and where potentialities can be explored through context, movement, and gesture — creating a vocabulary for what could be. Reflecting the workings of memory — fragmented, jumping back and forth, not following our understanding of linear time — this text does not follow a chronology or aim to present an overarching narrative that explains a certain development. It is a rehearsal to understand what the images and gestures of these works mean, to become conscious of their connectedness through the elements of braids and water. I think of the method Gloria Anzaldúa calls "el cenote/the dreampool," through which she describes ancestral information stored as imagery in our individual and collective unconscious.[1] Tapping into these images can be a creative and spiritual way to create and reconnect to knowledge. I understand my videos and performances as expressions of the images stored within us that are connected to collective imaginaries we can explore in our search for meaning.

These reflections stemming from my artistic research are part of the Repatriates project, which investigates the role art plays in multifaceted repatriation processes. After my research led me to cases where repatriation was impossible due to unlocated remains — such as Pocahontas's burial place in Gravesend, England — I shifted my focus. I then examined the influence of the imaginary realm and stereotypes, arguing they shape not only museum policies and narratives, but also the way we understand ourselves within culture and national narratives. Exploring how shared images and imaginaries connect us has been central to my inquiry into their impact on institutional decisions, gestures, narratives, and, more broadly, collective identity.

Trenzación (2017). Berlin, in the City and the Woods. Direction, Camera, and Performance: Maque Pereyra and Verena Melgarejo Weinandt.

Maque and I stand in the woods. Our long hair is intertwined, creating a shared braid. Together, we burn a plait of our cut hair. This gesture represents the beginning and end of our performative ritual. In between, meter-long braids are dragged through the streets of Berlin, and we comb each other's hair, braiding and unbraiding it.

We change our hair constantly — it is cut, bleached, and dyed. Every transformation, every change, creates its own moment of authenticity; there is no original state, no past that needs to be preserved. The braids only create meaning through their connection to life. In photos of my great-great-grandmother Bacilia when she was young, she is wearing her two braids. I remember how she stands proudly next to her husband and looks directly into the camera.



Trenzación (2017), Verena Melgarejo Weinandt and Maque Pereyra.

In older pictures, she is no longer wearing her braids. Cutting off one's braids is a strong symbol of identity transformation in relation to the migratory experiences of Indigenous people, especially women, in Bolivia. Many Indigenous women cut their braids when they move to urban areas to look for work or simply to face less discrimination by assimilating into Bolivian mestizo society.

Our hair forms a bond with our ancestors. Their braids tell a story; they are an expression that resonates in the present, and continues to create what will be. In our performance, the plait and the act of braiding become metaphors for the social and political implications of identity formation — an organic movement and process in which connections and commonalities might be able to transform our world.



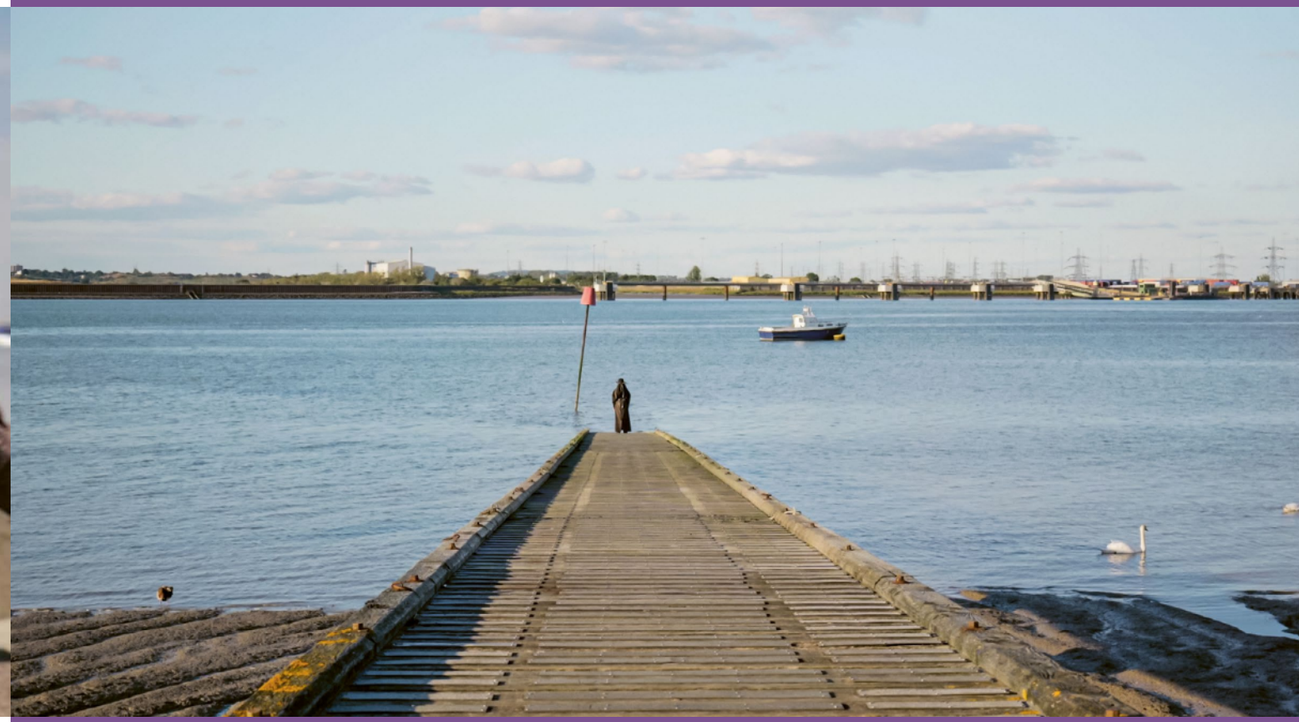
***Transformation. Braiding Renewal* (2023). Next to the Danube, Kritzendorf, Austria. Camera: Nick Prokesch. Assistant Director and Camera: Liesa Kovacs. Costume: Yvonne Kaufmann and Verena Melgarejo Weinandt. Director and Performer: Verena Melgarejo Weinandt.**

On the riverside, I weave a cloak out of many plaits, place it around my shoulders, and walk into the water, where I wash the braided garment. Stereotypes and fantasies about Indigenous people in German-speaking contexts have a long history and continue to weigh heavily on our present, like the braids I pull across the sand and into the Danube. Do we all feel the burden of the past pressing on our shoulders? What can we possibly do with it? Perhaps it helps to manifest the weight, to represent it, to make it perceptible and allow it to be experienced. Perhaps then we can set it on a path of transformation, where it travels with the currents and tides, becoming something new.



Transformation. Braiding Renewal (2023), Verena Melgarejo Weinandt.





Tinku. Encounter-Confrontation (2025). Next to the Thames, Gravesend, England. Camera: Nick Prokesch. Assistant Director: Liesa Kovacs. Director and Performer: Verena Melgarejo Weinandt.

The folkloric Bolivian dance Tinku refers to a ritual practiced in the Potosí region that involves eating, drinking, and dancing — though its central activity is a fistfight between community members. This fight is seen as part of a collective effort to restore equilibrium not only within the community but also for Mother Earth.

I learned Tinku in Bolivia at the age of nineteen. In this work, I perform it beside the River Thames. Pocahontas was brought to London via this river, where she was used to promote the tobacco industry in the colony of Virginia. Countless variations of her story have been told, but not many people know what really happened to her. In 1617, she died on the ship that was taking her back to her homeland, and was buried in the ground of St. George's Church in Gravesend, a small town forty-five kilometers from London. She has never been able to complete the journey down the Thames and across the ocean. The location of her remains is unknown, since a fire destroyed the church in 1727. However, she is still present and connected with us in different ways, whether through her real persona and life story or the many fictional versions of her. Reflecting on the histories that shape us prompts a number of questions: How can the violence that circulates through invented stories and images be addressed? How can this discrepancy between reality and fantasy be made tangible?

Alongside the Thames, I swing my braids through the air. As I dance, I turn in a circle, stomping the ground, my fists following the motion of my body, punching in different directions, sometimes directly toward the camera. My body, dance, and movements try to manifest in this place of contradictions and tensions what cannot be expressed in words: connections that move across the seas, that drift between reality and fiction, that connect us with beings of the present and the past — that entwine us all, in one way or another.

Tinku. Encounter-Confrontation (2025), Verena Melgarejo Weinandt.





Weaving Connections. Ocean Space, Venice (2026). Commissioned and produced by TBA21–Academy. Next to the Danube, Vienna. Performers: Alfredo Ledesma, Marisel Orellana Bongola, Auro Orso. Camera: Nick Prokesch and Miae Son. Shooting Assistant: Pêdra Costa. Sound: Bassano Bonelli. Concept and Direction: Verena Melgarejo Weinandt.

I have known Alfredo, Marisel, and Auro for many years. They have all grown up or currently live in Vienna, recognize their Indigenous ancestors, and have artistic practices that address different axes of violence — such as racism or class- and gender-based — while searching for a collective and spiritual equilibrium.[2] Our lives and artistic practices have intertwined at different moments in our lives, influencing one another's thinking, feeling, and doing. In this performance, they tear black fabric into strips together, weaving them into one long, shared black braid, which they then wash in the river, connecting it with the water. The tearing of the fabric makes a harsh noise, but the movement is calm and concentrated. They tear simultaneously, each person following their own rhythm.

Interweaving is a collective gesture — it requires us to wait for one another, to let each body understand and do what is necessary without speaking. The fabric strands intertwine with arms and legs, with the water and the sand, while the braid grows longer and longer. Both the performance and the braid are in the water, following and adapting to its movement, to its fluidity. A gesture, an involvement, is required to establish a connection with the water; it is a process, an activation. Water flows, always in motion — it constantly transforms, much as we do.

Weaving Connections. Ocean Space, Venice (2026). Commissioned and produced by TBA21–Academy, Verena Melgarejo Weinandt.

Trenza Video (2015). Vienna. A collective production of Trenza.

We are a group of women, first- and second-generation migrants from different parts of Abya Yala.[2] We formed the collective Trenza ("braid" in Spanish) to interlink our experiences, creating a common thread that supports our stories and connects them to a longer strand. "We don't want to be / Stars but a parts / of constellations," as Gloria Anzaldúa says.[3] In a collective performance, we filmed our hands braiding dough and decorating it with flowers, seeds, and herbs.

Entretelas_Interfaces (2017). Berlin. Textile Installation and Performance-Photography.

I am sewing gestures of transformation. I am making faces, sewing faces, sewing them onto dresses. Hair and braids frame my own face and my sewed faces. I am referencing Gloria Anzaldúa's book *Making Face, Making Soul* (1990). In it, she describes an in-between space where resistance becomes possible — a space that allows one to reflect on one's own face. From this perspective, we understand which faces are essential, which remain part of the self, which are strategic, which are useful, and which can be discarded as unnecessary. Anzaldúa refers to this in-between space with the metaphor of a specific type of fabric: an interface that provides support but isn't visible, usually sewn to the underside of the fabric. Here, the process of making and unmaking is revealed — the interface is turned outward. Exploring this space, braids become part of faces, different textile elements are joined to the body, gestures are explored that protect, reflect, and provide support.



Entretelas_Interfaces (2017), Verena Melgarejo Weinandt.

***Weaving Connections,* 2026. Ocean Space, Venice. Commissioned and produced by TBA21—Academy**
Exhibition text

Streams become rivers, become the ocean, just as hair becomes a braid. Continuous cycles reflect our interconnectedness across time and beyond spatial divisions. Weaving and braiding manifest interdependencies; they make them visible and palpable as we embody them through our hands and bodies, letting them expand beyond rational understanding.

In this spirit, *Weaving Connections* is part of the artist's long-term development of a body of performative films and research that explore how the cultural imaginary in Germany has represented and framed Indigenous people in mainstream media and culture. Looking critically at the historical formation of stereotypes and fantasies about Indigenous people since German colonialism, and their close ties to the construction of a German national identity and culture, this body of work confronts attendant forms of violence. Imaginaries come into play when museums and institutions draw on historical and emotional ties to connect a German audience with what they exhibit and store, while simultaneously refusing to let go of ideologies that prevent them from returning what does not belong to them.

Weaving Connection expresses the need for a vital shift in perspective that not only counteracts forms of violence but deeply reflects on how we act and reenact them, as when we disconnect ourselves from other ways of being. Institutions replicate separations, dichotomies, and categorizations that fracture us and the more-than-human world. The artist follows the water's path of movement and transformation, creating a continuous cycle where waters are never truly separate but exist in a state of perpetual connection.

Threads in blue tones interwoven with black braids recall both flowing water and strands of black braided hair. Braids are a recurring element in the artist's trajectory, allowing her to explore how individual and collective identities come into existence. The washing of braids reflects on the water's ability to forge relationships between all living beings, as well as its spiritual power to transform, purify, and recreate. A collective act of preparing, braiding, and washing the braids before being woven into the textiles reminds us of the care and presence this act of transformation requires. The three-channel video allows three performative moments to unfold, creating a constant flow of shifting visual relationships.

Ultimately, *Weaving Connections* is a gesture, a movement. It expresses endless variations of entanglements that move in different formations through the space, reminding us that there is never just one way to display and tell a narrative of change and transformation, nor one single perspective from which to engage. The non-linearity of this work questions our definition of time within the web of connections in which we exist, pointing beyond a linear understanding of past, present, and future and the divisions made between them.

Our imaginaries, fantasies, and projections are more than mere fiction; they are actors, they have agency. Just as these fantasies and imaginaries can be violent—shaping today's politics, movements, and actions—they can also be appropriated, reclaimed, and transformed. They offer a path toward balance and equilibrium. Let us listen, feel, and manifest the imaginations that flow from the paths of waters and oceans.

Installation with three-channel video (color, silent), 21 woven textiles (100 × 60 cm, each, cotton), one braid (ø 190 cm, Alcantara® material), metal frames
Channel one: 6 min 18 sec
Channel two: 9 min 37 sec
Channel three: 5 min 55 sec
Overall dimensions variable

Camera: Nick Prokesch, Miae Son
Editing: Georg Oberlechner
Performers: Marisel Orellana Bongola, Alfredo Ledesma Quintana, Auro Orso
Set assistant: Pêdra Costa
Costumes: Klara Neuber, Michaela Hudecova Königshofer (Schnittbogen)
Frames fabrication and installation: with Attosecondo
Set up assistance: Francesco Pavon, Eugen Rroji, Enrico Silvestri
Sound design: Jorge Villaseca
Sound recording: Bassano Bonelli Bassano

Next pages:
Verena Melgarejo Weinandt, *Weaving Connections*, 2026. Installation views, Ocean Space, Venice. Commissioned and produced by TBA21—Academy. Photo: Jacopo Salvi.

1 Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Light in the Dark / Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 242.
2 I use *equilibrium* instead of healing, which I feel has become overused and emptied of meaning in academic discourse. In Western contexts, healing is the response to a sickness, the reestablishing of a "healthy" condition. To me, the term *equilibrium* helps convey that this is not a binary situation but rather an process of transformation and integration.
3 Abya Yala is a term referencing Latin America that was used by the Kuna people before colonization. It can be translated as Mature Land, Living Land, or Flowering Land.
4 Gloria Anzaldua, "The New Speakers," in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 24—25.



Ozeba, or Return My Belongings Unharmed or You Will Be in Trouble

Samson Ogiamien

I ask for Oluyenyetuye bronze of Ife
The moon says it is in Bonn
I ask for Ogidigbonyingboyin mask of Benin
The moon says it is in London
I ask for Dinkowawa stool of Ashanti
The moon says it is in Paris
I ask for Togongorewa bust of Zimbabwe
The moon says it is in New York
I ask
I ask
I ask for the memory of Africa
The seasons say it is blowing in the wind
The hunchback cannot hide his burden
Niyi Osundare, *African Memory*, 1998

I ask of Uhun Elao ivory bust of Ogiamien
The moon says it is in Geneva
I ask for the crown of Montezuma
The moon says it is in Vienna
I ask for the Asmat soul canoe from Papua New Guinea
The moon says it is in Venice
I ask for the Dadikwakwa-kwa dolls of Anindilyakwa
The moon says they are back with Warnindilyakwa in Australia
I ask for the mask of Iyagbon
The moon says it is back in Benin City
I ask for Iseku of Igodomigodo
The moon says they are here, watching us.[1]
Samson Ogiamien and Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, 2026

I am no longer merely asking: I am now deeply committed to the ongoing debate over the repatriation of the Benin cultural artifacts — bronzes, works of art, and sacred objects — taken during British colonization in 1897, when the palace of the Oba (king) was plundered. This debate is not only about artistic mastery, it's also about the profound connection between these objects and the heritage of the Benin people. Though these artifacts have been preserved and studied in Western museums, their removal was an act of colonial aggression that severed the people's direct link to their cultural legacy. The debate about their restitution centers on ethical considerations of ownership and the impact of these artifacts on their communities of origin. For the Benin people, repatriation represents justice and a step toward healing and reconciliation. In Edo, my mother tongue, the single word *Ozeba* means: "Return my belongings unharmed or you will be in trouble." This is exactly what we, the Edo people, are asking European museums to do, because this is what restitution means to us. These objects are spiritually significant, illustrating our history and documenting our collective memory. They are our archives, and were never meant to be exhibited in foreign museums.[2]



Iyagbon Mask, film still from the making of *Iyagbon's Mirror*, Graz 2021. Photo: Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll.

As a performance artist, sculptor, and descendant of the Ogiamien royal family of the great Benin Kingdom, I tackle the issue of restitution through an artistic approach of recontextualization. In my artwork, exhibitions, workshops, and seminars in Europe, I provide new contexts and meanings to objects to help audiences understand their historical and cultural significance, bridging the distance between past and present. It is essential to know and understand our past in order to deal with and redefine the present, thereby creating a better and more stable future — one anchored in truth, empathy, and cultural balance. By reuniting fragments of history with their rightful homes, we nurture intergenerational healing; by understanding our roots, we cultivate resilience; and by bridging art with heritage, we contribute to a world that honors diversity, justice, and the shared humanity that binds us all.

I have sought to raise cultural awareness through my artistic practice by highlighting the stories behind many of the artifacts still displayed in museums across the Western world, fostering a deeper appreciation and respect for diverse cultural heritages. Many of my works are conceived as platforms for dialogue, encouraging discussions about the ethics of provenance and repatriation as well as plans for the return of these objects to their motherland. Furthermore, my works serve as educational tools to create engaging educational experiences for students in institutions across Europe and Nigeria.

The main materials I use in my artistic practice are clay and bronze, which serve as a profound medium of expression and communication, as they relate to the stolen artifacts made with the same materials. Clay, with its earthy nature, epitomizes a raw foundational connection to Mother Earth, the human experience, and the physical world. Bronze, on the other hand, symbolizes durability, transformation, and permanence. Clay captures the essence of the creative process while bronze preserves and elevates it, thereby combining immediate expression with lasting impact.

Since 2017, I have carried out the project *Iyagbon's Mirror* in collaboration with the Onyrikon Company and the Repatriates project. It will conclude in Benin City, Nigeria, in 2026.[3] Onyrikon, a multidisciplinary theater company based between Switzerland and France, has played a significant role in the project, leading the audience in two-hour performances through different stations, accompanied by actors and musicians, centering on the bronze mask of Iyagbon. These site-specific, interactive performances took place in Austria and Switzerland. They were conceived as a mirror game of cultures — between the market and ritual, between possession and being possessed — intended to sensitize the public to the problems related to African heritage being kept in European museums. The first performance in Graz was documented and turned into a short film by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll in 2021.[4]

In Edo, *Iyagbon* means Mother Earth, the protector of artifacts both at home in Benin and in the diaspora. Iyagbon is a goddess who shields all living beings, cultures, and artifacts. In the Edo pantheon of gods and spirits, each deity has a specific role and embodies attributes that reflect the values and needs of society; they are portrayed in art and sacred objects depicting scenes from Edo mythology. The mask of Iyagbon is both a traditional and a contemporary artwork. It represents a new generation of African art traveling to Europe to reconnect with ancestral works in the diaspora, thereby raising awareness of the provenance and restitution of artifacts. The mask is cast in bronze, a material traditionally used to immortalize a subject, to preserve it for posterity. It was created by me in collaboration with the Royal Bronze Casters Guild of Igun Street, whose members hold an esteemed place in the history and culture of the Benin Kingdom. The guild's work preserves a rich artistic heritage



Iyagbon's Mirror, performance in Neue Galerie Graz during La Strada International Festival for Street and Puppet Theater, Graz, 2022. Photo by Nicola Milatovic.



Samson Ogiamien with Iyagbon's mask in the Weltmuseum Vienna. Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Film still from *And the moon says it is in Vienna*, 2025.



Iyagbon's Mirror, performance in Arzo, Switzerland, 2021. Courtesy of Onyrikon Theatre.

and continues to inspire new generations of artists and historians. Its members live in a historic quarter of Benin City, my hometown.

In the thirteenth century, craft guilds were organized in Benin to bring together artisans who had been scattered across the empire. Gathering them in quarters ensured the protection of their trade and secured their service to the royal palace. Only members of the guild were permitted to produce works for the palace, guaranteeing the highest standards through a hierarchy that supervised production. The guild used — and still uses — the lost-wax method of bronze casting. Their products remained the property of the palace, created only by royal permission or commission. This tradition of bronze casting has been passed from one generation to the next, still to this day. I, Samson Ogiamien, was born into the family of Royal Bronze Casters. *Ozeba!*

The saga of Iyagbon addresses the highly topical issue of the provenance and restitution of thousands of looted objects still displayed in ethnographic museums across Europe. This artistic proposal serves as a powerful catalyst for reflection on the decolonization of museums and the restitution of artworks seized through colonial plunder, a debate that has intensified since the artwork was conceived in 2017.[5] After half a century of demands, some objects have finally been returned. Yet the colonial trauma remains enormous and complex, affecting the whole of society. The consequences must be dealt with at all levels. I believe that each act of restitution represents a positive step forward in political, diplomatic, cultural, and symbolic terms.

Iyagbon's Mirror has created space for the descendants of both the victims and the perpetrators to come together and reflect — one of my guiding principles is: "Come, let's reason together." Since the question of repatriation comes up again and again, I am setting the stage to resolve the issue. As a sequel to *Iyagbon's Mirror* — which has been included in various exhibitions across Europe — I am currently developing a new project titled *Iyagbon Bokhian*, which in Edo means "Welcome Home, Iyagbon."[6] The time has come for the mask of Iyagbon to be returned to her homeland. The return of the mask, which has become a ritual object through theater and fiction, mirrors the journey of repatriation, as objects once taken through colonial plunder are slowly beginning to leave European museums for their countries of origin.

This project represents the logical and necessary continuation of the artistic adventure. A site-specific second episode will take place in Benin City in February 2026. It is the result of a collaboration between the Association of Yaruya, the Repatriates research project, the Association of Art Tension, Onyrikon, the Ogiamien Palace, the University of Benin, the Royal Bronze Casters Guild of Igun Street, the Benin National Museum, and Kada Cinema. The performance will take place in a location of extraordinary symbolic significance: the Ogiamien Palace. A protected historical and cultural building, the royal palace is an exceptional example of intact precolonial architecture and one of the sites looted during British colonization. It is also where my ancestor's altars can still be found today. There, Iyagbon's mask will find refuge, following the Edo people's demand to return the stolen artifacts — *Ozeba*.

In preparation for *Iyagbon Bokhian*, I convened a seminar at the Benin National Museum on February 25, 2025, which brought together scholars, researchers, and enthusiasts for a series of thought-provoking presentations on the arts of Benin — one of Africa's most celebrated and historically rich artistic heritages.[7] The seminar served as both a prelude to the performance and a platform for examining Benin art from multiple angles, shedding light on its enduring significance and evolving meanings across time and space. Participants with diverse perspectives offered insights that deepened our understanding of the artifacts beyond their aesthetic value. Tracing the historical context of the artworks' creation and role in performance and cultural identity, the presentations revealed the complexity and richness of Benin art. The discussions also extended to a global perspective on arts repatriation and the contested place of these artifacts in the world today — a testament to their timeless relevance and the conversations they continue to inspire. The key viewpoints presented during the seminar include the following:

Performance Perspectives

In this talk, Chris Ugolo, professor in the Department of Communication and Performance Arts at the University of Benin, discussed how the performance aspect of artistic production documents significant historical events. Beyond the visual art forms, such as the bronze works that record life experiences, performances in festivities and ceremonies also record important events, as they are replete with dramatic displays of singing, dancing, costumes, and make-up, which often hold ritual and religious significance. Ceremonies such as Ugie-oro, Ugie Ododuwa, Ugie Emobo, Igue, and Olokun — highly visual expressions — hold great significance for Benin art and music both within the country and across the diaspora. Professor Ugolo underscored that our performing arts are intact, unlike our visual arts: "They looted our visual art, but it could not be taken away from us."

The Cultural Significance of Benin Arts

Kokunre Agbontaen-Eghafona, professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Benin, explained how African

art is a means to express creative perceptions of nature through oral literature, plastic arts, graphic arts, and music. She emphasized that these prominent forms have played a significant role in the history of the Benin Kingdom. According to the professor, Benin is renowned for its remarkable art, which stands as a powerful marker of its cultural heritage. She examined the various cultural roles of these art forms across economic, political, historical, social, and therapeutic contexts. The economic activities of early Benin communities laid the foundation for the kingdom's guild system, which developed between approximately 900 and 1130, and remained in place until the fall of Benin in the nineteenth century. The economic support provided by the guilds was one reason the kingdom was able to thrive and survive. Each guild offered a distinct economic advantage to the Oba, the palace, and the kingdom as a whole.

Benin art also played an important historical role as a means to memorialize significant individuals and events. Around 970, the kingdom developed a clay art to create mnemonic devices that aided in the oral transmission of history. Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English travelers who visited the kingdom between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries mentioned various art forms in their accounts, including brass plaques, royal ancestor heads, ivory tusks, and carved pillars. Thus, the historical dimension of Benin art can also be regarded as educational.

Like Benin art, African art more broadly frequently reflects societal expectations. Social themes are prevalent in many artistic performances, and much of the cultural activity centers on the family and the community. Music and oral literature serve to reinforce established religious and social patterns. Art also fulfills a therapeutic function. Practices such as divination to identify problems and their possible resolutions played a particularly significant role in the production of artworks.

Professor Agbontaen-Eghafona concluded her talk by emphasizing that a people's art represents a system of cultural symbols, much like language itself. Each culture engages with its objects in distinctive ways, and communities around the world produce artifacts that synchronize with their environments. By examining the roles that Benin art played in the past, we can identify its continued relevance in contemporary society.

The Art of the Benin Kingdom (Historical Perspective)

The historian Patrick Oronsaye underscored that the Benin Kingdom is renowned for its sophisticated and highly skilled artistic tradition. The Benin Bronzes and other artworks reflect the kingdom's rich history, spiritual beliefs, and political structure. Art in Benin developed under the patronage of the Oba, with early works created from materials such as ivory, wood, and terracotta, while the arrival of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century introduced new motifs, including depictions of Portuguese traders on brass plaques and other freestanding objects.

A British military expedition captured Benin in February 1897, plundering the palace and town and seizing thousands of artworks from the royal complex. Monuments and the palaces of many high-ranking chiefs were looted and destroyed, and the looted palace of the Oba was set ablaze. Most of the plunder was kept by the expedition, with some 6,500 ("official" figures list about 2,500) religious artifacts, visual histories, mnemonics, and artworks sent to England. Several photographs show British marines in the courtyard of the Oba's palace before it was set on fire. The looting of the palaces of the city's nobles, the Queen Mother's palace, and the royal harem at Ugbekun followed, which were then torched and reduced to rubble. In the process, many terracotta, wooden, and coconut-shell artifacts and mnemonics — which the invaders did not consider valuable — were lost forever.

Oronsaye explained that Benin art has been remarkably resilient in the face of the political, economic, social, and religious changes that have shaped Benin's cultural landscape since 1897. One of the major changes in Western art in the early twentieth century was the shift from the classical ideals of Greek and Roman statuary to a wider view that accepted so-called primitive art as equally beautiful and human. Artists such as the Cubists began collecting African artifacts and soon exploited their unrestrained, expressionistic energy in their own work. Gradually, sculpture long considered suitable only for ethnological institutes began moving into galleries, museums, and homes as objects of artistic merit.

Oronsaye concluded by saying: "The art of the Benin Kingdom is a testament to royal power, historical documentation, and cultural identity. Despite the challenges posed by the looting of 1897, Benin art continues to inspire scholars, artists, and cultural institutions worldwide. The ongoing repatriation movement highlights the enduring significance of these works to Nigeria's heritage and global art history."

Repatriation to Benin

The historian Godfrey Osaesiomo stressed that every person in Benin and throughout the diaspora shares a concern for the return of the artworks. He described how the looters manipulated the perception of these objects so that the Edo people in Benin saw them as evil, only to seize them, take them to Europe, and make money from their sale.

The first formal recognition of the need for restitution was in 1935, shortly after Oba Akenza II ascended the throne. He made

an appeal to the British authorities for the return of some of the sacred royal treasures — not as a political demand, but as a call for cultural and spiritual restoration. The Oba emphasized that these artworks were not mere decorations but sacred items essential to the spiritual life of the Benin monarchy and its rituals of remembrance. However, the British authorities dismissed the request, claiming that the artifacts had become part of museum collections and served scientific and educational purposes. In 1937, with the assistance of the British teacher K. C. Murray, Oba Akenza II campaigned for the voluntary return of the Benin artworks and the construction of museums across Nigeria. This marked the beginning of a long and continuing effort by the Benin royal court and the Nigerian government to reclaim these culturally and historically significant artifacts from museums around the world.

Osaesiomo concluded his talk by stating how the issue of repatriation is not simply a matter of legal action — many scholars have urged past Obas to bring the matter before the International Court of Justice — but rather a matter of morality and conscience for those still holding the looted art.

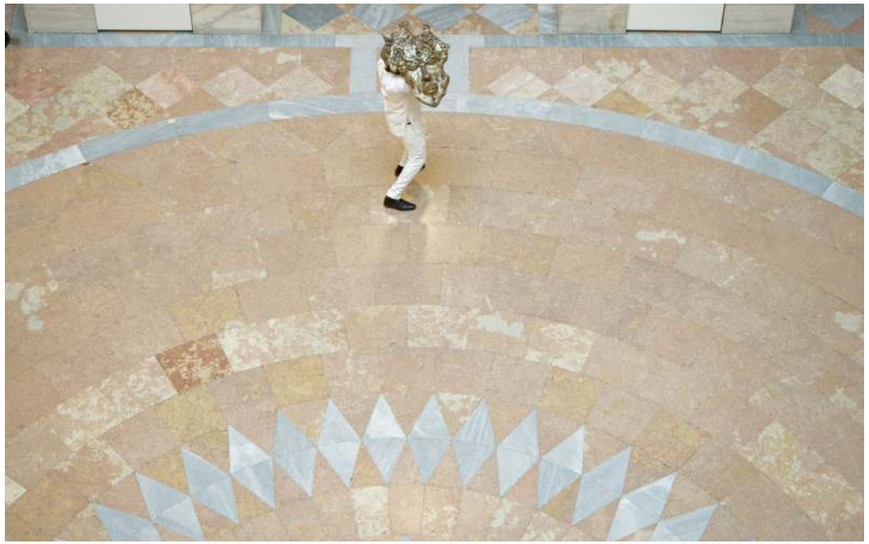
Insights on Benin Bronze-Casting Techniques

The sculptor Scott Ogbemudia, a representative of the Bronze Casters Guild from the Igun community, explained that in the past, long before there were cameras or journalists, the Igun craftsmen were invited to the palace to observe every ceremony, festival, and ritual, and reproduce what they had seen. The finished works were kept in the custody of the Oba, as bronze casting was considered to belong to the throne. The Igun guild holds the monopoly over bronze casting in Benin.

Ogbemudia described the lost-wax casting process, beginning with the first raw material needed: red earth (red sand). This foundational element, unique to the craft, is mixed to achieve the right consistency, not too soft or too hard, and used to form the initial object. Though it does not hold easily, it is applied and allowed to dry as many times as possible until the desired outcome is achieved. Because red earth cannot capture fine details, after it has dried a layer of wax is applied, called a wax slab. The wax, softened by sunlight or the heat of a fire, is rolled on a flat surface with a bottle until thin. The dried core, called *Akpa*, is wrapped with the wax, which is used to craft the delicate features such as the eyes, ears, and nose. Once the embellishments are complete, an outer layer of red earth is applied to cover the wax, creating a separation between the core and the surface, which is allowed to dry naturally to prevent cracking. The piece is then usually turned upside down; a rod-like wax structure is attached, coated with red earth again; and a funnel-shaped opening is formed to allow the molten brass to flow into the mold and pass through the runners to the main object. A binding wire is used to secure the mold and prevent cracks during firing. While the mold is being heated, the artist prepares a crucible at the foundry — a refractory container loaded with scrap brass, which melts at approximately 800 to 900°C. Once the oven reaches about 600°C, the mold is lifted with the aid of thorns fixed into the ground. Simultaneously, the molten brass is removed from the foundry and poured into the mold. Some of the wax is lost during heating, giving the technique its name: the lost-wax process. After casting, the piece is allowed to cool, then the outer mold is broken away to reveal the artwork. The final steps involve cleaning and polishing to achieve the finished aesthetic piece.

Rounding out the session, Eddy Erhagbe, professor in the Department of History and International Studies at the University of Benin, who was invited as a discussant, expressed his appreciation for the seminar. He said that such gatherings are reassuring, as they help rekindle awareness for the importance of art and history for our society. He remarked that an essential aspect of the reparations issue is that the Western world has historically undermined our creativity while continuing to hold on to our art objects, even though all art is fundamentally an expression of creativity.

1 This poem is read on the occasion of the opening in Venice and is the basis for *And the Moon says it is in Vienna*, the second film in the *Iyagbon* series, which premiered in Madrid at the Afro-conciencia Festival and WienWoche Festival in September 2025. See https://repatriates.org/iyagbon/and-the-moon-says-it-is-in-vienna/.
2 See the video interviews in Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, "On Properties of Relation, in the Process of Repatriation," *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual — Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur* 3, no. 1 (2022), https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/xxi/article/view/88608/83449.
3 Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, "Repatriation from the Universal Museum: *Iyagbon's Mirror* as a performance of Minor-Universals," in *Minor Universality: Rethinking Humanity After Western Universalism*, ed. Markus Messling and Jonas Tinus (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 265–82.
4 Samson Ogiamien and Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, "Iyagbon's Mirror," Repatriates, November 9, 2022, https://repatriates.org/iyagbon/iyagbons-mirror/.
5 Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Samson Ogiamien, Verena Weinandt, and Julian Reinisch, "The Moon Says — Artists, Decolonize the Format! Addressing Repatriation with Gesture, Sound and Image," in *Umwege/Detours: Künstlerische Wissenspraktiken als Dekoloniale Strategien / Artistic Knowledge Practices as Decolonial Strategies*, ed. Amalia Barboza and Mariel Rodríguez (Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, 2025), 193–205.
6 *Iyagbon's Mirror* was shown in the exhibitions *In Dialogue with Benin: Art, Colonialism and Restitution* at Museum Rietberg, Zurich (2024); *SE-YA-MA* at Musée d'ethnographie de Genève (2024); and Art in Public Space, Steiermark, Museum-Joanneum, Graz (2023); and at Musée d'ethnographie, Geneva (2022); Neue Galerie Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum, Graz (2021); and Arzo, Switzerland (2021).
7 For a video of the conference, see "Iy'Agbon Bokhian (Mother Deity Welcome)," Repatriates, February 25, 2025, https://repatriates.org/iyagbon/iy-agbon-bokhian-mother-deity-welcome/.







Keep your hands off my dwarves, scenes from *And the Moon says it is in Vienna*, film stills by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, 2025.



His Imperial Majesty, Rich-Arisco Osemwengie and Samson Ogiamien at the Ahue Erha shrine in Ogiamien Palace during Iyagbon Bokhian, Benin City, 2026.

Next pages: Samson Ogiamien, *ISEKU dwarves*, 2026. Installation view, Ocean Space, Venice. Commissioned and produced by TBA21–Academy. Photo: Jacopo Salvi.





Exploring Identity, Memory, Human Archives: A Conversation with Sènami Donoumassou

Adéwolé Faladé

On a hot and humid afternoon in July 2023, I participated in "Arts/Archives/Performances" in Porto-Novo, Benin. During the workshop, a group of African artists and African and European social science scholars and museum professionals discussed artistic research in archives created during colonial times.[1] We focused on the corpus of still and moving images collected by Father Francis Aupiais, a French missionary who roamed several regions of Dahomey (the French colonial name for Benin) and documented its Catholic and cultural lives in 1930 during a journey financed by the banker Albert Kahn. A young Beninese woman sitting next to me seemed deeply engaged in the discussion about art's potential to offer a nondiscriminatory gaze on those archives, creating space for the silenced voices of the colonized people to finally be heard. I introduced myself and learned that she was Sènami Donoumassou, a visual artist. Born and based in Benin, in her work she experiments with the technical and poetic potential of light through photograms, protean installations, and drawing, inviting us to reflect on notions of identity, otherness, archives, and memory. For the artist, every individual is an archival body containing multiple identities. As she puts it: "We are made of animal DNA, plant DNA and minerals. We are cells, but above all we are traces and memories. As beings made up of several elements, we represent living archival bits that are interconnected."[2]

In 2022, when I discovered Donoumassou at *Revelation! Contemporary Art from Bénin* — the traveling exhibition of Beninese contemporary art that coincided with the repatriation of twenty-six artifacts from France to Benin — I immediately became interested in her work. Using visual tools, she initiates dialogues between the present and the past, between the collective and the individual. In September 2024, shortly before the opening of *Revelation!* at the Conciergerie in Paris and her solo exhibition *Tàn xó [Memory in Prose]* at Fondation H, I met with her to talk about her work in the two shows and the meaning of restitution.[3]

Adéwolé Faladé: As I stepped into Fondation H, I was almost immediately swallowed by Arkhéenia, the fictional space you created for this exhibition, which highlights our otherness and foreignness while at the same time creating a common thread between us. Your usage of archival films also struck me. You edited archival silent films from the Musée Albert Kahn in Boulogne-Billancourt, conceiving



Sènami Donoumassou, *Couleur de l'eau, couleur de l'âme, couleur du sang*, 2024. Close-up of the map in the installation. Photo: Adéwolé Faladé.

a short piece featuring people around the world practicing different religions yet using gestures that look incredibly so much alike. It's a way for you to state that we might believe we are different but truly we are not. This set the tone for what your artwork was examining — the collective versus the individual, our so-called differences, the creation and usage of archives. How did your project *Memory in Prose* and the name Arkhéenia come to be?

Sènami Donoumassou: For some time, I have been wondering about our relation to the notions of territoriality and citizenship. What does it mean today to be French, or Beninese? Can we say that someone who wasn't born in Benin but spent twenty years there and acquired the citizenship is less Beninese than someone born in the country? What is religion, skin color, or territoriality when it comes to defining a person's identity? Because these are the very same elements that are used to reject the other. But in the end, we are all human, we all share the same origin, we all share the same collective memory. We come from nature, we are made of natural elements — minerals, bacteria, cells. The aspects that bring us together also fuel our rejection of the other. We're living in a more and more radicalized world.

All that was going through my mind when I came across Maya Angelou's "On the Pulse of the Morning," written in 1993 for Bill Clinton's presidential inauguration. In her poem, Angelou addresses memory, sense of belonging, identity. Using allegories of natural elements, she questions our connection with shared memories, the diversity of humankind, the territories they occupy, and the relations among various populations. The poem is set in a fictive world.

That's what inspired me to begin the exhibition with Arkhéenia, an imaginary territory. The word stems from *Archéen* (Archeen). Looking up the word *archive*, I was led to Archean, the geological era when the only form of life on earth was cells, bacteria. The link between archives and cells agglomerating to form life seduced me! In a way, archive also refers to the origin of life, the inception of something. I used that made-up name to say: "Welcome to the source. Welcome to our common origin."

AF: Tell me more about the pieces exhibited. How did you establish a connection between them?

SD: On the upper floor, the visitor walks into the exhibition room, crossing the border of the fictional territory, Arkhéenia, into an area that isn't affected by the passage of time or the changes occurring in the world. The installation *Couleur de l'eau, couleur de l'âme, couleur du sang* (Color of water, color of the soul, color of blood), composed of mirrors, photos, candles, dried leaves, and more, is in direct dialogue with the short film *Connected?* These two pieces allow me to interrogate our collective history and how our practices, beliefs, religions, and viewpoints have led us to wars, to rejecting others, and even to committing crimes and genocides. The installation also delves into the trauma left in both the victims' and perpetrators' personal histories — the traces it leaves in blood, in family heritage, and in the memory of humanity. And how do we, today, while still employing the same practices, the same religious and traditional beliefs, attempt to purify the spilled blood? There have been multiple massacres in the history of humanity — massacres triggered by religion, ethnic differences, political viewpoints, and so on — and they are still occurring today. The other aspect of the installation is the soundtrack. The repeated heartbeat symbolizes the passage of time, which never stops. Regardless of what we do, whether we live or die, time keeps passing — time will always exist.

On the lower floor, the visitor's bare feet tread on sand in a dimly lit room. On one of the walls of the room, a question, or rather an invitation to ponder, engages and challenges the visitor: "Que laisseras-tu de toi?" (What trace will you leave?) A short film of different plays of light is screened on the next wall. The viewer follows the feet of the unknown main character, who is apparently walking aimlessly, a movement punctuated by several voices and subtitles expressing various identity traits and origins. Every single one of us may think that we are distinct, but ultimately we are composed of bits and pieces from culture, history, and nature. In the end, we all belong to a collective memory, the same shared collective memory. In one corner of the room, there is a space dedicated to introspection and reflecting, sitting or lying on a mat and writing one's tentative answers in a notebook. What traces or memories do we wish to leave? What form will they take?

AF: Speaking of traces and memory, the link to the past, to tangible and intangible memory, I'd like to talk about the artifacts that have been restituted. I'd like to go beyond the materiality that has been returned. We all know that the twenty-six artifacts that France repatriated in November 2021 to its former colony, the Republic of Benin, held different functions and were of different natures. I'd like to know how you — someone who works on memory, archives, traces, on what can't be seen — look at the objects that have come back? How do you understand them?

SD: The fact they have been restituted, the fact that Benin is the first African country to receive artifacts, shows that African countries are entering a new phase, sociologically and politically speaking. I think that, symbolically, it is high time for the power dynamic to shift. We must not forget that the works that have come back stayed in the West for a long time. They have had other lives, and now they will have a third one, so to speak. It's a bit similar

to us, actually. We had a life before colonization, a life during colonization, and a life after colonization. After the official end of colonization, we became hybrid individuals, a blending of knowledge and culture from these eras. Objects are the same. I see them as objects that were loaded with meaning before they left, and upon their return even more so. They were here in Paris for a long time — a lot happened during that period. They carry a double meaning. Then, the fact that, once in Benin, they are going to museums is symbolically powerful. This will enable us to pass on to young people the practices of our ancestors.

As of today, we have been acquainted with only a few aspects of our own past. Consequently, the return of artifacts may allow us to gaze back. Going to the museum, seeing these objects, and drawing young people's attention to them will help them understand that they come from a people or families who had a strong culture, a strong spirituality, and that these elements were transcribed through the objects. Objects must play a role in transmitting the memory of yesterday, but also to some extent the memory of today.

For example, you discovered them for the first time in the Musée du quai Branly, and you were told that they came from Benin and were taken away during the war. Now young people are going to see them in Benin and will be told their story. The youth will learn about the kings they represent, the looting by the French, their long stay in Europe, and finally their return. This adds another layer to their history, to their biography.

AF: One of the outcomes of the restitution was the exhibition *Revelation! Contemporary Art from Benin*. Artworks by forty-two contemporary Beninese artists are on display. The different pieces exhibited enhance the close link between art and the sacred dimension of Beninese cultural life. After stops in Morocco and Martinique, the traveling exhibition is now about to sojourn in Paris at the museum the Conciergerie. I noticed, in particular, the diversity of tools and media — painting, installation, video, sculpture, and photos, like your pieces. What link do you establish between your exhibited works in this specific exhibition and the objects that were returned?

SD: There are the soot drawings *Ombre 1* (*Shadow 1*) and *Ombre* 2 (*Shadow 2*, both 2021), and photograms that are a way of shedding light on our past and on how to better know ourselves. I see the soot drawings as a way to focus on what we don't want to see. For me, what is not seen matters as much as what is seen. During our upbringing, we inherit our ancestors' secrets, evil alliances, or wrong deeds. All that transpires through soot. Soot is considered something dirty — it's something you don't want to touch or go out covered in. It's an opportunity for me to ask: What are we trying to hide from ourselves? Where do our fears lie? What are we rejecting? What do our shadows stand for?

It's only by searching in the shadow that we can find the light. You can't run away from your shadow and find the light — that's impossible. You have to accept it. The more you try to run away from your shadow, the more likely you are to develop a mental disorder. When I talk about shadow, I'm referring to trauma. Everything we repress is what I call the shadow, and it's also what Carl Jung calls the shadow. Everything that is repressed, consciously or unconsciously, born from personal experience or from the experiences of a person who lived before us and passed down through the bloodline, is what I dig up.

More specifically, *Ombre 1* talks about how we create a link with our environment — how, from our mother's womb, our personality is also created, because it is influenced by a number of things, how our identity is gradually shaped. *Ombre 2* states that we have a dark side, something that we are repressing and need to find. There's something invisible that nevertheless speaks to us, hurts us, or makes us envious. In a way, this is how the two works engage with the notion of memory and identity.

My works exhibited here in Paris at the Conciergerie might resemble the act of declaiming panegyrics — families' histories put into song. The visitor sees people's portraits, both men and women. What is compelling is that I've chosen to erase all the facial features that serve to identify them, and replace them with panegyrics. The collective belonging and collective memory stand out, as does the sacred connection to deceased relatives, who are recalled and mentioned in the panegyrics. The artifacts on display have a sacred connotation. They were used during ritual ceremonies for kings. We know that when the king appeared or when traditional ceremonies were held, panegyrics would be declaimed.

1 "Arts/Archives/Performances," Repatriates, July 31 — August 5, 2023, https://repatriates.org/calendar/arts-archives-performances/.
2 "Sènami Donoumassou: Tàn xó [Memory in Prose]," Fondation H, October 2 — December 6, 2024, https://www.fondation-h.com/exhibitions-en/creative-residency-and-exhibition-8.
3 "Revelation! Contemporary Art from Benin," Conciergerie, October 4, 2024 — January 5, 2025, https://www.paris-conciergerie.fr/en/agenda/revelation!-contemporary-art-from-benin.



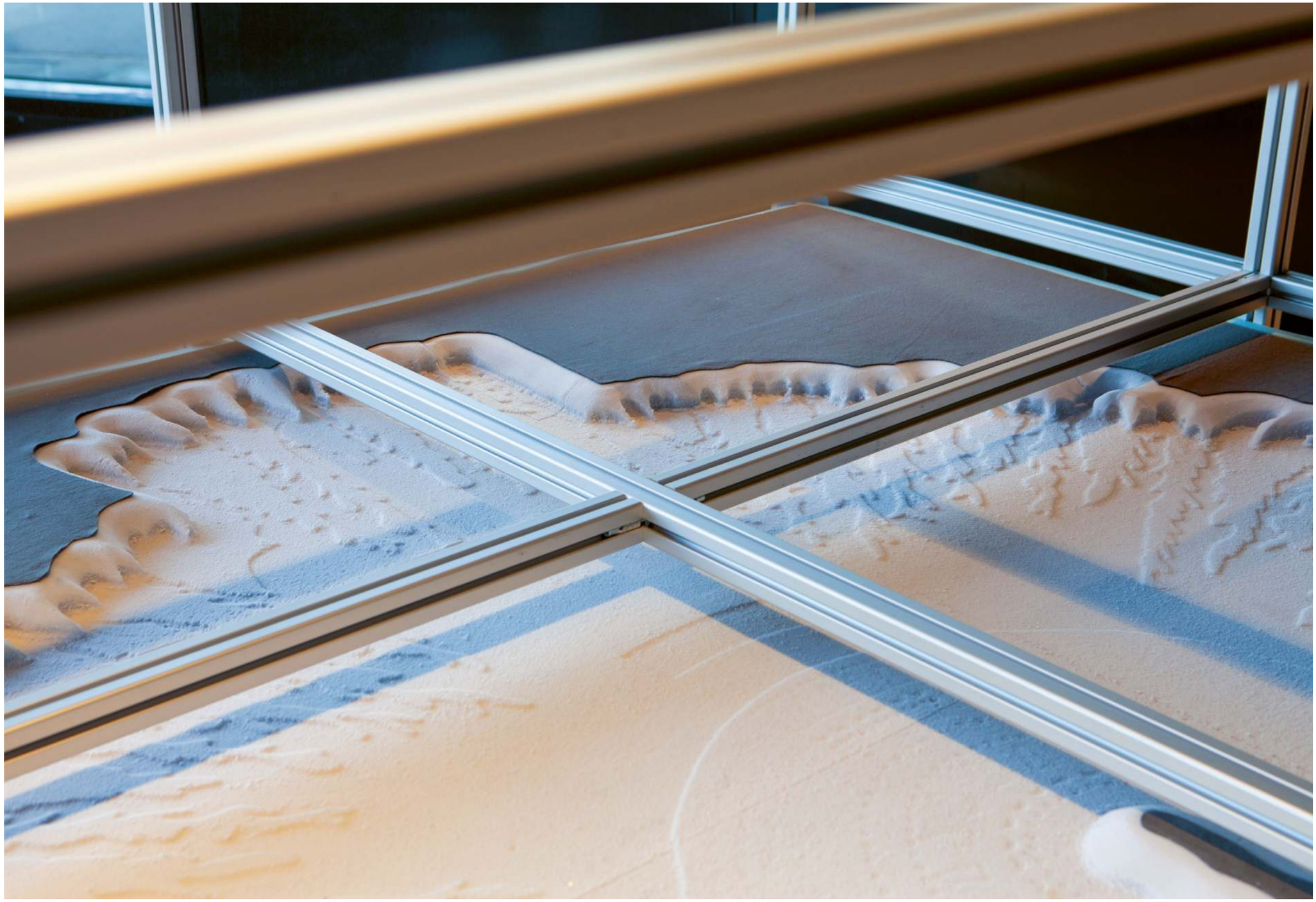
Sènami Donoumassou, *Ombre 1*, 2021, part of a series of drawings that use silk-screen printing, paper, coffee, and ink.



Sènami Donoumassou, *Hɔnvĭ nɔ̌ cínù*, 2022. This photogram is a portrait of a person whose identifying physical features have been erased and replaced by clan panegyrics.

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, *Box with the Sense of its own Unbreaking*, detail of WienWoche installation, 2025. Photo: Verena Melgarejo Weinand.

The following section deals with a case which was central to the Repatriates project, namely that of the so called "Penacho" that Mexico wants repatriated from Austria. In a collective performance in 2025 during WienWoche this soft bed inside a massive 3m wide transport box was carried in a procession to the doors of the Weltmuseum in Vienna as a gift. This gift-giving gesture was accompanied by activists and artists collectively demanding the return. The soft bed above being made for the transport that was claimed to be impossible, which together with the physicist Kerstin Kracht, artist Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, proved in a patented intervention that the museum was instrumentalizing care to avoid repatriation. This was the culmination of years of interventions, some of which are represented here.



A Feast: Reclaiming

Claudia Peña Salinas

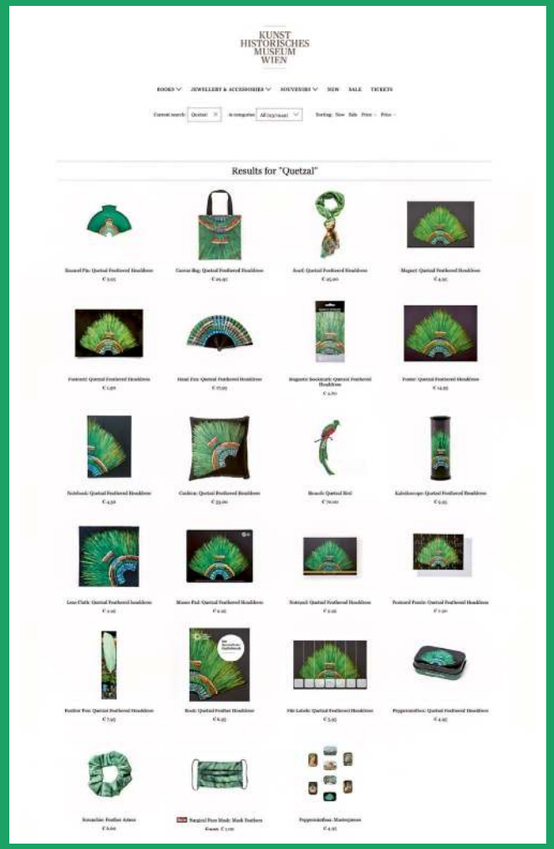


This morning, I took a short walk to the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. It is Sunday, a free day for visitors who are Mexican citizens, and I am here to see the replica of El Penacho de Moctezuma.

After noticing people waiting in line to take their picture with the headdress, I joined them.

The original headdress may have belonged to Moctezuma II, the ninth Aztec ruler from 1502 to 1520. It consists of five hundred tail plumes from quetzals, a bird native to southern Mexico and Guatemala. It could have been a gift or among the items taken from Moctezuma II by the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. In the late nineteenth century, the headdress came into the possession of the Austrian geologist and explorer Ferdinand von Hochstetter. Today, the headdress is displayed at the Weltmuseum Wien, where it has become a significant cultural artifact. Its repatriation remains a contentious issue, with ongoing disputes between the governments of Austria and Mexico.

The label next to it does not mention anything about the original.



The Weltmuseum web shop sells a postcard featuring an image of the headdress, among other items.

Penacho, Weltmuseum Wien, postcard.
Size: 10.5 × 14.7 cm
€ 1.50





Archivo Histórico
del MNA, 1960.
Photo: Ricardo Salazar.

This photograph from 1960 may have been staged, as there is limited information about it. Did they realize they were looking at a replica? Did it matter? In this image, there is a reverence for the object seldom seen among those waiting in line before the replica today. Why has this changed? Is it our comfort with and access to the camera, or something else? The Penacho is no longer an object to observe, but one to possess and claim.



Before leaving, I take a picture of the crowd around the object.



The vintage postcard features an aerial view of Chapultepec Castle. Sitting high amid the greenery — its elevation rivaled only by the nearby glass and metal skyscrapers — it remains a strange sight to behold. An image suspended in time.



Later, I visited Chapultepec Castle to look for Emperor Maximilian and Empress Carlota's Gala Carriage. Maximilian, the second son of Archduke Franz Karl of Austria, served as Emperor of Mexico from 1864 until his execution in 1867. He and his wife, Empress Carlota, lived at Chapultepec Castle.



Édouard Manet painted *The Execution of Emperor Maximilian* in 1868/9, after the actual event. Curiously, he signed it with the date of the execution, 1867, as if he had been present at that very moment. There is a shadow in the lower right corner. Is it the painter's or the viewer's?



To my surprise, a miniature replica of the carriage sits just around the corner. In 2011, the government of then-president Felipe Calderón proposed lending lending the Penacho in exchange for the carriage. The Viennese government declined the offer. Was the miniature created in case the Viennese had accepted, leaving us with a copy of the carriage?



That night, I had dinner at El Penacho de Moctezuma, a restaurant in Mexico City. Outside, a large neon image of the headdress greets visitors.



A Frank Stella – like painted door welcomes me as I search for the entrance to the restaurant. Beyond it, a corridor is adorned with several small Ojos de Dios, or Tzicuri, as the Wixárika, a Native people of Mexico, call them. One cannot help but notice the similarity between the modernist, geometric, iconic painting and these more spiritual, humble objects, whose purpose is to aid in seeing beyond our present realm.

On the wall, one of these Tzicuri hangs above a frame containing a postcard image of the original headdress and an inscription noting its current location: the Weltmuseum in Vienna. The lacquered surface shows cracks, as if yearning to release its object.



Everything around here bears its image. The table is set, and all around me people devour their meals joyfully.



Quetzalli, 2021
Vinyl, 140 × 167 in.
Curated by Io nit Behar
DePaul Art Museum,
Chicago (inside window
view).

A composite image of
the headdress combines
elements from the original
at the Weltmuseum Wien
and the reproduction at
the National Museum of
Anthropology in Mexico
City. The upper section,
made primarily of quetzal
feathers, is taken from
the reproduction, while
the lower crown portion is
from the original.





Quetzalli Flag, 2021
Fabric, 39 × 78 in.
Der Kunstsalon in FLUCC,
Vienna. Flag of the
Penacho composite image
waving in Vienna,
as part of the exhibition
Properties of a Presence,
curated by Khadija von
Zinnenburg Carroll.

Museum Souvenirs Featuring Quetzalapanecáyotl: Sustainable Traces with a Holistic Approach

Nina Höchtl and Yosune Miquelajauregui

If you visit the web shop of the Weltmuseum Wien — the Viennese ethnographic museum that is part of the Kunsthistorisches Museum — you will currently find more than twenty souvenirs featuring or referencing one of the most controversial objects in the museum's collection: an artifact commonly known as the *Penacho de Moctezuma* (Moctezuma's headdress).[1] Originally called *quetzalapanecáyotl* in Nahuatl, in the shop and on various souvenirs it is announced as "Quetzal feathered headdress." These souvenirs are listed under categories such as "Weltmuseum," "Aztec," "Feather," and "Quetzal," in prices ranging from one to seventy euros. Some are accompanied by short descriptions. For instance, the description of the enamel pin reads:



Size: 34 × 24 mm
enamel covered with epoxy resin.
Decorate your jacket or bag with this colorful pin, which is inspired by a very special object from the collection of the Weltmuseum Wien. The magnificient [sic], Aztec Quetzal feathered headdress is the only existing one and consist [sic] of hundreds of long Quetzal-feathers and more than thousand golden ornaments. Quetzal feathered headdress, Mexico, Aztec, early 16th cent., inv. no. 10.402.[2]

Quetzalapanecáyotl enamel pin, 2025. Photo: Nina Höchtl.

Quetzalapanecáyotl cushion, 2025. Photo: Nina Höchtl.

Typically, a souvenir is produced in a certain location — although most of these items do not specify their place of production — and intended for widespread distribution elsewhere. In this case, while the souvenirs are meant for visitors from all around the world, they strongly evoke the region where the quetzalapanecáyotl disappeared under Spanish colonial rule in what is now Mexico. Today, these souvenirs can be purchased online or at the site where the object in question surfaced in 1596, when it was first mentioned in a European inventory, in a territory now known as Austria. In the shop, the quetzalapanecáyotl appears in various sizes as jewellery, a scarf, a bag, a fan, and a puzzle, among other objects. These

items can be purchased and taken home, either for oneself or to be gifted to someone else, much like any other souvenir. Souvenirs serve as reminders of past events or distant experiences, carrying their significance into the future. However, the past events that these souvenirs evoke — dating back to Spanish colonization — are far from cheerful, and their significance for the future is ripe with contradictions.

Colonial imperial relations and operations led to the quetzalapanecáyotl ending up in the Weltmuseum's collection at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Over the last forty years, it has faced conflicting desires, divergent interpretations, ongoing discussions, and intensifying demands for restitution. From 2010 to 2012, a joint research and restoration project involving Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), and the Weltmuseum concluded that, for the time being, transporting the quetzalapanecáyotl — whether by air or by sea — would pose too great a risk to its fragile feathers. Thus, these twenty-three souvenirs unintentionally function as both memory aids and evidence — they continually recall the fact that the quetzalapanecáyotl has not been returned.

Our project strives to move "beyond" this impasse. It started with the following question: How can we think about restitution in relation to processes of repair and regeneration while considering other-than-human aspects of existence? In these times of deep uncertainty, the entire network of ecosystems, now spiraling out of control, is at stake; the interdependence between humans and their environment, in all its manifestations, must be acknowledged. Rather than debating the necessity or potential risks of physically returning the quetzalapanecáyotl, our collaboration began with the tangible aspects of the object — specifically, the more than twelve thousand now untouchable feathers used in its fabrication — to focus on the tangible impact of the production of souvenirs. For instance, although presumably produced in Europe, more than nine thousand kilometers away from Mexico this manufacturing impacts the habitats of the birds that provided the object's feathers — the cotinga, quetzal, roseate spoonbill, and squirrel cuckoo. Hence we ask: How can these souvenirs serve as acts of gift-giving and self-gifting without causing further harm?

On the museum's website, "Sustainable" is one of the "special topics" for browsing souvenirs. Selecting it reveals only one of the twenty-three souvenirs featuring the quetzalapanecáyotl: a cushion. The description highlights that the cushion is made of 100% recycled polyester microfiber. For the museum, the concept of "sustainable" appears to be defined solely by the use of recycled materials. We sought to challenge this narrow interpretation of sustainability by evaluating its associated footprints through a broader, more holistic lens — one that incorporates the social, economic, and political dimensions of production. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the product's true impacts throughout its entire life cycle — that is, by assessing each stage of its creation, use, and disposal.

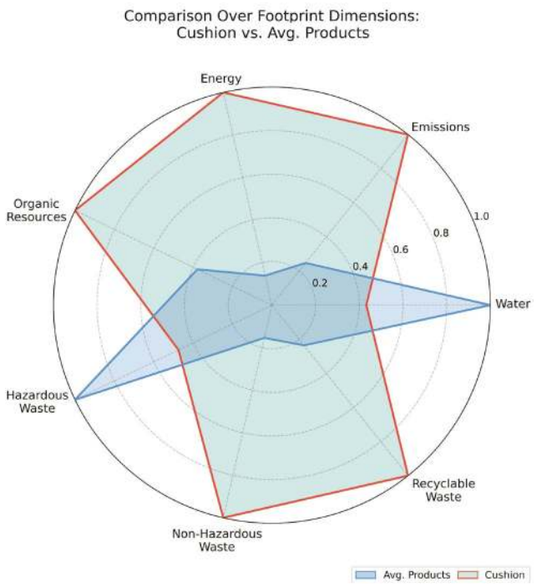
We assessed the socio-environmental footprint of twenty-seven museum souvenirs by integrating five indicators — resources, emissions, energy, waste, and human well-being — into a footprint index ranging from 0 (no impact) to 1 (greatest impact). An exhaustive literature review produced a dataset containing average estimates for each indicator. Two multicriteria decision-making (MCDM) approaches were then applied to integrate the indicators into a footprint index for each souvenir. Both methods aim to identify an optimal solution based on multiple conflicting indicators. A programming interface was developed to enhance the visualization of model outcomes and clarify the decision-making process, facilitating more informed and effective decisions.[3] This tool allows users to modify the weighting of indicators according to specific stakeholders' interests and objectives. The process is designed to be fully transparent and interpretable, enabling a clear understanding of how input parameters are used and enhancing the overall explainability of the results, including the integrated assessment of each souvenir's footprint.

Our analytical framework also allows for the exploration of plausible "scenarios" for museum souvenirs, which can be adapted to assess potential footprint impacts within a set of predefined conditions. These scenarios are constructed by adjusting the weights of different indicators and analyzing them using the multicriteria techniques explained above. Rather than providing definitive predictions of the future, these scenarios serve as tools for collectively exploring how the interests and priorities of various stakeholders may result in either sustainable or unsustainable outcomes. This approach fosters dialogue, encourages collaboration, and provides insights into how diverse perspectives can shape more responsible and informed decision-making.

For example, our analysis of the cushion's impacts revealed that it is among the top ten souvenirs with the largest socio-environmental footprint.[4] This ranking is based on a comprehensive evaluation that considers both environmental and social dimensions, including resource extraction, energy consumption, waste generation, emissions, and the well-being of communities involved in its production and supply chain. The findings highlight the significant impact this product has across its life cycle, emphasizing the need for sustainable practices and more responsible production methods to mitigate its footprint. If the best possible scenarios across all environmental and social conditions were realized, the three souvenirs with the lowest impact would be the coaster, the postcard puzzle, and the scarf.

Our framework explicitly considers the political, social, and institutional contexts, at both regional and local levels, that shape interactions within networks of actors. From this perspective, integrating multicriteria techniques with collaborative research offers a constructive approach for uncovering the systems that underpin sustainability-related decision-making. This holistic approach deepens the understanding of complex dynamics and supports the development of more informed, context-sensitive strategies to advance sustainability priorities. In short, decisions made today will influence the complex futures ahead on our damaged planet.

The quetzalapanecáyotl souvenirs have the potential to act as a bond, enabling different actors — such as souvenir manufacturers, museum shop managers, and purchasers — to recognize shared histories and other-than-human entanglements. The colonial formation of Europe was built on the exploitation of the bodies, ecosystems, cultures, and heritage of Mexico and other territories. The deforestation and extractivism that have afflicted Mexico from the sixteenth century to the present are merely the other side of this colonial process. As a result, the once-thriving habitats of the quetzal — the most emblematic bird whose feathers were used for the headdress — are now nearly destroyed, and the species itself is on the brink of extinction. We propose that a holistic approach to restitution could include efforts to restore these ecosystems, not least as part of a broader attempt to construct an imaginary and a politics that are no longer human-centered. Our project is a small gesture toward this endeavor, processing the past to envision future scenarios that aim to collectively "think about how much you can give up to promote more life."[5]



The Ecological Footprint app, 2025.



Verde Esmeralda, performance, 2025. Photo: Georgina Hugues.

Next page: Nina Höchtl, Screenprint QR code for https://eco-footprint.vercel.app, edition of 50 for launch of App during Eternos Retornos, Wien-Woche, 2025.

1 Kunsthistorisches Museum Shop, accessed December 29, 2024, https://shop.khm.at/en/.
2 Kunsthistorisches Museum Shop, "Enamel Pin: Quetzal Feathered Headdress," accessed December 29, 2024, https://shop.khm.at/en.
3 The Ecological Footprint app was developed by Nina Höchtl, Yosune Miquelajauregui, Raúl de la Rosa, and Camila Toledo Jaime at the National Laboratory of Sustainability Science of UNAM. See https://eco-footprint.vercel.app/.
4 Since material data and manufacturing locations were not provided, a composition analysis was conducted by Camila Toledo Jaime. Product labels were reviewed to identify the materials used, and additional research was carried out when label information was missing or incomplete. As of November 2025, not all of the souvenirs assessed in 2024 remain available, such as the coaster, while a new one, the Quetzal Feathered Headdress brooch, has appeared but hasn't yet been included in the analysis. The material composition of all twenty-seven souvenirs is available in the app. See https://eco-footprint.vercel.app/Productos.
5 Naomi Klein, "Dancing the World into Being: A Conversation with Idle No More's Leanne Simpson," *Yes!*, March 6, 2013, https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2013/03/06/dancing-the-world-into-being-a-conversation-with-idle-no-more-leanne-simpson.



Biographies

Anindilyakwa Arts is a hub of creativity spanning the Groote Archipelago in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Northern Territory. The Warnamamalya (Traditional Owner)-led creative program proudly supports local employment and encourages traditional and contemporary creative practices. Anindilyakwa artists explore creative avenues through “old and new ways,” drawing on deep knowledge of traditional practices and experimenting with concepts in contemporary art disciplines.

Britten Andrews is an Australian filmmaker and photographer with over a decade of experience working closely with Indigenous communities. He is currently the media coordinator for the Anindilyakwa Land Council. Guided by Traditional Owners, the media program documents important stories, traditions, and language, helping to preserve the cultural identity of the Anindilyakwa people for future generations. In 2023, Andrews documented the repatriation journey of 174 cultural heritage items from Manchester Museum back to Groote Eylandt. He accompanied an Anindilyakwa delegation in partnership with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), capturing the significance of this moment in his film *Engku-Wa Angalya* (*Far Away from Home*, 2025).

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll was raised by the Pacific Ocean around Naarm (Melbourne) Australia. She is an artist and professor at the Central European University, currently leading the ERC project *Repatriates: Artistic Research in Museums and Communities in the process of Repatriation from Europe* (repatriates.org). She received her PhD from Harvard and is the author of the books — and exhibitions that arose from them — *Art in the Time of Colony* (2014); *The Importance of Being Anachronistic: Contemporary Aboriginal Art and Museum Reparations* (2016), *Botanical Drift: Protagonists of the Invasive Herbarium* (2017), *Bordered Lives: Immigration Detention Archive (2020); The Contested Crown: Repatriation Politics between Mexico and Europe* (2022). Her installations and films have been shown internationally at contemporary art and film festival venues including the Venice, Marrakech, and Sharjah Biennales, ZKM, Savvy, HKW, Manifesta, and the ICA London.

Manuela Ciotti is Professor of the Social and Cultural Anthropology of the Global South at the University of Vienna, where she leads the research team Sedimented visions. She is also the Principal Investigator of the ERC Advanced Grant project *The anthropology of the future: an art world perspective* (ANTHROFUTURE). Her research addresses questions of social justice, art, and future in the Global South.

Njabulo Chipangura is Assistant Professor of African Anthropology at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, where he specializes in museum anthropology and critical heritage studies. He joined Maynooth University in February 2025, following his role as Curator of Anthropology at Manchester Museum, University of Manchester (2022–2025). Prior to that, he spent over a decade as Curator of Archaeology at the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, based at Mutare Museum (2009–2020). He holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. His work critically engages with the coloniality embedded in museums and advocates for collaborative, community-based methodologies.

Rosa Anna Di Lella is a cultural anthropologist and officer at the MUCIV-Museum of Civilisations in Rome, where she curates the collections of the former Colonial Museum and coordinates the Educational Department. Her work combines anthropological research with participatory and collaborative practices, fostering critical reflection on sensitive and contested heritage. She contributes to the curation of programs and exhibitions, including the *Museo delle Opacità* (Museum of Opacities) project, which seeks to rethink how museums interpret colonial history and legacies.

Sènami Donoumassou was born in 1991 in Benin. She currently lives and works as a visual artist in Cotonou. Donoumassou explores notions of identity, heritage, and history through her practice. In her creations — which oscillate between photograms, protean installations, video works, and drawings — she experiments with the technical and poetic potential of light. She has developed a body of work around oral traditions, body memory, and various African philosophies. She has participated in several international residency programs, including Villa N'dar, Saint-Louis, Senegal (2024); Villa Ruffieux, Sierre, Switzerland (2024); and Trame at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris (2023). Her work has been featured in exhibitions including *Unraveling the (Under-)Development Complex* at SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin (2022); Rencontres de Bamako (2022); and *Xógbé* and *Amazones*, both at Le Centre, Abomey-Calavi, Benin (2022 and 2017, respectively). In 2024, she took part in the Dakar Biennale and presented a solo exhibition at Fondation H in Paris. She received the inaugural James Barnor Award in 2022 and a special mention from the jury of the Photography Award at the Musée du quai Branly — Jacques Chirac in 2024.

Adéwolé Faladé is a cultural heritage activist with a passion for multiculturalism. For more than a decade, she has collected, preserved, and promoted the cultural heritage and traditions of the Republic of Benin through Mewihonto, the association she has directed since 2016. Within Mewihonto, she has had multiple roles, including field investigator, journalist, project manager, and coeditor. Faladé earned a Master of Arts in British, American, and postcolonial studies from the Université La Sorbonne in Paris (2008) and a Master of Arts in French literature from the University of Illinois Chicago (2009). Upon her return to Cotonou, Benin, she engaged with the local art scene, working with musicians, actors, film and theater directors, and event planners in Benin and other African countries. Faladé is currently a doctoral candidate in comparative history at the Central European University (CEU) in Vienna and core researcher in the Repatriates project. Her research interests revolve around the restitution of Beninese artifacts from France and the new ties fostered through their return.

Kaudife Haikali is a Namibian filmmaker, director, and producer dedicated to telling African stories with authenticity and depth. As the founder and director of Joe Vision Production, he has made significant contributions to Namibia's film industry through feature films, documentaries, and training initiatives. His projects address themes of intergenerational trauma and social transformation, including the Berlinale Silver Bear for Best Director winner *PEPE* (2024), which is the Dominican Republic's Oscar entry for best international feature film, and the box-office success *My F*k, Marelize!* (2025). His latest documentary, *Netumbo: A Leader Beyond Politics* (2025), examines Namibia's first female president and the nation's path toward renewal. Haikali also cofounded the Creative Industry Guide and Propaganda Prop Shop, further enriching Namibia's creative ecosystem. He holds a master's degree in film, with research focused on the sustainability of Namibia's film industry.

Sophie Haikali is an award-winning filmmaker and producer with over a decade of experience in film and media. Based in Namibia, she specializes in international co-productions spanning documentaries, television, and feature films. Her credits include *The Daily Show* (Comedy Central, US), *The British Tribe Next Door* (Channel 4, UK), *Atlánticas* (Spain), and *My F*k, Marelize!* (Namibia/South Africa). She produced *Netumbo: A Leader Beyond Politics* (2025) and *PEPE* (2024), which won the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlinale and became the Dominican Republic's Oscar entry for best international feature film. Haikali holds a master's degree in media culture from Maastricht University and a bachelor's degree in media studies from the University of Namibia.

Nina Höchtl is a visual artist, researcher, and teacher. Based at the Center of Gender Research and Studies (CIEG) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in Mexico City, she

conceives and practices research as a transdisciplinary endeavor that combines artistic, archival, and analytical practices with the study of visual arts — particularly visual culture — and queer, post- and de(s)colon/ial/izing feminist theories and practices. In 2013, Höchtl received a PhD from Goldsmiths, University of London, after which she held a postdoctoral research fellowship at the Institute of Aesthetic Research (IIE) at UNAM. In 2018, her film *¡Hauntings in the Archive!* (2017) won the Women's Voices Now Best Documentary Feature Award. Since September 2022, Höchtl has been part of the international research project "Itacate: Sobras trasatlánticas," the research group "Figuras del Exceso y Políticas del Cuerpo" (FIDEX), the Centro de Investigación en Artes (CIA) at the Universidad Miguel Hernández in Elche, Spain, and the IIE.

Laimi Kakololo is a Namibian visual artist who combines textiles and jewelry to create engaging and immersive art experiences. She holds a Diploma in Visual Art and a Bachelor of Arts Honors from the University of Namibia in Windhoek and works as an educator. Born and raised in Angola by her grandmother (and inspiration) during the civil war, they migrated to Namibia when she was nine years old. Her work is rooted in the research of craftsmanship and techniques from around the region, where tradition meets innovation, and where the past intertwines with the present to create something extraordinary.

Danjibana Noeleen Lalara is an Anindilyakwa women, cultural leader, fashion designer, model, director and performer. Her multidisciplinary practice re-imagines ancestral knowledge through visual art, fashion, performance and film. A fierce advocate for Anindilyakwa Arts, Danjibana has opened doors and built pathways for artistic expression, cultural continuation, and safe gathering spaces for Anindilyakwa women to come together; places to sit, to make, to laugh, to dance, and to remember. Her leadership strengthens identity within community and shares culture with outside audiences on the terms of Anindilyakwa people. In 2023, Danjibana led the landmark repatriation of 174 cultural artefacts from the Manchester Museum, including Dadikwakwa-kwa (doll-shell), returning these significant items to Groote Eylandt after being away for generations. Through visionary leadership and unflinching creativity, Danjibana is a tour de force of Australian Indigenous art.

Wietske Maas is a curator, artistic researcher, and editor based in Venice. She has worked as curator at the European Cultural Foundation, Amsterdam (2008–2018) and at BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht (2014–2025) where she convened exhibitions, public programs, collective study, and publishing projects as acts of critical pub licness: questioning how publishing can become a site for shared conversation on art and life-in-common. Alongside this work, she has developed artistic research in diverse international contexts, investigating social and urban ecology as sites of transformative convivial assembly.

Edith Mamarika (1945–2024), a senior Warnindilyakwa artist, elder, and cultural knowledge holder from Umbakumba on Groote Eylandt, is known for her traditional and contemporary weaving using both pandanus and ghost nets, and for her shell necklaces. She is also recognized for her role in the repatriation of cultural artifacts. She shared memories of playing with some of the returned items, like the *dadikwakwa-kwa* shell dolls, with her grandmother.

Verena Melgarejo Weinandt is a German Bolivian visual artist, researcher and curator. She is currently anartistic researcher and project manager for the Repatriates ERC- research project at the Central European University, Vienna. Previously, she was a researcher at the University of the Arts Berlin in the research group "Knowledge in the Arts" funded by the German Research Foundation. Her current artistic research project as part of Repatriates focuses on the role of stereotypes and how they shape cultural and institutional practices, as well as our relationship to the fictional, imagination, and nonhuman beings as a tool for (re)creating both individual and collective identity. Her work on Gloria E. Anzaldúa since 2015 has led her to a series of workshops, exhibitions, publications, and educational programs. Her artistic works have been exhibited at the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo Salta (Argentina), at the nGbK Berlin (Germany) and at the Biennial Sur Cúcuta (Colombia) and Buenos Aires (Argentina).

Yosune Miquelajauregui is head of the National Laboratory of Sustainability Sciences (LANCIS) in the Institute of Ecology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and leader of the Socio-ecological Systems Modeling Laboratory. Her research focuses on the design and implementation of participatory frameworks that model decision-making processes under conditions of deep uncertainty. She also studies coupled socioecological systems — thresholds, trajectories, patterns of vulnerability, and adaptation — along with the resilience of ecosystem services, the territorialization of sustainable development goals, and capacity building for sustainability. She holds a PhD in forest sciences from Laval University in Quebec City, Canada.

Tamara Newton is a scholar and museum practitioner whose work focuses on decolonial issues. She is pursuing her PhD at the University of Birmingham, supported by the Haywood Scholarship and the W. M. & B. W. Lloyd Charity. Her research investigates and compares approaches to the repatriation of Indigenous belongings

from museums, with an emphasis on how heritage institutions can prioritize care for Indigenous communities and their possessions and facilitate decolonization and revitalization through repatriation processes. With a background in art history, fine art, gender and sexuality studies, and British colonial history, Newton aims to critically analyze colonial legacies in innovative and provocative ways. She is part of the European Research Council — funded Repatriates project cohort. Based between England and Portugal, she also engages in a critical analysis of Portugal's colonial legacies. Her article "Contemplating Colonial Echoes: Visitor Perspectives in a Portuguese Museum" appears in the spring 2026 issue of *Exhibition*, and her paper "From Artefacts to Blackface: The Ongoing Influence of Colonialism in Portuguese Culture" received the 2025 DC Watt Prize from the Transatlantic Studies Association for best conference paper by an early-career scholar.

Samson Ogiamien is an artist and educator based in Graz. Born in Nigeria, he comes from a family of Royal Bronze Casters linked to the Igun Eronmwon guild. His education in Nigeria focused on art and design as well as welding and construction; he also managed a sculptor's workshop. In Austria, he completed the two-year master program in sculpture at Ortweinschule Graz, graduating with distinction in 2007. In 2010 and 2012 he received the Outstanding Artist Award for "Intercultural Dialogue" from the Austrian Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and in 2014, the award from the city of Graz for the promotion of the arts. He has exhibited and performed at the Ethnography Museum of Geneva, La Strada International Festival for Street and Puppet Theater in Graz, the Colombo Art Biennale in Sri Lanka, and Kunsthaus Graz. Ogiamien is part of the European network IN SITU and is currently touring Europe with *Iyagbon's Mirror*, a project developed in collaboration with the Onyrikon performance group and the artist and researcher Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll. The work addresses the critical subject of provenance and the reclaimed restitution of thousands of artifacts that European museums obtained directly or indirectly through colonial exploitation and theft.

Francesca Tarocco is Professor of Buddhist Studies at Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the founding director of the NICHE Centre for Environmental Humanities, where she leads an interdisciplinary international network of scholars and practitioners focusing on critical environmental humanities, water studies and political ecology. She is currently researching for two new books on cosmotechnics and on different trajectories of human-environmental relationships in Sinophone Asia. Tarocco also writes for *Frieze* and other art journals.

Claudia Peña Salinas lives and works between Mexico City and New York. Peña Salinas studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and received an MFA from Hunter College, New York. Her work includes sculptures, installations, paintings, videos, publications, and photographs and has been displayed at Casa Gilardi, Mexico City (2025), Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg, Florida (2024), Es Baluard Museu d'Art Modern, Mallorca, SP, (2023), Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati (2022), The High Line, New York (2021), DePaul Art Museum, Chicago (2021), Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, New York (2021), Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR, (2019), the Arizona State University Art Museum, Arizona, (2019), the Whitney Museum of American Art (2018), Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil (2015), Queens Museum of Art (2012), Art Museum of Puerto Rico (2006), and Museo del Barrio, New York (2005).

Jesse Weaver Shipley is an artist, writer, and ethnographer who explores the links between aesthetics and power. He is the John D. Willard Professor of African and African American Studies and Oratory at Dartmouth College. His films, images, and multi-media installations experiment with storytelling and portraiture and have shown across Europe, North America, Asia, and Africa. He is the author of articles and books including *Living the Hiplife: Celebrity and Entrepreneurship in Ghanaian Popular Music* and *Trickster Theatre: The Poetics of Freedom in Urban Africa*. He is completing a film on global fashion and a book on the *Aesthetics of Revolution*.

Christopher Williams-Wynn is an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at Freie Universität Berlin. His research on modern and contemporary art examines how media have been used to explore the epistemological claims, political consequences, and aesthetic implications of disciplinary knowledge and practice. Along with his book *Arts of Control* (forthcoming), he has published in *Art Journal*, *Grey Room*, and *The Art Bulletin*, among other venues. Support for his research has been provided by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Max Planck Society, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, and Institute for Studies on Latin American Art. He received his PhD in History of Art and Architecture from Harvard University.

A publication accompanying the exhibition
Tide of Returns, March 28 – October 11, 2026, Ocean Space, Venice
Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Castello 5069, 30122, Venice

Editors:
Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll,
Christopher Williams-Wynn,
Verena Melgarejo Weinandt

Editorial management:
Lydia Fuchs

Copyediting:
Max Bach

Translations:
Judy Lalara
Maxine McKenzie
Alberston Lalara

Graphic design and typesetting:
Toledo i Dertschei

Typeface:
ABC Diatype Semi-Mono

Reproductions:
max-color, Berlin

Production:
Kati Klaeske

Paper:
Gmund Action Night Offshore Blue, 310 g/m²
Munken Polar rough, 120 g/m²

Printing and binding:
Livonia Print, Riga

© 2026 Hatje Cantz Verlag, Berlin, and authors

Published by
Hatje Cantz Verlag GmbH
Mommsenstraße 27
10629 Berlin
Germany
contact@hatjecantz.de
www.hatjecantz.com
A Ganske Publishing Group Company

ISBN: 978-3-7757-6316-5 [PRINT]
ISBN: 978-3-7757-6317-2 [PDF]
ISBN: 978-3-7757-6318-9 [EPUB]

The automated analysis of this publication in order to obtain information, in particular about patterns, trends, and correlations as outlined in § 44b (“Text and data mining”) of the German Act on Copyright and Related Rights (UrhG), is prohibited.

Printed in Europa

Cover illustration:
Carlos Toledo

Frontispiece:
Britten Andrews, still taken during the making of *From My Mother's Country*, March 15, 2025.

This research has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 101001407 – Repatriates).

www.repatriates.org

Tide of Returns is commissioned and co-produced by TBA21–Academy, Fundación TBA21, c/Amor de Dios 1, Madrid 28014, Spain www.tba21.org, and Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

