

MAGICAL

THINKING

OF
SYSTEMS

AND
BELIEFS

JAN 29 TO APR 19, 2026

MAGICAL THINKING, OF SYSTEMS AND BELIEFS

In *Magical Thinking, of Systems and Beliefs*, artists manuel arturo abreu, DB Amorin, Jonathan González, fields harrington, Africanus Okokon, and sidony o'neal traverse causal, alogical, and ritualistic modes of knowledge formation. Their works across sculpture, new media, sound, print, installation, and video evoke the often denigrating phrase “magical thinking,” which to skeptics suggests an impossibility or distortion in the connection between beliefs and reality.

Works in the exhibition *Magical Thinking, of Systems and Beliefs* resist Western frameworks and their historically dominant visual and political regimes, and instead offer invitations to see signs, relationships, and links between the material and spiritual worlds in knowledge systems from across the Global South. These invitations range from recognizing disappearances within Nollywood film, critiquing connective and alienating technologies in the Pacific Islands, and speculating on Black cellular immortality. Such magical thinking operates as a fugitive mode of existence and resistance.

A new commission for the exhibition from Jonathan González, *suite for a minor meeting*, will be performed at the African Meeting House of the Museum of African American History, Boston/Nantucket (MAAH) in collaboration with Angela Tate, Chief Curator and Director of Collections (MAAH). *Magical Thinking, of Systems and Beliefs* is organized by Laurel V. McLaughlin, TUAG Curator, in collaboration with David Thacker, Senior Preparator and Installations Manager, and Meera Chauhan, Exhibitions Coordinator, and is accompanied by a multi-authored reader. Exhibition design is provided by Common Space, a creative studio founded by Jon Santos. Generous funding for the 2023 symposium *Magical Thinking* at MASS MoCA was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art, and exhibition support is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

AFRICANUS OKOKON

Unpossessed
2022

Akuaba
2025

fire
(Picture disc version)
2025



Africanus Okokon, *Unpossessed* (still), 2022

Image Description: A central silhouette of a person that is out of focus in dark gray, with blue, yellow, and gray pixelations framing the figure.

Africanus Okokon works with moving image, performance, painting, assemblage, collage, sound, and installation to explore systems of forgetting and remembrance. In sharing collective and personal mediated histories, Okokon often references the cultures of his father and mother, of Nigeria and Ghana, respectively. The installation *Unpossessed* reveals scenes of disappearance in the films of Nollywood—Nigeria’s movie industry—through a reactive video sculpture. Triggered by the movements of audiences, visions of ghostly disappearance are removed time and again. Using antique Vaseline soft focus, rephotography, CRT “picture tube,” and custom Max software with webcam, Okokon reiterates disappearance through the work’s creation. Meanwhile, RGB color projects off a mirror from underneath the TV, creating a ghosting effect echoed in the soundtrack of a Ghanaian choir run through a synthesizer. Functioning alongside the technical disappearances is the symbolism of disappearance within Nollywood

films. These plot-driven productions are often DIY, with small budgets and stories drawn from everyday community life. Resampling these narratives, Okokon unveils the ethics of image fugitivity in globalization, and the conceptual escapes from constrictions of everyday life. Appearing at a rapid pace, the images signal the acceleration of contemporary culture, risking detachment and even alienation from their original contexts. The vinyl record listening station *fire*, is a similar invitation to *Unpossessed* to meditate on states of transition, the collapsing of time, the power of belief, and forgetting through an excerpt of an audio visual performance. *fire* was performed in 2023 at the MASS MoCA symposium *Magical Thinking*.

Seen alongside *Unpossessed*, the sculpture *Akuaba* references a ritual fertility doll associated with the Fante people of Ghana. Here, Okokon splices an original *Akuaba* doll with the head of a store-bought baby doll and recasts it in resin. Presiding over the disappearances, *Akuaba* suggests the cycles of life and death that echo the installation’s repeating images.

fields harrington, *Surreptitious Spread*
(*Ventilation Series*), 2023

Image description: A silver circular ventilation duct wrapped into a knot on a sand-colored floor with white wall in background.



FIELDS HARRINGTON

Surreptitious Spread
(Ventilation Series)
2023

*Monkey Bar/
Lab Support Stand*
2023

*Propagate at Two
Revolutions per Hour*
(roller drum series)
2023

*Untitled (Volumetric
Surface Render of the
Nuclear Envelope of One
HeLa Cell)*
2023

*Untitled (George Otto Gey
with His Roller Drum)*
2023

Disembodied Survival
2025

Surreptitious Spread
(Ventilation Series)
2023

In fields harrington's practice, sculpture, performance, video, photography, and writing portray immaterial forces that shape the production of empirical knowledge, particularly within Western science. harrington's series "Non-Exhaustive Work" (2023), consisting of sculpture, a C-print with privacy filter, and a dye sublimation print, alongside a new poster *Disembodied Survival*, departs from the HeLa cell. This notoriously immortal cell line was extracted from Henrietta Lacks's cervical cancer cells in 1951 without her consent. Questioning the knowledge-producing system of scientific inquiry through the commonplace tools of a lab support stand (known as "monkey bars"), ventilation ducts, and roller drums used in cell culture, alongside images of the cell itself, harrington also reconfigures such objects as speculative propositions. The works consider immortality as a fugitive escape from death, akin to the concept of free time as a space outside of work. As harrington says, "Non-exhaustive work could be defined in many ways. For our purposes, we will define it as work performed by lives which are themselves not subject to exhaustion: immortal life."

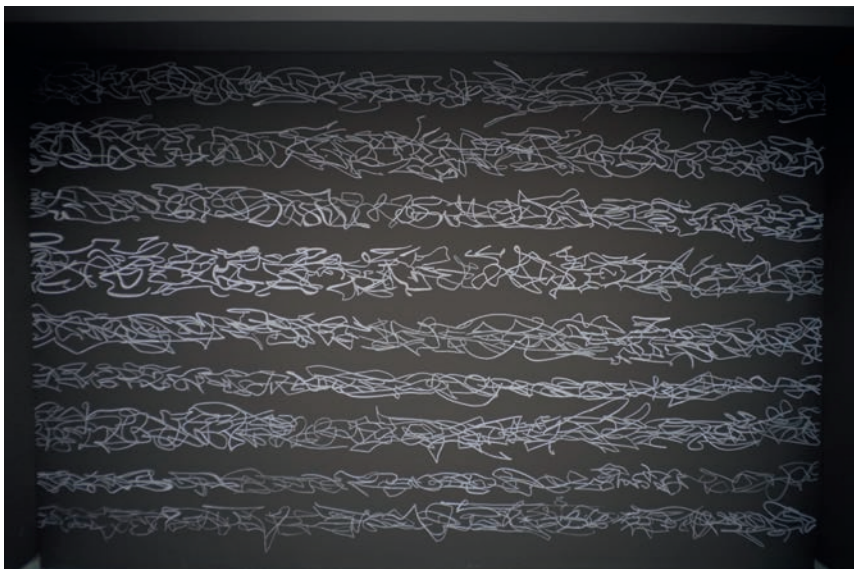
MANUEL ARTURO ABREU

*Untitled (Herramienta,
FamilySearch)*
2017–ongoing

*Debajo del agua: the wake
work of Enerolisa Núñez*
2021

*Untitled (Herramienta,
FamilySearch)*
2017–ongoing

Untitled (Herramienta)
2014



manuel arturo abreu,
Untitled (Herramienta),
2021

Image Description: A
black wall with white
writing that does not use a
recognizable alphabet.

Across manuel arturo abreu's practice, the artist queries the current uses of and potential speculations about everyday objects, ultimately countering national, religious, and artistic logics and boundaries. The wall installation and digital prints of *Untitled (Herramienta, FamilySearch)* and the floor-based altarlike installation *Untitled (Herramienta)* embody an ongoing research endeavor concerning the tools of knowledge production and familial ancestry. The wall installation features asemic writing—an experimental form of script without codified words—paired with digital prints on canvas, which due to varying degrees of decay and disrepair have illegible components. Comparing Dominican civil archival records concerning their familial ancestry with asemic writing, abreu cites state-sanctioned systems of knowledge preservation alongside personal and spiritual world-building. Viewed in synergy with the floor-based installation *Untitled (Herramienta)*, composed of USB cables, keys, coffee filters, eggshell

powder, beeswax, and a vintage fisherman figurine, the works convey transtemporal infinitude and power within Afro-Caribbean traditions, bypassing colonial and nation-state logics while simultaneously recognizing research not simply as a rational project but as a ritual for working with the dead.

Presented alongside the *herramienta*, or “tool” works, abreu’s video *Debajo del agua: the wake work of Enerolisa Núñez* pays homage to the “Queen of Salve.” *Salve*, or *Palo*, is a genre of Afro-Dominican sacred music emerging from the Congo and composed of drumming and singing. The video traces the legacy—or “wake work,” as abreu says in the words of scholar Christina Sharpe—of *Salve* through experimental documentary and video-essay techniques, critiquing the characterization of the genre as “folklore,” national cultural property facing extinction, or Christian extension. Instead, abreu’s video demonstrates how the genre persists as a discrete, time-based, and syncretic Afro-Dominican form.

DB AMORIN

ocean floor (repeater)
2024

study for wave export
2024

*information is heavy
even thoughts have mass
somewhere*
2024

*desire is datapoint
is gravity wave is
transmission-based*
2024

ocean floor (touchdown)
2024

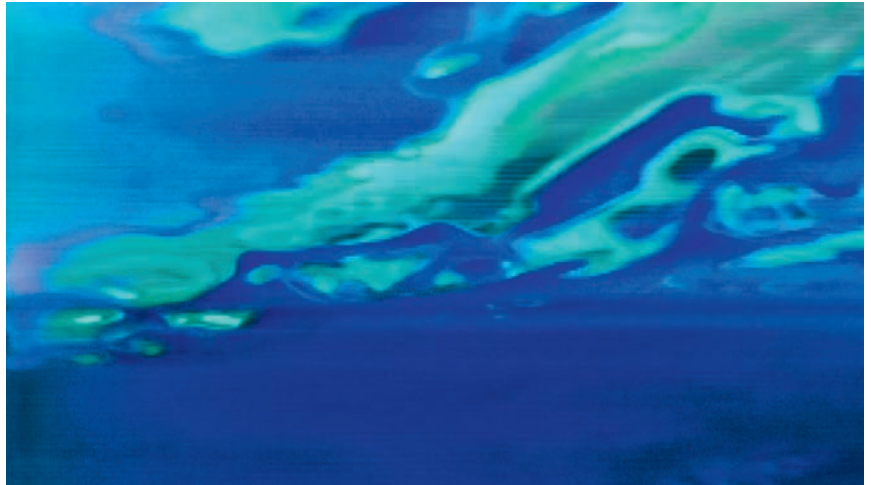
*fly-thru state
(hotel lobby loop)*
2018/2024

*island unfold and inviting
(letter of support)*
2024

*why should an uncertain
future (atoll)*
2023

DB Amorin, *x-routes* (still),
2018

Image description: A
glitched underwater image
of the ocean in dark blue
with lighter blue wave
patterns.



DB Amorin works across new media, sculpture, and installation, using DIY methodologies to examine structures of technologies within the Pacific Islands. In the series “wave attn,” he considers the ocean as technology, functioning as a prism through which to examine visual cultures, legacies of colonialism, and Indigenous forms of knowledge.

In *study for wave export*, Amorin amasses glitched StyleGan-trained images of island fantasy, demonstrating their distortions. *why should an uncertain future (atoll)* also highlights the absurdity of modern technology through repeating footage of the Operation Crossroads nuclear weapon testing in Bikinni, Aolepān Aorōkin Majeļ (Bikini Atoll, Marshall Islands) in 1946. In the site-specific installations *ocean floor (touchdown)*, *ocean floor (repeater)*, and *fly-thru state (hotel lobby loop)*, he references the Transpac cable system that both connects and alienates the Pacific Islands from “mainlands.”

The laser etchings *information is heavy even thoughts have mass somewhere* and *desire is datapoint is gravity wave is transmission-based* convey ongoing divisions by mapping the metaphysical split between representations and lived realities. Finally, *island unfold and inviting (letter of support)* chronicles the burgeoning crypto haven of the newly minted South Pacific island nation of Satoshi. The fictional letter features words from the Prime Minister of nearby Vanuatu introducing the neighboring island system, an ironic welcome for crypto companies that operate as neocolonial and extractive forces upon the real island of Vanuatu. Amorin’s works collectively critique the attention economies of imaging, data, and fantasy that attempt to claim island cultures and their surrounding waters, while also underscoring the natural ocean technologies known by Pacific cultures for centuries that resist cooptation.

JONATHAN GONZÁLEZ

Score I—*Gamin (Joy Street)*
2026

Score II—*Mother and Child (Passages)*
2026

Score III—*African Dancer (Sanctuary)*
2026



Jonathan Gonzalez, *Spectral Dances*, American Academy of Arts and Letters, 2024

Image Description: A staircase surrounded by bookshelves and viewers watching a Black performer in a blue and white striped jacket with black sports bra and cutoff shorts roll down the stairs.

Jonathan González's new commission *suite for a minor meeting* encompasses a print series, audio work, and performance in partnership with the Museum of African American History, Boston/Nantucket (MAAH) presented at MAAH's historic African Meeting House in Boston's Beacon Hill neighborhood. The print series adapts architectural schematics by Asher Benjamin dating to 1806; the story of "Mrs. Dorsey," a runaway slave who took shelter in the African Meeting House; sculptor Augusta Savage's tender portrait bust of a young Black boy, *Gamin* (ca. 1929); Richmond Barthé's expressive sculpture *African Dancer* (1933); and archival images from the African Meeting House. These art-historical references underscore visual cultures of Blackness that confronted dehumanizing histories of enslavement and continued segregation in Black interior life and art.

The performance at the African Meeting House explores the embodiment of gathering inspired by the Meeting House architecture and compositions by Harlem Renaissance composer William Grant Still Jr.

(1895–1978), through a choral work for soprano, countertenor, and baritone voices. Performers name, un-name, hark, belt, and howl with and against the architectures of the Meeting House. Beginning from exterior street, they guide audiences into its interior sanctuary where the first Black Baptist congregation in New England worshipped and abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and Sarah Grimké, advocated for emancipation. For González, sonic slipperiness intervenes within past histories, conjuring their continued advocacy and activating their animating forces. The choral composition, recorded at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts and presented here at Tufts University Art Galleries, imagines minoritarian meetings that resist capture, ruminating on the question of long emancipation and a Black Commons from scholars Rinaldo Walcott in addition to Fred Moten, Stefano Harney, and J.T. Roane.

SIDONY O'NEAL

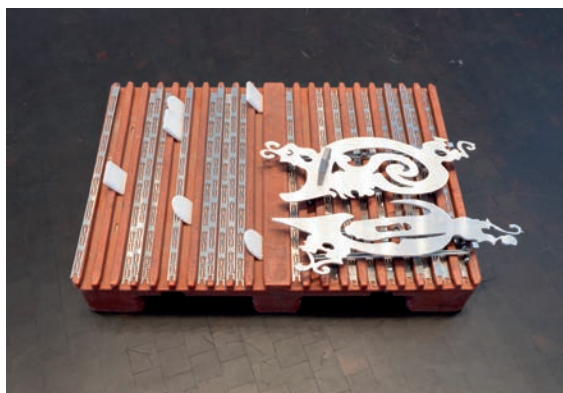
Colonel Lágrimas
2023

Lemma
2023

Lemmmmmma
2023

Lemmmmmmmma
2023

Lemmmmmmmmmma
2023



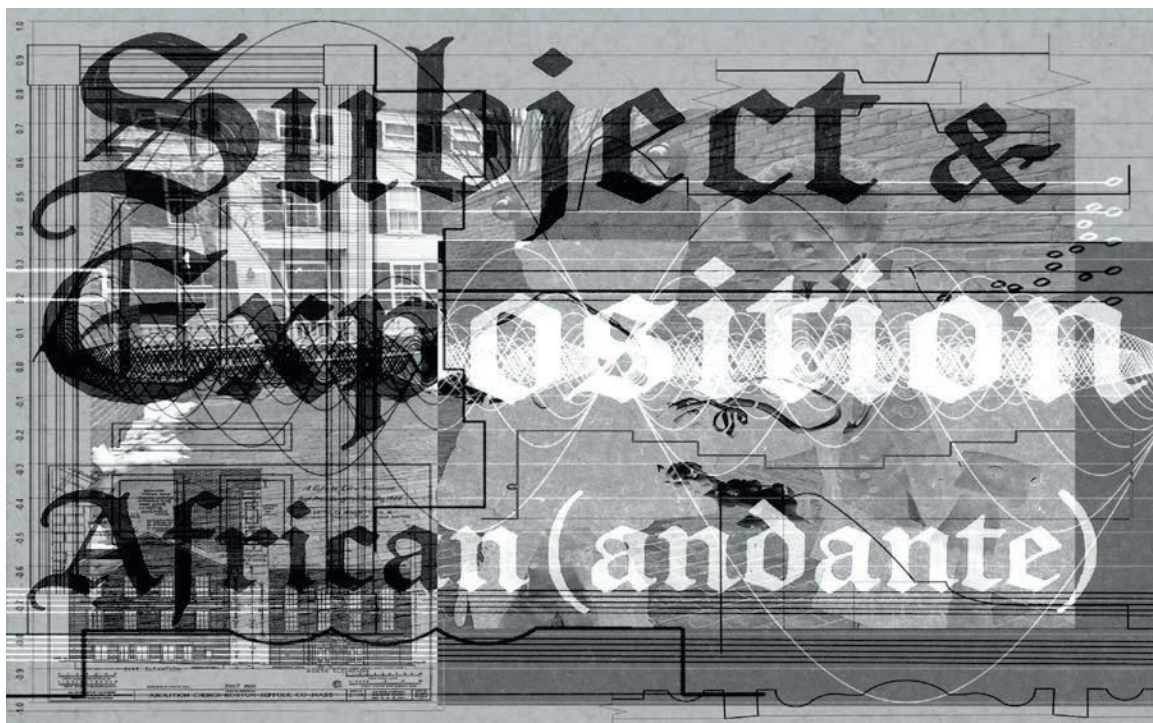
sidony o'neal, *Program for fireback with sacrificial anode*, 2023

Image Description: A wooden pallet inlaid with patterned aluminum stripes and steel-cut shapes.

sidony o'neal's work poses questions to mathematical concepts and histories of knowledge through research, intuition, and interface. In their kinetic sculpture *Colonel Lágrimas* and *Lemma* drawing series, o'neal questions the limits of mathematical systems, specifically how they influence behavior, gesture, and social and economic structures. *Colonel Lágrimas* traces the origins of the *Pankha* fan, a cooling device from South Asia from the sixth century, denoting the caste system by those who enact cooling and for whom, eventually becoming embedded within British colonialism. o'neal first encountered the 1860s technology in an issue of *National Geographic* from 1943, describing its travel through the transatlantic slave trade to the Mississippi River Valley. Reemerging as a German patented technology in the late 2010s, o'neal hacks the stolen cooling system through the integration of hand-etched ceremonial blades,

nodding to Central African gift knives, that vibrate in the air—for both warning and forging relation. The work references “Tropical Algebra,” a younger field of mathematics, which employs proof of the logic of colonized subjugation in the southern United States as well as the Global South, theorizing that colonizers had to cool their surroundings in order to extract. Coopting the German patent, o'neal hacks the hacker.

The “Lemma” drawings eerily approximate the phrase “let me” through informal means, stretching across longer prints created through a metal heat-sink technique, or digital stamping commonly used in the cooling of electronics. Increasing in length, the drawings ask ever more insistently to be allowed to do something, much like a computer program, or mathematical proof, both of which o'neal evokes as a haunting poetics that refuses the rationality of mathematics.



Jonathan González, *Gamín*, 2026

Image Description: Black and white image with architectural renderings in the background and the text: Subject & Exposition African (andante) in heavy gothic text.

Audio Brochure:
To listen to a reading of
this brochure along with
image descriptions, scan
the QR code below:



Reader: Meera Chauhan

fields harrington, *Propagate at
Two Revolutions per Hour (roller
drum series)*, 2023

Image Description: A circular blue
metal disc with two interlocking
layers of perforated white sheets,
creating a spinning drum with
metal handle in the center.



Tufts University Art Galleries / Boston

Magical Thinking, of Systems and Beliefs
January 29–April 19, 2026

Curator:
Laurel V. McLaughlin

Copy Editor:
John Ewing

Brochure Production:
Meera Chauhan

Design:
Common Space, founded by Jon Santos

Printing:
Puritan Press, Hollis, NH

artgalleries.tufts.edu
[@tuftsartgalleries](https://www.instagram.com/tuftsartgalleries)

Tufts University Art Galleries (TUAG)
is free and open to all, Tuesday-Sunday,
11 am-5 pm, 230 The Fenway, Boston.

Generous funding was provided by
Tufts University and The Andy Warhol
Foundation for the Visual Arts



A stylized, handwritten signature of "Andy Warhol" in black ink, written in a cursive, flowing script.

The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts