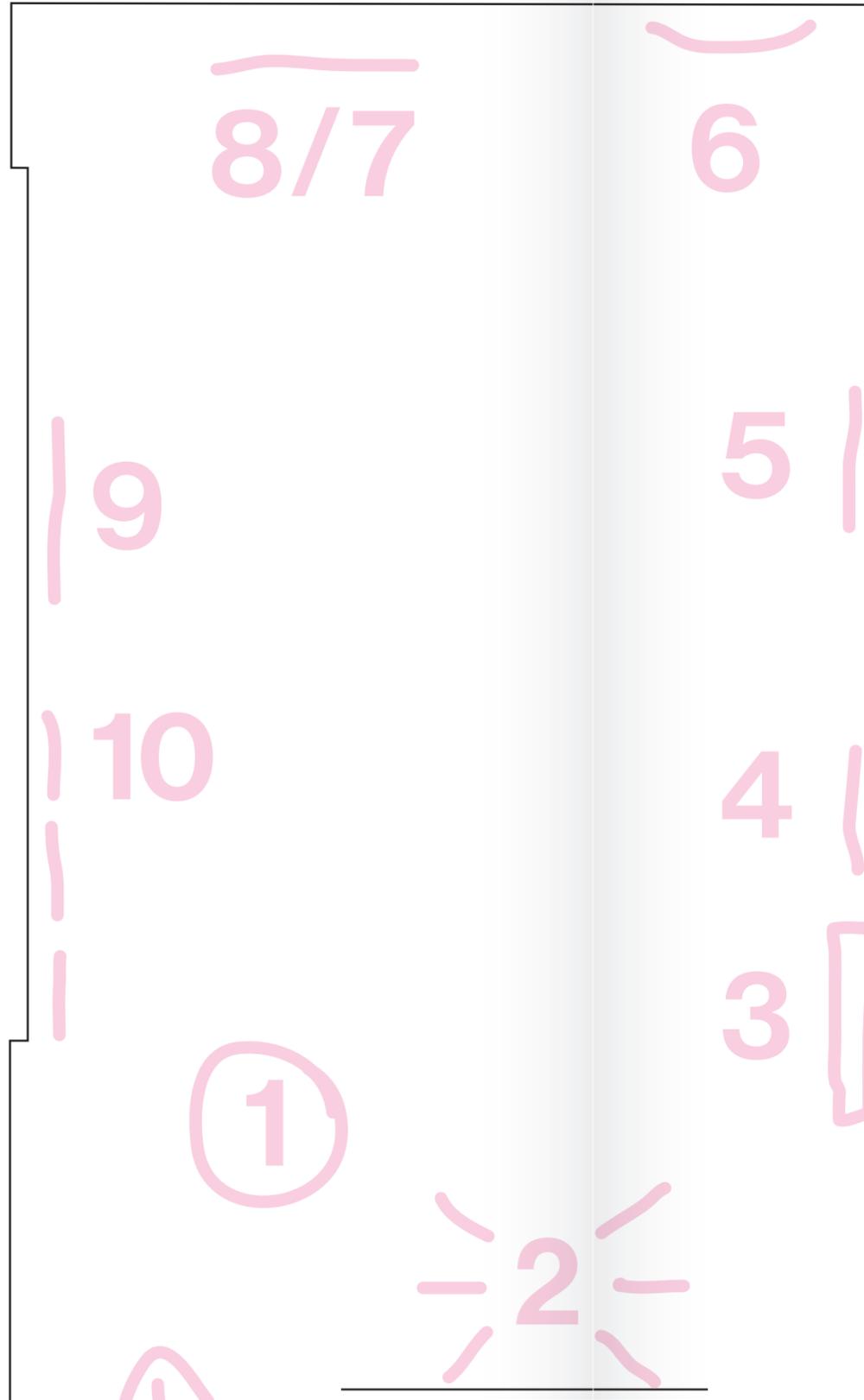


Model

Curated by
Nkhensani
Mkhari

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A4 Arts Foundation – Reading Room
15 Oct '22 – 15 Nov '22



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Curatorial Statement

For artists, 'the model' becomes method and form, replica and representation, route and routine, rhizome and root. While models can be representations of objects, actions or systems one desires to understand, they can also function as analogies – linking models to one another and linking a given model with its subject. As part of my research into the use of models in artistic practice, I staged mode(l) – an engagement with architectural plans, maps, diagrams, and maquettes – in Goods at A4 in April 2022. The research presentation was itself a model of what an exhibition could be; a place to explore modelling as a form of making in and of itself. The guiding question then, as now, remains the same: how do artists embrace the model, freeing it from its narrowly understood practical framework, altering its approach towards intention and outcome and, in doing so, lend it new meaning?

In my artistic research, I keep coming back to how artists archive themselves, how they navigate and circumvent what Adrian Piper terms 'aesthetic acculturation'; a process by which "individuals are recruited into the ranks of art practitioners as artists (and also secondarily, as critics, dealers, etc.) within existing art institutions and thereby abdicate their social, intellectual, economic and creative autonomy."

I choose to think about models as either nouns or verbs – a model as object or to model as action. Within this exhibition are artists who use themselves as models through self-portraiture. Samuel Fosso gallantly straddles the tripartite liminal membrane between performance, fashion and self-portraiture. In the series titled *Plastic Crowns*, Phumzile

Khanyile displays a dexterous use of flash and flesh, transmogrifying and fusing the two with startling deliberateness, and lending a singular sense of space and tone to her three distinct characters.

Dialogue around the homogenising power of aesthetic acculturation becomes especially important in the polarising post-digital age where image and self consume and cannibalise each other; a double-headed ouroboros. As a result, we are left with less and less time to create, consider or even appreciate unique and in-depth explanations, observations, and critiques.

Bhavisha Panchias' sound piece, aptly titled *Imagine you're in a museum: What do you hear?*, proposes a model for listening to systems of colonial modernity and its extractive and accumulative logics. DB Amorin explores the materiality of video as an analogue to the flexible and composite character of identity.

If Marshall McLuhan's famous statement "the medium is the message" summed up the postwar era's dismissal of meaningful content, the world we live in now is one in which "the model is the message," according to philosophers of technology Benjamin Bratton and Blaise Agüera y Arcas. Can switching from medium to modelling help us arrive at alternate modes of operation that steer away from the homogenisation of aesthetic acculturation and result in meaningful artistic, cultural, and curatorial interventions? This is model performing as 'verb'.

I first met Tony Yanick in the summer of 2020 when I enrolled in his seminar titled 'AI as Disinformation Engine: Exploring the Deep Fake/State'. Tony taught me how to make art using Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) as he uses them in his own artistic practice. Looking through his oeuvre, I came across a work titled *Make America Great Again (and again... and again)*. The title jumped right at me for obvious reasons. The title image for the video piece is a still of one of my favourite authors, the late Octavia Butler. The video piece is an ode to Butler, using a mixture of found footage, performance videos and GAN videos all in black and white, gently forcing the three methods to crystallise and coalesce into a cohesive form stretched in time. During one of our late-night and early morning conversations about role models, Tony offered to contribute a

second video. Reflecting on mothers as role models, the video is generated using a GAN with a hauntingly spell-binding soundtrack titled *In Search of Our Father's Gardens* by RA Washington/Jah Nada.

Xhanti Zwelendaba's work acts as a map at the intersection of class and migration – a map and a model – asking after the places and points where language can find an escape. Its title, *Musuwo Panjodzi*, is a Shona phrase translating to 'exit when there is danger' or 'where there is an accident'. The words appear twice in red lettering against the glass, further emphasising the dangers faced when immigrants leave their countries for South Africa to find a better life, only to end up sampling a different model of state collapse.

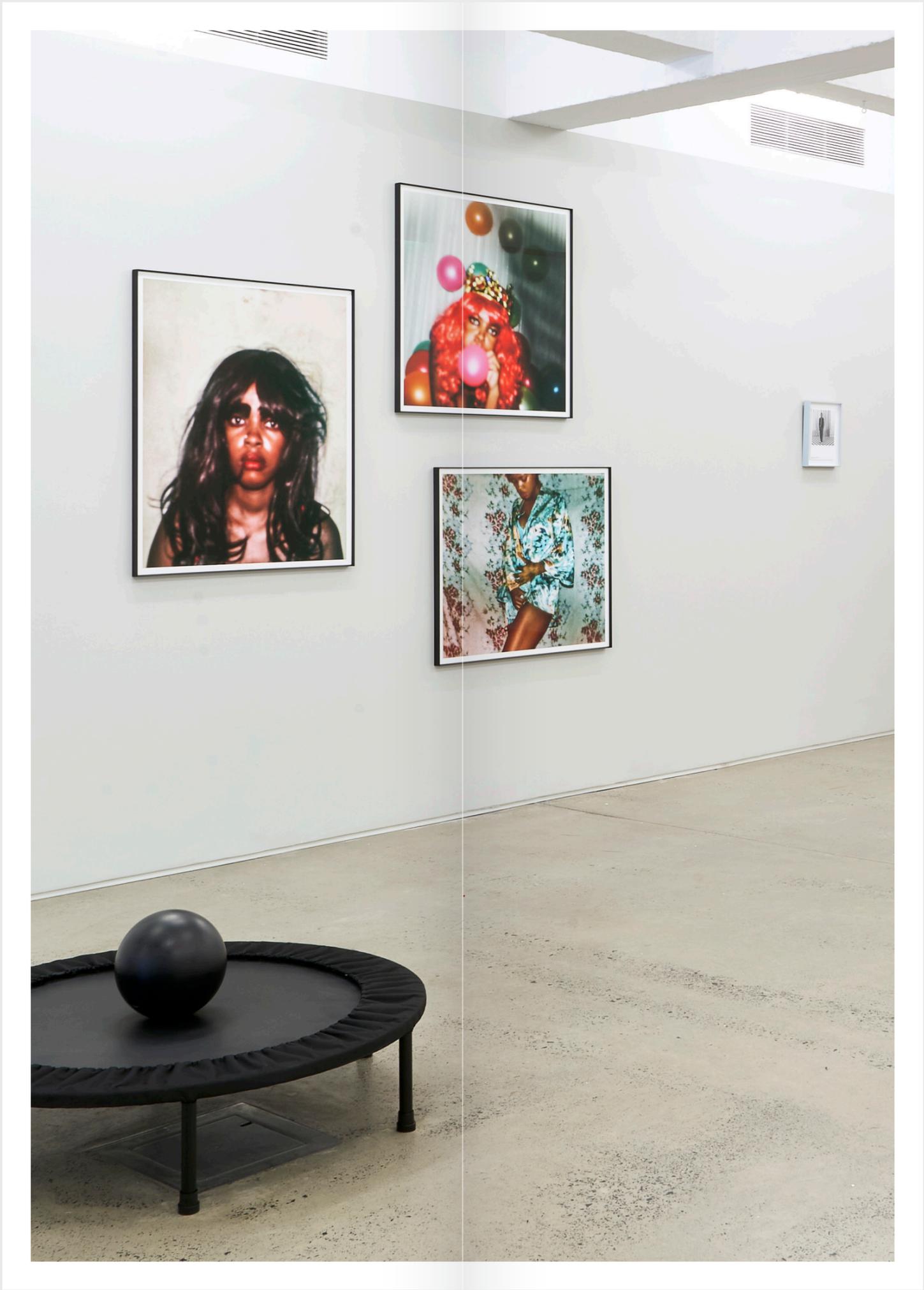
Kyle Morland contributed a work to the rehearsal or research process of mode(l). During a visit to his workshop studio, I liked the cracks and fingerprints on one of his works from the *lofted bends* series; how this signified 'evidence of process', evidence of the artist's hand countering the void of mechanical emptiness I find too often in the Cape Town art scene. This work created a line for further dialogue in this new phase of the exhibition, for which he contributed a work titled *Library of Forms*, a series of miniature versions of his *lofted bends* made of humble paper and tape.

The first work I ever saw of artist Bogosi Sekhukhuni in the real was *Dark Gravity* in 2018. Until then, the artist had existed as a myth to me: one of those people everyone knows but no one ever sees. I first discovered his work through my Tumblr page in its heyday. We shared mutually fervent interests in the tripartite scheme of art, science and spirituality. On a late-night phone call with Bogosi to Portland, Oregon, we discussed the shimmering South African art ecology, art and science, post-planetary design and local cosmogonies. He suggested showing a new poster of a proton-proton chain reaction, a perfect pairing to *Dark Gravity*, where both works stand at the intersection of art and science education.

For me, to curate is to watch an idea distil, reduce, compress and expand again. Models aren't just useful fictions or indirect ways of talking about or acting upon the world. Rather, they are encapsulations of the know-whats and know-hows underlying theoretical and practical commitments pertaining to framing and unframing the world, i.e. knowing and doing something about it. Models can either disclose or covertly convey and reinforce

systems of knowledge. They are entangled with our biases, assumptions and partialities – whether implicit or explicit. This exhibition expands upon this notion by framing the model as a medium and method in and of itself.





**Bogosi
Sekhukhuni**

①

***Dark Gravity*
(2018)
Trampoline and
bowling ball
101 x 40.5 cm**



Comprising a bowling ball that sits atop an exercise trampoline, Bogosi Sekhukhuni's (b.1991, Johannesburg; works in Portland) *Dark Gravity* references a popular high-school science experiment employed to help students visualise gravitational pull. Gravity, in simple terms, refers to the mutual attraction between things with mass and energy. Sekhukhuni's practice speaks to such themes of connectivity (and disconnectivity) that have arisen from the digital age. *Dark Gravity's* monochrome appearance alludes to the presence of dark matter – a hypothetical presence attributed to 85% of all the matter in the universe. Sekhukhuni's interest in the hypothetical is testament to his belief in the role of the artist as social reimaginer. Negotiating the intersections of art, science and technology, Sekhukhuni invites us to question what we take for granted and, perhaps more importantly, what we deem incomprehensible.

**Bhavisha
Panchia**

②

***Imagine you're
in a museum:
What do you hear?*
(2020)
Sound
33 mins**

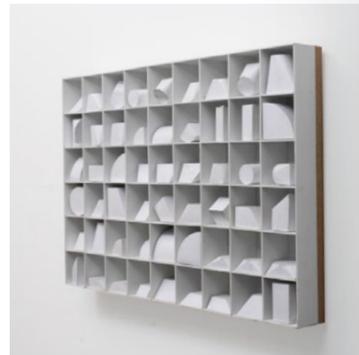
Imagine you're in a museum.

What do you hear?

Bhavisha Panchia's (b.1985, Durban; works in Johannesburg) *Imagine you're in a museum: What do you hear?* is an audio collage of musical tracks, interviews and ambient sounds. Produced as a curatorial response to the impact of colonialism on cultural production, we hear muffled voices, bodies moving and robotic readings of empirical data. Panchia, researching the politics of how we hear, who is heard, and, conversely, who and what is missing from the soundscape begins *Imagine you're in a museum: What do you hear?* by describing the concept of phonomnesia – the sensation of remembering or imagining sound. Her question, "What do you hear?" considers the museum's involvement in colonial history. What would you hear, were you to explore alternative soundscapes or adopt new ways of listening?

**Kyle
Morland**
*Library of
Forms (2021)*
Paper and tape
60 x 84 x 9 cm

3



Working to obscure self-imposed rules, Kyle Morland (b.1986, Johannesburg; works in Cape Town) assembles his sculptures with a studied exactitude. While *minimalism* and *formalism* perhaps best describe his spatial compositions, such words reveal little of the works' interior logic. Few of Morland's sculptures are purely abstract, most functionless studies of more functional forms. Made with an engineer's precision, his sculptures often appear as misplaced industrial parts reminiscent of air conditioning ducts, metal piping and construction steel bent out of shape. But to his hard-edged, mass-produced aesthetic, Morland adds moments of material grace. Cloth, cardboard, masking tape – those things moveable and provisional – offer a compelling counterpoint to the artist's unbending metal forms. Such is *Library of Forms*, a series of card models for proposed, large-scale sculptures; fragile things aspiring to more permanent medium.

**DB
Amorin**
*remoting
(2021/2022)*
Colour video,
no sound
2 min 30 sec

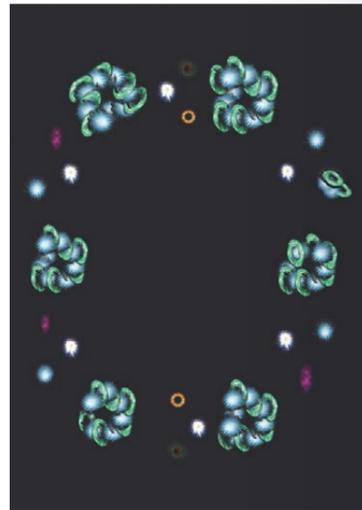
4



In non-linear, time-based compositions, DB Amorin (b.1985, Honolulu; works in Portland) draws on DIY experimentation, AI programming, and lo-fi technological tools to create mediated experiences of the phenomenal and digital worlds. In *remoting*, the artist offers a shifting arrangement of shapes and colours, a collection of irregular, pixelated forms that morph into one another, slipping between near-familiar images – almost fire hydrant, almost rabbit, egg almost fried – and embryonic abstractions. The video work was generated by StyleGAN, an open-source generative adversarial network, which the artist trained on non-human emoji sets from iOS 14. Departing from the recognisable symbols after which it was modelled, *remoting* prompts us to question why we so intently attempt to reconcile the identifiable and indistinguishable into more recognisable forms.

**Bogosi
Sekhukhuni**
untitled (2022)
Acrylic print
59.8 x 84.1 cm

5 |



Bogosi Sekhukhuni's (b.1991, Johannesburg; works in Portland) *untitled* poster is a digital rendering of a proton-proton chain reaction, one of the two known sets of nuclear fusion reactions by which stars burn. Appearing as bacteria under a microscope, it alludes to the interconnectedness not only of terrestrial life but of cosmic forces. Sekhukhuni, who maintains that the concept and execution of an artwork cannot be viewed in isolation from each other, is predominantly concerned with the links between science and art education. In reimaging the models built by scientific rationalism, the artist finds alternate ways to picture the world, inviting the physical to coexist alongside the spiritual. It is this translation from science to art, from diagram to kaleidoscopic abstraction, that lends Sekhukhuni's *untitled* poster its intriguing hybridity.

**Xhanti
Zwelendaba**
*Musuwo
Panjodzi* (2016)
Salvaged taxi
window
112 x 70 cm

6



Xhanti Zwelendaba's (b.1992, eDikeni; works in Johannesburg and Cape Town) *Musuwo Panjodzi* presents a salvaged taxi window bearing the words 'Emergency Exit' in Shona. Made for Chamber of Mines, an exhibition by Zwelendaba and Rowan Smith at Whatiftheworld in 2016, the work speaks to the intersection of mining, class stratification and immigration in South Africa. The rear window is symbolic of the overcrowded taxis used to transport workers to mines and calls into question the distinctions drawn between immigrant workers and expatriates. Mounted against a wall, the transparency of *Musuwo Panjodzi* provides the viewer with a blank canvas through which to reflect on the legacy of oppression and poverty in South Africa. Zwelendaba, whose practice examines the tensions between custom and capitalism, offers a critique of the systems that force labourers into inevitable harm. While a taxi can be escaped through an emergency exit, how do immigrant workers escape the mining industry and the ideologies that maintain it?

Tony
Yanick

BOBBI LYNN (2022)
Colour video with
sound
18 min 9 sec



Tony Yanick's (b.1986, Cleveland; works in Buffalo) *BOBBI LYNN* is a reflection on the artist's mother as his role model, an abstract meditation on aspiration and imitation. The shifting, hallucinogenic imagery is composed using GAN, a generative adversarial network, which pairs AI neural networks – or 'deep learning algorithms' – against one another, that the two can be trained without human supervision. GANs are often compared to mimicry in evolutionary biology, with one thing (an AI) appearing as something else (a photograph, perhaps). The AI models itself on an aspirant object, much like a young child imitates their role model, imperfectly and diligently. Set to a soundtrack titled *In Search of Our Father's Gardens* by RA Washington/Jah Nada, Yanick's video – however provisional – gestures to the creative act: biological, digital, and artistic.

The generative open-license model credited with co-creating this work is Stable Diffusion.

Tony
Yanick

***Make America Great Again (and again...and again)* (2017)**
Black-and-white
video, sound
7 min 30 sec



A multi-valent practitioner, Tony Yanick (b.1986, Cleveland; works in Buffalo) works at the intersection of philosophy, technology, and art. Attending to the intricacies of aesthetics and ethics in the age of artificial intelligence, he finds variable modes to present his understandings. To Yanick, art is less a final form than a means of integrated research, a tool with which to articulate his findings beyond the written word. Such is *Make America Great Again (and again...and again)*, a tribute to Octavia E Butler's post-apocalyptic science fiction novel, *The Parable of the Sower* (1993). Understood by the artist as a prophecy of the Trump era and the existential threats of climate change, wealth inequality and corporate greed, the film pairs sound clips of Butler from interviews and readings with digitally eroded footage of the author speaking. This is intercut with close-ups of hands and feet, a mouth – all wet or slick with oil – abstracted from the human, becoming other, alien. The cinematographer is Robert Banks Jr. To the whirring sound of a projector, a voice intones: "All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you. The only lasting truth is change."

**Samuel
Fosso**

***Autoportraits II
(Fosso Fashion)***
(2021)

**Print on gloss paper
17.8 x 24 cm**

9



“When I work, it’s always a performance that I choose to undertake. I link my body to this figure, because I want to translate its history.” The protagonist in all his images, Samuel Fosso (b.1962, Kumba; works in Bangui) is at once photographer and performer, both seeing eye and subject. (To paraphrase, in the context of this exhibition, the artist is at once modeller and model). Since the mid-1970s, when he opened his photographic studio aged only thirteen, Fosso has explored the intricacies of selfhood and identity. His work expands the definitions of *autofiction*, the characters he performs – cultural and political figures, social stereotypes and popular imaginings – in turns historical, aspirational, invented and intimate. “Clothes help me tell the character’s story and share their own emotions,” he says of his performed selves. “But most of all, the clothes help me understand them. Once I press the camera button, I am the character, I am not myself anymore.” This image, from *Autoportraits II (Fosso Fashion)*, was made in collaboration with the publication *A Magazine Curated By*, which invited Fosso to create a series of performed portraits dressed in garments from leading fashion designers.

**Phumzile
Khanyile**

***Plastic Crowns
(2016–)***
Series

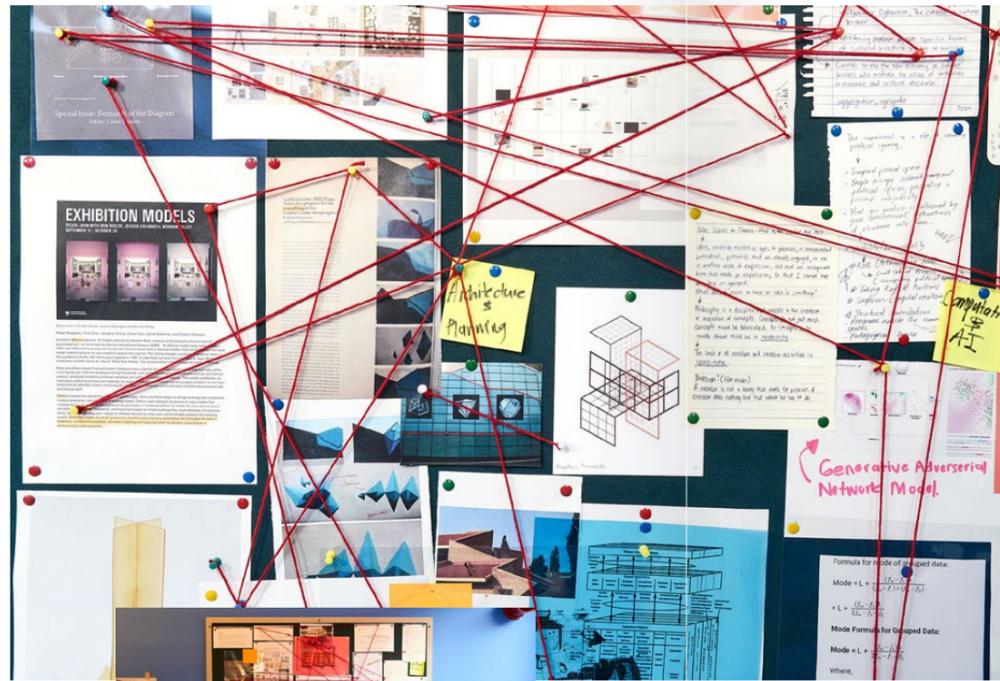
**Inkjet print on
Photo Rag
Dimensions variable**

10



To Phumzile Khanyile (b.1991, Soweto; works in Johannesburg), her photographic series *Plastic Crowns* describes “a journey of self-discovery.” Consisting of self-portraits covertly taken in her childhood home while her grandmother was asleep or at church, it presents a body of work that is deeply personal, the artist modelling aspirations and desires. By draping chiffon dresses and headscarves over her camera’s lens, Khanyile composes imperfect images (with soft focus, muted colours and constellations of grain) reminiscent of those found in family photo albums. In one photograph, *Nomvu*, she holds a satin dressing gown in place, her gaze downturned. In another, she wears the titular plastic crown,

a lone guest at an imagined party; and, in the third, her likeness is framed by heavy bangs and darkened eyebrows. Throughout the series, she uses metonyms to play the parts of others – balloons as lovers, her absent father an empty coat. *Plastic Crowns* is an honest account of the artist’s exploration of what it means to be a woman negotiating societal expectations within the complexities of past and present family life.



Model – Wayfinder (2022)

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