

# WOMEN

Inflight  
Magazine  
#3

# AERROPLANES



# [...] we predict a great future for this new Nigerian artist.

Ulli Beier on the 1965 Mbari Club Ibadan exhibition invitation card, Ulli Beier Photographic Estate, CBCU & Iwalewahaus, University of Bayreuth.

The most recent artist from Zaria is **Colette Omogbai**, from Benin [Benin City], who has found a vigorous style of her own. Her themes are abstractions on themes of grief, agony, recreation, curse and accident. Her manner is expressionist: simplified human forms are recognisable but are rearranged to suit the mood of the painting. Large hands and feet are used to express both

movement and emotion. Bodies, heads, breasts are recomposed into large areas of colour which provide the basic structure of the picture. Her colours are intense: black, white, ultramarine, mauve, orange, are the prominent ones. The overall impression is sombre and intense. Her application of paint is always interesting, her surfaces alive.

The artists of the Zaria school represent the first decisive breakthrough in Nigerian art. Of the group here mentioned, each has found his individual style and his personal solution. But they were all involved in the crucial struggle for identity. The Négritude movement of the French territories never had any followers there because some of its simplifications were not acceptable. Never-

theless, Nigerian artists had to ask themselves some of the same questions: What is our heritage? How much is it relevant today?

Ulli Beier, *Contemporary Art in Africa*, New York & London: Praeger 1968, 47.

**WOMEN ON 2 AEROPLANES**

SEARCH RESEARCH:  
Looking for Colette Omogbai

23 - 26 May 2018

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In collaboration with  
**cca lajos ife** Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen

THE SHOW ROOM

Colette Omogbai, Agony, 1963. Oil on Handboard, 100x100cm | DDAK, Universität Bernau

Founded by the TURM Fund of the German Federal Cultural Foundation  
**KULTURSTIFTUNG DES BUNDES**

STRANGE AGONY

sweating the languor of a blues  
from head to foot  
listen I shed my pain at every step  
I abandon all my limbs  
I estrange and cherish myself  
I give up my heart again  
I go my way  
my head in my legs  
the better to knot my destiny  
to the grass of the pathways

[...]

a christian will never understand  
what is evoked in me  
by saint George and his intricate poetry  
shadow the pagan no longer remembers  
we were foolish among the tender vines  
and stroked the seas in order to weep  
between the pine-needles  
her agony my agony our agony o virgin  
but love not being a christian virtue  
I have given joy to none  
my face turned to the backs of men  
all christians tacitly  
thrusting at me the cross of a god betrayed  
whom I betray to remain faithful  
to the shadow

Tchicaya U Tam'si

From *Tchicaya U Tam'si, Selected Poems*, translated from the French by Gerald Moore, Heinemann Educational Books, 1970. Originally published as „L'étrange agonie“, in: Tchicaya U Tam'si, *À triche-cœur*, Paris: Éditions Hautefeuille (Caractères), 1958.

H A U S D E R K U N S T

**POST WAR ENERGI**

Kunst zwischen Pazifik und Atlantik, 1945 – 1965

14.10.16 – 26.03.17

STRETCH YOUR V I E W

#3  
**In Conversation**

selves for revisiting and reinvention: collage and conversation. But what is a conversation and what is it for?

The momentum to see conversation as a distinct activity, as a medium, almost, emerged not through talking but through images. Talkative images, you might say: a pair of paintings by Lubaina Himid, *Between the Two my Heart is Balanced* (1991) and *Five*, part of the *Revenge* series from 1992. *Five* depicts a conversation—or is it a debate?—among colours, postures, gestures, plates, signs, maybe continents, held between two (female?) figures, seated at a table. Who is conversing with whom, and what about? Whatever is happening within the frame of that painting, whatever is at stake, happens somewhere in between. An in-between populated by fugitive lines, choreographed movements, negotiations, by a hardly graspable absence–presence. The story that the painting tells is unreliable; it might be different every day. There is no script. Each time we slide into conversation with the image, we have a different encounter.

Like a collage, an inspiring conversation is a puzzle. What is interesting is not a new whole, but what zigs and zags between the pieces—displaced fragments re-arranged in new proximities, neighbourhoods, constellations. The unfolding of that story in between is full of surprise, invention, fiction, misinterpretation—something that needs to be endured, not controlled or labelled. Sentences or images taken out of context or out of place become part of new narratives. When ideas are in motion, there are often troubles in transportation.

Continues on page 9.

*Women on Aeroplanes* begins to multiply. In the fall of 2018 alone, there is the eponymous exhibition at The Showroom in London, curated in association with The Otolith Collective (2 October 2018 to 26 January 2019); *Niepodległe: Women, Independence and National Discourse* at The Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, curated by Magda Lipska (26 October 2018 to 3 February 2019); and the resonance chamber of these and other activities at Iwalewahaus at the University of Bayreuth. The project generates a variety of forms and accompanying discourses.

The *Inflight-Magazine* keeps company as a kind of flying gallery of its own.

Thinking about how the various layers of research and artistic production could come together, not in their singularity but in their relations, two terms seemed to present them-

# Feedback — Art, Africa and the 1980s

27.10.2018  
— 05.05.2019

IWALEW  
VAIIAUS

Untie to Tie  
ifa-Galerie  
Berlin

# untietotie.org

Lungiswa Gqunta  
Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum  
Emma Wolukau Wanambwa

3.10.18  
— 26.1.19

THE SHOW ROOM

Women  
on  
Aeroplanes  
at The  
Showroom  
Curated  
with The  
Otolith  
Collective



Lungiswa Gqunta  
amaNgwevu. 1970's New Brighton,  
Port Elizabeth, South Africa

26.10.2018 - 03.02.2019  
MUZEUM sztuki nowoczesnej w warszawie  
Women, Independence and National Discourse  
Women, Independence and National Discourse  
Niepoddległość  
www.artmuseum.pl

## Star Alliance

- 2 Night Flight with Nigerian Artist
- 5 Editorial
- 6 Star Alliance
- 8 Passenger List
- 9 Women on Aeroplanes, Third Iteration  
**In Conversation**
- 10 **Agony (1963)**
- 12 **Man Loves What Is Sweet and Obvious**  
Colette Omogbai
- 12 **Looking for Colette Omogbai**  
Nadine Siegert
- 14 **—A Research Diary**  
Iheanyi Onwuegbucha
- 15 **The Seat Pocket Review of Books**  
What is Surrealism?  
Reading *Agony* with Tchicaya U Tam'si  
Michael C. Vazquez
- 20 **Colette's Decision?**  
Odun Orimolade
- 22 **Radical Sharing**  
Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum &  
Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi
- 29 **Spectacles**  
Gladys Melina Kalichini
- 32 **Silent Conversations**  
Rahima Gambo
- 35 **What songs will we sing when  
everything returns to us**  
Lungiswa Gqunta

## Content

- 37 Two or three questions answered by  
Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi
- 38 Two or three questions answered by  
Emily Pethick
- 39 Two or three questions answered by  
Bisi Silva

### Inflight Magazine #3

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KULTURSTIFTUNG  
DES  
BUNDES

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London

Images  
Cover: Invitation card, exhibition opening Colette  
Omogbai, Mbari, Ibadan 3 August 1963 (detail). Photo-  
graphic Estate of Ulli Beier, Center for Black Culture and  
International Understanding / Iwalewaha, University  
Bayreuth.  
Transportation: Vickers Standard VC10 (Series 1100)  
G-ARVI (c/n: 811), seen here in the original BOAC Golden  
Speed livery but with Nigeria Airways titles. Regularly  
wet-leased to Nigeria Airways between 1964 and 1966.  
(James Ashley, BAC/Vickers VC10 on pinterest).  
All images of art works, courtesy of the artists.

# Passenger List



**Rahima Gambo** is a visual artist and documentary photographer who explores themes of Nigerian identity, gender, history and memory through long-term visual projects. Her work ruminates on the processes of storytelling and experiments with text, illustration, video, sculpture and installation. She is based in Abuja, Nigeria.

**Gladys Melina Kalichini** is a visual artist and researcher from Lusaka. Her work researches the representation of women in relation to dominant, national and colonial histories. Her first project, consisting of a written piece and an exhibition, explored the erasure of women in Zambian history by analysing the ways in which Alice Lenishina's and Julia Chikamoneka's narratives are marginalized and made less visible within the context of the official narrative of the Zambian liberation struggle.

**Iheanyichukwu Onwuegbucha** is Associate Curator at the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Lagos and founder of e-museum.org, a virtual museum project. His current curatorial and research interests include: collective war memories in museums, inclusive virtual museums for Africa, and modern and contemporary African art with particular interest in female modernists from Africa.

**Odun Orimolade** continues to evolve an experimental, trans-disciplinary approach to her practice, incorporating and exploring different media that spans painting, sculptural installation, performance, costumes and mixed media art. She has particular interest in drawing mediums as a connecting point, which is also a large part of her work. She keeps an open contexture to her approach to creative production and is attracted to the impact on and perception of indi-

viduals on issues that spread across a variety of genres.

**Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi** is an artist living and working in Johannesburg. Her pre-occupation is power: how it works, what structures it creates, how we relate to it, what threatens it. Inherent in her examination is an imagining of alternatives. She divides her time between her studio and the field of art as social practice. Nkosi is currently teaching a course at the University of the Witwatersrand on re-thinking Modernism.

In her curatorial, publishing, teaching and research practice, **Nadine Siegert** engages with discourses on archives and collections within public institutions as well as the collective image archives of resistance and revolution. She moves with care, in thought and practice, within the fields of aesthetics and politics.

**Bisi Silva** is the founder and artistic director of the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos (CCA, Lagos), which opened in 2007 with the aim to promote research, documentation and exhibitions related to the work of African artists on the Continent and abroad. Bisi Silva, a true woman on aeroplanes, has curated numerous exhibitions, she is the heart and brain of ÀSÌKÒ, "an innovative programme designed to redress the frequently outdated or non-existent artistic and curatorial curricula at tertiary institutions across Africa." CCA hosted *Women on Aeroplanes* in May 2018.

**Emily Pethick** is of the seldom species who can easily understand and grasp an idea and transform it into production and realisation. She was part of the moment when the conversation started about what became the *Women on Aeroplanes* project. She gave enthusiastic and full support as the director of The Showroom, London and became meanwhile the new director of Rijksakademie van beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam.

**Pamela Phatismo Sunstrum**: "I am interested in this idea of locating landscapes of alternative and yet-to-be known possibilities [...] within the space of imagination, rather than in a physical place. The space of imagination opens radically vast territories of possibility. The space of imagination allows for multiple, simultaneous 'utopianisms.' Pamela Phatismo Sunstrum was born in 1980 in Mochudi, Botswana, and currently lives and works between Johannesburg, South Africa and Ontario, Canada.

**Michael C. Vazquez** is a writer, editor, and curator with interests in little magazines, music, intimacy, and food. Before he joined *Bidoun: Art and Culture from the Middle East* he was the editor of *Transition: An International Review*. He associates freely with the Colloquium for Unpopular Culture at New York University.

Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi, *Tail*, 2015. Oil on canvas, 150 x 84 cm.

Part of this entails new ways of researching and presenting research; selecting quotes, borrowing lines of writing by others—remain in that language, and estranging it at the same time. Something in the process of selecting and replacing always goes wrong, like how it never works to play a favourite song to someone else. The time we spend with songs, texts, and images doesn't translate; neither our understanding nor our enthusiasm. Everything that comes with repetition disappears in the moment we offer it to someone else for the first time. It doesn't carry over in the material itself. Or maybe it does, somehow? But only ever unreliably. And yet a different meaning might emerge through these new juxtapositions. An encounter, not an explanation.

*My life is a collage, with time cutting and arranging the materials and laying them down, overlapping and contrasting, sometimes with the fresh shock of a surrealist painting*, wrote Eileen Agar, photographer and painter, associated with the Surrealist movement who, like Colette Omogbai, attended the Slade School of Fine Art—almost exactly 40 years earlier, between 1925 and 1926. The repetition of a certain phrasing in connection with Colette Omogbai, a pioneering Nigerian painter, "who identified as a Surrealist," sent us looking into histories of surrealisms. The plural here is important, because there are indeed many invocations and occupations of the surrealist movement, into various geographies, subject to (mis-)interpretation. Here, trying to arrange encounters between people, dates, poems, moods, ambitions, images—that never met, but maybe did—became a sort of spiral of conversations amid cracks, breaches, and intervals, interstices and discontinuities, allowing the in-between to vibrate in negotiations.

Have a safe flight  
Annett Busch, Marie-Hélène Gutberlet

## THE ARTWORK AS MISUNDERSTANDING

There is a crisis with regard to Representation. They are looking for Meaning as if it was a Thing. As if it was a girl, required to take her panty off as if she would want to Do so, as soon as the true interpreter comes along. As if there was something to take off.

Marlene Dumas, 1991



1/A00051WN

14127

1/A00051WN

WILM DE KOONING  
TITLE: *Collette Omega*  
MATERIAL: oil on hardboard  
DIMENSIONS: 25" x 24" square  
U.S. MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NY, NY

30

SCHLIER  
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
NEW YORK, NY

COLLECTION

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# Man Loves What Is Sweet and Obvious

Man cannot feel what painting is. Competition with photography exasperates him above all. Man's courage fails when he is confronted with the intense version of life. To man intensity is unpleasant.

Self-expression and a departure from nature is inability. Man loves formulae. Fixed ideals in art are his favourites, even though he succumbs to modern science and technology. A divorce from this is gloomy, fearful, and frightening. This, he says, gives him sleepless nights full of nightmares. During the day, when he sees the records of the previous night in terms of paint, he screams. 'Burn it! It reminds me of my sleepless nights.' 'Give me reality,' Man declares, 'something I can admire and enjoy. I want that which I can live with and not that that cowards my better part of man.' 'Especially that picture with black ivory black,' Man emphasises. 'It is colour of hate, war, destruction and death.' 'Save that colour.' Man advises, 'for the day my dearest one gives up her ghost.'

## Looking for Colette Omogbai

In August 1963, a number of paintings by Colette Omogbai were exhibited at Mbari Club Ibadan. Another show in Lagos followed in September 1963. Mbari Ibadan was a cultural club initiated by the writers Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo and Ulli Beier two years earlier. By 1963, Beier had been working as publisher of the art and literary magazine *Black Orpheus* for five years. Besides showcasing exhibitions with emerging African artists, the club was known for its literature and theatre events and significant for the formation of Nigerian modernism in these early years of independence. During these years,

The persistence of those memories of death now haunts my imagination and finally points to the gateways of the grave-yard.' 'Rather give me the "salady" type of pictures—pictures rich with ice-cream colours. I love ice cream for its pinks as soft as the dainty little frocks of the toddlers and the sweet sky-blue on cool summer days, or even the fair yellow of lemon. No touch of black,' Man insists.

Man does not challenge the voice of a strange bird when it sings an unfamiliar song. But he questions modern trends. Twisted legs and elongated necks, hair made of roots and blue body beats his imagination. 'What on earth is this?' Man asks with disgust. 'Are these legs those of a monster, the neck like that of an ostrich and the torso as though a hungry stricken creature from the concentration camp?' 'Hide it or I fall sick,' Man pleads. Man loves the word 'like.' To Man, nothing is the other; it must be Like the Other. 'Give us reality.' Man proclaims, 'if possible, the reality as real as that of Bouguereau.' 'If you can paint my dear,' Man pats the artist like his little son, 'stick real hair, real nails, real teeth to the figure on the canvas. I like to touch these as I would in real life.' Man, frowns at 'Modern Art.' It is no use since it has no bearing with man's environment. It is useless because it has no meaning. It is useless because it is out of keeping with the Old Masters vision. 'It is art of the toddlers,' Man dismisses carelessly. Man believes in freedom of speech. In art this is forbidden and when done at all it must be by one as aged as the rocks. The youth that strives for self-expression is suppressed. 'Sit down my child, your eyes have not seen as many days as Abraham.' 'Wait till you have

several Mbari Clubs were founded that were [...] "a complex scenario of collapsed boundaries, a nonlinear flow of artistic influences, and a compelling manifestation of an aspect of modernist experience in which émigré Europeans, black diaspora, and postcolonial Nigerian artists created a laboratory where local and appropriated forms from diverse artistic genres and disciplines coalesced to produce a thriving, contemporary visual culture." Chika Okeke-Agulu, 2013.

stiffened for fifty more harmattans!' But now you will be better off a 'photographer,' until grey hairs begin to appear, spend your time copying "A-man-And-a-Donkey" and exactly too.' 'Don't forget the man's eyelashes!' These are the tastes of man. How far can he go with these ideals? Where is the place of man? Where is his courage? Where is his superiority over nature and his environment. Will man continue to be the slave of that which he has created? Who will untie us of this age of the old chain of Tradition? Who will give us sight to see things in New light? Give these points a thought and let us dig into this New Way of Looking. It is a challenge to man.

Colette Omogbai

Nigeria Magazine, 84, March 1965, 80.

Connected to the literary and art journal *Black Orpheus* and the Mbari publication series, the club provided space for a cosmopolitan elite rooted in Nigerian culture. Colette Omogbai has been one of the very few female artists featured by Ulli Beier. She graduated from the Arts Department at the University of Zaria in Northern Nigeria; another nucleus of the formation of Nigerian Modernism in those years. She went to London to study at the Slade School of Fine Art where a number of other African artists such as Ibrahim El Salahi and Shibrain from Sudan had studied before her. Later she moved to the USA for a doctorate in art education at Columbia University which she completed in 1976.

Little is left today of Omogbai's work: an oil painting titled *Agony* stayed with Ulli Beier and is hosted at the Iwalewaha collection at the University of Bayreuth in Germany, the original invitation card for the exhibition at Mbari in 1963 is at the Ulli Beier Photographic Estate at the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding in Oshogbo, and a few illustrations in books. Beier's art collection travelled throughout Europe and the United States during the 1970s, and *Agony* was most likely part of it. In 1979, Beier was invited to Germany to present the collection at the Horizonte Festival in Berlin and one year later in a show called New Art from Africa at the Universities of Mainz and Bayreuth. Among the visitors was Léopold Sédar Senghor, Senegalese president at the time. A photograph of the Ulli Beier Photographic Estate shows Beier standing with Senghor in a group of visitors in front of *Agony*, earnestly engaged in conversation.

During these years, Beier acted mainly as an art mediator for a yet highly uninformed German public. He, who took on many roles during his life as an art critic, writer, publisher and facilitator, became a museum director in

In art, man loves what is 'sweet' and sentimental. He cannot understand that painting is something other than green leaves and brown body and black hair. Any living transformation of art seems to him as hateful and nightmarish.

Art to man, is not a thing in itself. It is dependent. Paint must be explained in terms of words and in storytelling words too. Man believes in meaning that can be expressed by clear and distinct ideas. He fails to realise the fact that to look for an explicit meaning in art is a fundamental error, based on a complete misunderstanding of the medium.

## —A Research Diary

Bayreuth, even if he always rejected this institutional framework. Iwalewaha was rather set up as a continuation of the Mbari Clubs and the exhibitions were part of a diverse cultural programme. Later, becoming part of the Universities' property at Iwalewaha, the painting went through the inventory process. The backside of the image reveals a number of traces telling the history of its itinerary. As a piece of art, it was hibernating for many years in the storage rooms of the institution. Only recently, in the context of a new interest in the history of "modern African art," *Agony* surfaced again raising curiosity around the identity of its painter. Most prominently, the painting was shown at Haus der Kunst in Munich in the exhibition, *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945–1965*, curated by Okwui Enwezor, Katy Siegel and Ulrich Wilmes (October 2016 to March 2017). One could find the painting within the display of the exhibition chapter *New Images of Man*, next to Francis Bacon, Magda Cordell, Georg Baselitz, Wilfredo Lam, Maria Lassnig, Ben Enwonwu, Alberto Giacometti, Gerhard Richter, Pablo Picasso and others; it also featured on the exhibition poster. In May 2018, *Agony* then travelled to Lagos to be shown during the *Women on Aeroplanes* workshop at the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA). It will be displayed in the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw as well as at the Kunstsammlung NRW in Düsseldorf shows in 2018–2019. Fifty years after the initial show in Ibadan,

Keeping a research diary has been employed here as a method of reflecting on the ongoing research focused on finding the artist Colette Omogbai, investigating her practice and the circumstances surrounding her apparent erasure from Nigerian art history. Tracking and reconstructing Omogbai's footprints on her curious journey outside the limits of mainstream art history has been a challenging and thrilling adventure. What follows is a chronicle of the progress of the five-month investigative research by the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, led by **Iheanyi Onwuegbucha**.

the painting seems to have become part of a changing canon of African Modernism; but despite its very recent success story, very little is known about Colette Omogbai, her work and practice. While her absence, her disappearance from the art scenery, triggered our inquisitiveness to simply learn more about the biography and transformation of an artist for whom "a great future" has been predicted, research on Colette Omogbai opened up a set of questions regarding the mechanisms of remembering and writing art history and how and why women artists get neglected in the narrative (not only in Nigeria).

Nadine Siegert

The story continues on the bottom of the next pages, told through a many voices.

12 December 2017.

After the first iteration of *Women on Aeroplanes* in Berlin, we decided that the research on Colette Omogbai should commence with first trying to find the artist or at least finding out about her current status. From Lena Neumann of Iwalewaha (University of Bayreuth) I received scanned documents from the Slade Archives, London. These included Omogbai's application documents to Slade, progress report and reference report from her professors as well as correspondence between her and the school.

These documents revealed, among other things, a consensus of positive affirmations in the assessment of Omogbai's potentials as an artist. Her professors in Zaria and Slade noted that the artist had a promising career and that her time in Slade would definitely sharpen an already evident talent. Thus, with the use of words like "distinguished", "prolific", "competent", "intelligent" in describing Omogbai, these reference letters painted a fascinating picture of the artist in my mind. Someone who, if alive, I would not imagine could easily "disappear" from the art world.

Also, reading her correspondence with Slade, the language of the letters echoes the statement of M.E. Betts who noted that the works of the artist (then only 23 years old, living in a patriarchal society and male-dominated art world) were developed in a "highly authoritative and original manner". This, when considered with her personal statement in 1963—"... I want to produce shock, but want to leave a concrete image in the mind of the observer"—and her 1965 text, "Man Loves What is Sweet and Obvious", further defined an already forming mental image of Omogbai-as-artist in the mould of Barbara Hepworth and Lynda Benglis—both trail blazers who pioneered the feminist art movement in Britain in the 1960s (the same period Colette was writing in) and whose works I had studied just months before whilst in the UK. At this point my excitement was doubled, but deep inside, I felt the fear that the artist may not be alive.

24 January 2018.

After the Christmas holidays, I received new material from Iwalewaha—a scanned copy of the invitation to Colette Omogbai's first solo exhibition organized by Ulli Beier at Mbari, Ibadan in August 1963. It was in this exhibition that the painting *Agony* (1963) was first featured, and subsequently acquired by Beier. In this invitation card I found that Colette Omogbai was born in Uzebba, a town few kilometres from Benin City.

14 February, 2018.

I embarked on a trip to Calabar to research the archive of late Afi Ekong, a female modernist artist and entrepreneur who operated the Bronze gallery. In her very rich archive I found a letter from Colette Omogbai inviting Afi Ekong to Olokun Gallery in Benin City where Omogbai worked as secretary in 1965. This, at least, provided another piece in the puzzle of the artist's activities after her return from Slade.

Planned a visit to Benin City. With this information and the previous knowledge that she worked in the Ministry of Education in Edo state, possibly Benin City, I focused my resources visiting the various offices of both State and Federal Ministries of Education in Benin City. This was, however, unsuccessful as nobody seemed to remember her or have knowledge of any official records pertaining to her. Nevertheless, I planned a further exploratory visit to Benin. First, to participate in public radio programmes and discuss the phenomenon of disappearance and see if anyone with information about Colette Omogbai would call-in to the programme or after. As a backup, I planned to visit Uzebba, where she was born, to search for families and relatives who may have information about her current whereabouts.

## What Is Surrealism? Reading *Agony* with Tchicaya U Tam'si

Tchicaya works with UNESCO in Paris, where he has lived since 1946 when he accompanied his father—then a deputy for Moyen Congo—there. We had two meetings, drinks and supper at a small cafe and a dinner party which he arranged for me.

My first introduction to Tchicaya was through his poem "A Mat to Weave"<sup>1</sup> which was read for criticism at the African Writers' Conference held at Kampala in June 1962<sup>2</sup>. I remember that assembly of African poets and novelists spending a baffled and almost stormy half-hour trying to analyze the opening of this poem.

*He came to deliver the secret of the sun  
and wanted to write the poem of his life*

*why crystals in his blood  
why globules in his laughter*

What held up the conference was the "crystals" in his blood and the "globules" in his laughter which many felt were inappropriate images conjuring up visions of sluggish natural functions. One fact however was obvious. Tchicaya is not untouched by Negritude but his presentation of this doctrine is more implied than stated. There is nothing idyllic about his ancestors—to him they were warriors. *His "race remembers the taste of bronze drunk hot" and one suspects that his crocodiles would never be "scented." [...]*

Miss Omogbai is in the fourth and final year of a painting course [...] she is undoubtedly one of the outstanding painting students we have had since the formation of the Fine Art Department here over ten years ago. Her work produced during the first two years of the course was both competent and intelligent. However, during the last year her painting has developed in a highly authoritative and original manner. Miss Omogbai is extremely prolific in her work and has already had two exhibitions of her painting in Lagos and Ibadan.

I try to reproduce on canvas, nightmares and dreams, in fact the otherness that underlies the human flesh. I want to produce shock, but wish to leave a concrete image in the mind of the observer.

Colette Omogbai in Howardina Pindell, "Colette Omogbai" in: *Women's Studies* Vol. 6, 1, 1978, 116.

1963, M.E. Betts from the Department of Fine Art and the Ahmadou Bello University in Zaria writing to the Slade School of Art, Slade Archive, UCL.

I am wondering if it is possible for you to accept her as a student. She appears to me to be a person of some potential and in my opinion would benefit. [...] Here we have the sun and a certain amount of magic.

1963, Charles Argent, Professor and Head of Department, Department of Fine Art at the Ahmadu Bello University writing to the Slade School of Fine Art, Slade Archive, UCL.

5 March, 2018.

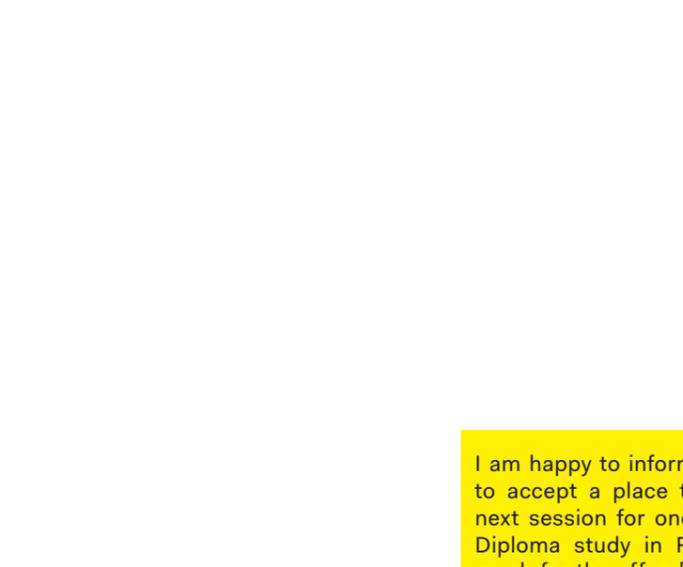
Shortly before the planned trip to Benin City, I stumbled upon grey literature where it was mentioned that Colette Omogbai was married to Prince Emmanuel Onyeka and now bears the married status name “Colette Omogbai-Onyeka”. This was probably the reason why previous searches for the artist were unsuccessful. This finding was the biggest break in the research that changed the subsequent course of the investigation.

Guided by the above discovery, I shifted the immediate search to tracking Prince Onyeka. This proved successful as I found that he was related to a royal family in Imo State. By engaging a network of contacts, I was able to locate her husband's community. A trip was therefore planned for Owerri, the state capital.



Tchicaya's flat is in a very modern block and it was a great surprise. The first thing I saw was a cherub holding a pair of candlesticks designed as scales. We sat on Louis Quinze chairs, ate off antique tables and saw ourselves reflected in ornate mirrors of which there were many. The whole length of one wall was covered with rare editions of various French classics and Tchicaya complained that his friends are in the habit of casually taking home a precious book and just as casually forgetting to return it. I looked everywhere for a little trace of Africa and discovered behind an ancient vase a little ebony head half hidden by manuscripts and very dusty. This was the only evidence of the people whose “race remembered the taste of bronze drunk hot,” and when I asked Tchicaya why he cultivated this improbable hobby of collecting French antiques he said in his jocular way, “I do what the Europeans did to Africa—I plunder Europe.” I was silenced because I have seen less rewarding ways of plundering Europe.

Frances Ademola<sup>3</sup>, “Comment: Tchicaya U Tam'si, Congolese Poet”, in: *The New African: The Radical Review*<sup>4</sup>, 3, 2, 22 February 1964, 32.



We have taken a Nigerian girl as a full-time non-Diploma postgraduate student (21), for one year, starting next October. [...] her work is distinguished [...] we had no hesitation in offering her a place on merit.

March 1964, Mrs. OD Maguiness, tutor to women studying at Slade University College writes to Olive, Slade Archive, UCL.

I am happy to inform you that I would like to accept a place to come to the Slade next session for one year's full-time non-Diploma study in Fine Art. Thanks very much for the offer. [...] Left to me, I would like to leave my work until my arrival in England but owing to my forth-coming final examinations in May this year, my [...] Professor want them back. [...] I shall be grateful if these works could be send by Air.

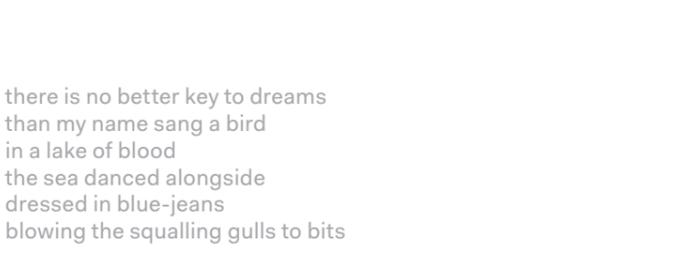
1964, Colette Omogbai writing to Slade School of Fine Arts, Slade Archive, UCL.

The long delays of my scholarship now been settled and I am happy to inform you that I have been fixed to travel this Sunday, the 8th of November 1964, by the plane V.C.10, which will leave here on Sunday morning to arrive London in the evening.

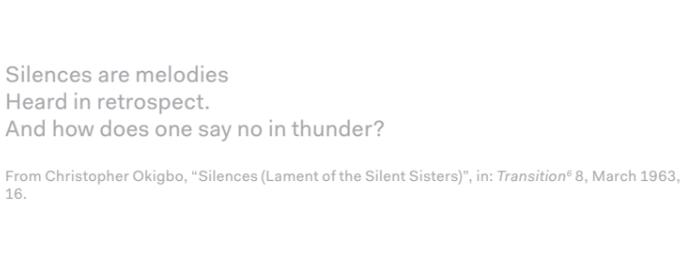
1964, Colette Omogbai writes a letter to the Forensic Science Laboratory in Nigeria, Slade Archive, UCL.

7 March 2018.

In Owerri, I searched for and established contact with the relatives of Prince Onyeka who could introduce me to him. Personal introductions are pertinent in a research like this due to security concerns in Nigeria. Individuals may be apprehensive and not give out any information about themselves or their relatives if they are not introduced to someone well known to them.



From Tchicaya U Tam'si, “Agony”, in: *Tchicaya U Tam'si, Selected Poems*, translated by Gerald Moore, Heinemann Educational Books, 1970, 3.<sup>5</sup>



Silences are melodies  
Heard in retrospect.  
And how does one say no in thunder?

From Christopher Okigbo, “Silences (Lament of the Silent Sisters)”, in: *Transition*<sup>6</sup> 8, March 1963, 16.

It seemed like a riddle, terse as a telegram, not even a comma: “Colette Omogbai a surrealist contributed *Man loves what is sweet and obvious*.” By turns muted and cutting, Omogbai's allegorical manifesto patronized her patronizer, not coincidentally called Man, “whose courage fails when he is confronted with the intense version of life.” The piece appeared in *Nigeria Magazine* in February 1965. By then Omogbai was already in London, living in Islington, studying at the Slade, where Ibrahim Salahi had studied a decade earlier, where the Guyanese polymath Denis Williams had taught before abandoning a bright career as one of Britain's leading black artists to research culture and art in Africa.<sup>7</sup> All three of them were involved in the Mbari Club for Artists and Writers in Ibadan, Nigeria. Ulli Beier, Mbari's co-founder and animateur, had met Salahi in Khartoum early in 1961 and came away convinced that the unknown Sudanese painter was Africa's greatest living artist. Salahi's first major exhibition was one of the club's inaugural events, and the occasion for one of its first publications. Omogbai's August 1963 debut seemed equally auspicious. Beier sent photographs of her paintings to the leadership of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) in Paris, including K. A. Jelenski, proudly announcing the arrival of “a new Mbari artist.”<sup>8</sup>

What puzzled me was that byline, so brusquely tendered, so out of the blue; so curious. What was surrealism in 1965, that Colette

Omogbai was mindful of it?<sup>9</sup> An earlier statement had affirmed her intention to create a language “in which mood, tension, and feeling could be represented” in “abstract interpretations” that “personified themes”—a discourse consonant, perhaps, with German expressionism, a recurring area of interest at Mbari.<sup>10</sup> Amid the welter of critical terms circulating in Nigeria at the time—abstraction and figure, modern and trad; Natural Synthesis, the African Personality; New Sacred Art—what work did *surrealism* do? What kinship was she claiming?

Chika Okeke-Agulu, whose magisterial history of Nigerian modernism played a key role in reviving attention to Omogbai, calls attention to a 1962 *Nigeria Magazine* article by Ulli Beier entitled “Eze: A Nigerian Surrealist Painter.”<sup>11</sup> But surrealism was not generally a term of endearment for Beier. In his admiring description of Uche Okeke's “world of pure fantasy” in *Contemporary Art in Africa*, Beier deployed “surrealism” as a negative example, a synonym for arbitrariness.<sup>12</sup> Eze Okpur did not figure in the pantheon of artists Beier championed, at Mbari and elsewhere.

But there is another possible genealogy for Omogbai's surrealism, one that takes into account the peculiarly effervescent atmosphere at Mbari—what Wole Ogundele described as a “‘thick’ kind of intertextuality (between literature, painting, sculpture, music).”<sup>13</sup> In November 1963, *Black Orpheus* featured Tchicaya U Tam'si, a Congolese writer who had published several acclaimed collections of poetry in French, but who remained almost completely unknown in the Anglophone world.<sup>14</sup> Gerald Moore's long essay situated Tchicaya in relation to Surrealism and Negritude. These association were, perhaps, inevitable. Tchicaya's most recent work had appeared with an introduction by Senghor himself that insisted the poet, possessed of “all the negro virtues,” had “a single passion, constantly and tumultuously observed... to bear witness to *Negritude*.” Moore's essay elaborated instead on the modalities of literary surrealism, from Breton to Césaire and back—what Senghor described, conjuring Rimbaud, as a “syntax of juxtaposition that breaks the bounds of logic.”<sup>15</sup> Moore noted, too, an affinity between surrealist elements in Tchicaya's verse and the “abrupt and cryptic power” of Yoruba poetry. (Elsewhere, he noted the poet's “pagan” ambitions.<sup>16</sup>)

The issue appeared in the months between Omogbai's exhibition at Mbari and the publication of a portfolio of her paintings in *Black Orpheus* 14, February 1964. She almost certainly would have seen it.

Moore charted what he called “the strange landscape of U Tam'si's imagination,” citing above all “the intensity with which he explores, eviscerates, rearranges his vocabulary of images,” quoting extensively from his works. The first poem he discussed in the essay concerns an obscure quest for a “key to dreams” that is indistinguishable from a nightmare. The poem was titled “Agonie.”<sup>17</sup>



[...] saw paintings earlier this months in her room in Islington. Plenty of work in progress which has some quality but needs a lot of searching out, i.e. the intention needs clarification [...] Overcomplicated and not-resolved through the most important elements.

1965, Colette Omogbai's tutor at Slade school of Fine Art, Slade Archive, UCL.



[...] applying for jobs in Nigerian education at service.

The tutor writing in the section “General report”, Slade Archive, UCL.

8 March 2018.

I was introduced to Prince Emmanuel Onyeka, Colette Omogbai's husband! This was the biggest break in the search. Armed with the photograph of 24 years old Colette Omogbai at 24 years old provided by Iwalewahaus from the Slade Archives, I gained the trust of Prince Onyeka. His reaction to seeing the photos was happiness. Amidst smiles, he rightly acknowledged that Colette was an exceptional scholar.

Finally, on enquiring about Colette's whereabouts, we were happy to learn that she was alive! However, she now lived in the USA.

Approaching Colette Omogbai. Encouraged by my progress thus far, I took up a new challenge—establishing direct communication with Colette Omogbai. Upon request, Prince Onyeka graciously provided me with the email address of one of their daughters, through whom I could gain a communication link to Colette. Initially, her daughter was very apprehensive and demanded details of the research project. After several attempts at proving our genuine interest, which took several weeks, we were finally allowed to send questions to Colette through her daughter.

Before going into further details, I wanted to know why she “disappeared”. Accordingly, I sought to know if she still practiced art, and if not, when did she stop practicing and why.

She replied:

“I stopped practicing after my doctorate degree in New York University. When I returned to Nigeria, I went into the Federal Civil service. And I couldn't accommodate part time art practice and my work in the Civil service was so congested and I couldn't afford the time even though I moved away from Nigerian traditional religion. So I was a full time civil service worker and administrator.”

Sir.

I wish to inform the Secretary that my Government seems to neglect the fact that a Postgraduate Course (Research) requires a lot of materials, which, in Fine Art, are quite expensive. Unless the Government makes available to her student a lump sum of 20 GBP a term, the progress of the student is slow and limited. Moreover the exploration into various possibilities in painting is very difficult.

1965, Colette Omogbai writing to the Secretary of the Slade School of Arts, Slade Archive, UCL.

In contrast to the organic sculptural wholeness that characterizes much of African sculpture, Omogbai’s arrangement of forms is new and unexpected, unencumbered by tradition. Forms are pulled asunder, pierced, and severed. They startle and disturb the viewer. Like totems, the part-bird, part-animal images take on the attributes of a community and depict its sorrows. The feeling of sacrifice as a physical and psychological presence is projected by these torn parts, harsh angles, and clawlike shapes, and is reinforced by her titles: Accident, Sacrifice, Agony, Anguish, and Grief. Colette Omogbai rearranges the syntax of composition in the same way that some Nigerian poets rearrange the elements of verse, juxtaposing words in unexpected ways. [...]

Omogbai rips human and animal forms from their original context, infusing them with a sense of violation, and then fixes them in another context, one informed by drama that is inherently psychological and poetic. Her forms become carriers that share the stigma and passion of a community. Her work is visual poetry of a searing sort.

Jean Kennedy, New Currents, Ancient Rivers: Contemporary African Artists in a Generation of Change, Smithsonian, 1992, 50–51.

Beier first encountered Tchicaya’s work in 1961, during the same series of travels that led him to Salahi. He began translating it soon after, arranging for poems to be published in various venues, promoting the work whenever possible. Tchicaya evinced an intensity to rival that of the young Nigerian writers whose poems Beier had published in *Black Orpheus*, and whose first books had appeared in remarkable editions by Mbari Publications that joined contributions from writers and artists. (Christopher Okigbo’s first book, *Heavensgate*, featured drawings by Demas Nwoko.<sup>18</sup>) In Tchicaya, Beier had found a poet with the scabrous wit of Wole Soyinka, the vivacity of J.P. Clark, the disjointed insight of Okigbo. But also something integral—a coherence of style, vision, and ambition comparable to what he had discerned in Salahi’s paintings. The pairing of Tchicaya and Salahi would in fact be one of Beier’s most ingenious orchestrations. Timed to coincide with the Mbari club’s third anniversary in 1964, *Brush Fire* combined an English translation of Tchicaya’s 1957 text<sup>19</sup> with twenty-one original watercolor-and-ink drawings by Salahi, inspired by the poems themselves.<sup>20</sup> Beier called *Brush Fire* “easily the most magnificent book we have ever published.”<sup>21</sup> It would become one of Christopher Okigbo’s touchstones for the cycle of poems that would appear posthumously as *Paths of Thunder*, after the coups and the pogroms; after Biafra, and his death in September 1967, a few months into the Nigerian civil war.<sup>22</sup>

Beier’s translations of Tchicaya and Salahi were published in 1964, in *Transition*, a journal of African literature and art that Beier had founded in 1961. The journal was published in London, and was one of the few African literary journals to be published in the West. It was a significant contribution to the African literary canon, and was a major influence on the development of African literature and art. Beier’s translations of Tchicaya and Salahi were published in 1964, in *Transition*, a journal of African literature and art that Beier had founded in 1961. The journal was published in London, and was one of the few African literary journals to be published in the West. It was a significant contribution to the African literary canon, and was a major influence on the development of African literature and art.

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In Nigeria, when I attempted to locate women artists, only two were mentioned to me: Suzanne Wenger and Georgiana [sic] Beier, both Europeans who had settled in Nigeria. (Expatriates in the arts living in Africa, white men and women, are usually free from the host countries’ pressures to conform, and are too often patronizing towards the Africans. They are often fleeing very rigid European class systems and are exempt from the class system of Africa. I tend to call them „art missionaries”. If things become too difficult for them, they have the freedom to leave.) [...]

A year later, in New York, I met my first African woman artist. Colette Omogbai, a printmaker, who was completing a doctorate in art education at Columbia University. [...] the only woman included in Uri [sic] Beier’s book on contemporary African art.

Howardena Pindell, “Colette Omogbai”, in: *Women’s Studies*, 6, 1, 1978, 116.

“The Lines In My Head,” one of the poems in *Brush Fire*, begins with an invocation:

we are the storm
in the heart of summer
thunder leaps
on the slope of our hearts

Thunder was in the air. It was in the air in Paris, where Tchicaya had lived since the age of fifteen, save for a brief season in Congo, three months in 1960, editing the journal of Patrice Lumumba’s political party during the short interregnum between independence and overthrow<sup>23</sup>. There were surrealists in Paris, still. André Breton himself was old and grey but still active; in 1961 he’d founded a new journal, *La Brèche*—the break—with a group of younger writers, several of them from Africa, including Joyce Mansour, a Jewish-Egyptian poet. In the fall of 1963—at the same time that *Black Orpheus* was introducing Tchicaya to English readers, *La Brèche* introduced a new surrealist voice from the USA to interested parties in French. Ted Joans was an African American poet, musician, and artist, born in Cairo, Illinois, who lived variously in Paris, New York, Tangiers, and Timbuktu.<sup>24</sup> *La Brèche* 5 featured fragments of letters from Joans to Breton, describing his journey from American Midwest to New York and beyond; his situational alliances with the abstract expressionists and the hipsters; his conviction that the white poets of the Beat Generation “owe almost everything to Surrealism,” having taken “their slang, their behavior, and jazz music” from black Americans. Joans was involved with the Chicago Surrealist Group, founded in 1966 by Franklin and Penelope Rosemont, among others, and contributed to its journal, *Arsenal/Surrealist Subversion*. In 1969, Joans attended the Pan-African Festival in Algiers, performing live with Archie Shepp.<sup>25</sup>

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Colette Omogbai is a pioneering Nigerian painter who identified as a Surrealist. [...] During her first solo exhibition at Mbari Ibadan in 1963, her works rejected academic realism for an expressionism verging on pure abstraction, with anguished figures and areas of bright colour. When she moved to Lagos after graduating in 1965, her bold, formal experimentation provoked critics to find her works “unfeminine.” She retaliated in a pro-modernist manifesto, “Man Loves What Is ‘Sweet’ and Obvious,” published in Nigeria magazine in 1965. Omogbai later studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, London, and received a PhD in art education from New York University.

2017, website of the Museum Haus der Kunst in Munich, https://postwar.hausderkunst.de/en/artworks-artists/artworks/agonie.

Who am I? I am African-American and my name is Ted Joans. Without Surrealism, I would have been unable to survive the abject vicissitudes and racial violence that the white man of the United States imposed on me every day. Surrealism became the weapon I chose to defend myself, and it was and will always be my own way of life. [...]

Today, the sun pierced over the Rif Mountains and woke me up. I read seven stanzas of *Les Chants de Maldoror*<sup>26</sup> (I do it every day); then I kissed my wife’s shoulder and looked at my new son. He was born on February 10 in Gibraltar. He came into the world agitated and alive. We called him TOR (Norse god of thunder)<sup>27</sup> LUMUMBA<sup>28</sup> (African martyr and UN beast). Tor Lumumba Joans, my son of the sun, my young black swan with blond blood. My black swan with an ancient Viking anvil planted on my back, my young rhinoceros<sup>29</sup> dancing kilted before the kings of Benin. Tor Lumumba, with the wheat sword of the USA in its golden beak, in full freedom towards the marvelous<sup>30</sup>.

Ted Joans, “Ted Joans Parle... (fragments de lettres à André Breton),” *La Brèche: action surréaliste* 5, October 1963, 66–67.

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In June 1963, an obliquely erotic image produced by another self-authorized surrealist—a Palestinian painter who worked under her surname, Seraphim<sup>31</sup>, coincidentally the name of a kind of six-winged angel that attend the heavenly throne—appeared in *Hiwar* (dialogue), a Beirut-based Arabic-language journal edited by the poet Tawfiq Sayigh. Seraphim’s drawing illustrated a short story by the journalist and writer Layla Baalbaki, entitled “A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon.”<sup>33</sup> (Baalbaki’s short story collection of the same name was confiscated, the author charged with obscenity and endangering public morals.) Like *Transition*, *Hiwar* enjoyed courting controversy; it was also part of the CCF network. The magazine published nearly all of the works of the Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih, usually with illustrations by Salahi. In June 1965, *Hiwar* devoted an issue to Africa, featuring contributions from Beier, Moore, Senghor, Sembene, and many others, as well as a suite of poems by Patrice Lumumba. It also featured numerous pages of artwork by artists associated with the Mbari Club—Susanne Wenger, Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Skunder Boghossian, and Malangatana, among others. And also, accompanying a poem by the Sierra Leonean writer Abioseh Nicol, a painting by Colette Omogbai.

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From Layla Baalbaki, “A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon”, in: *Hiwar* 4, June 1963, 22–28; edited by Tawfiq Sayigh, translated by Maia Tabet. Arablit.org

Michael C. Vazquez

1 In *Brush Fire*, translated by Sangodare Akanji. Ibadan: Mbari Publications 1964.

2 The Conference of African Writers of English Expression was held at Makerere College in Kampala, Uganda from 11–17 June 1962, convened by the Mbari Club in association with the Extra-Mural Studies program at the university, which was directed by Gerald Moore. The first large-scale meeting of African creative writers on the continent, it included readings, presentations, and workshops, as well as performances of plays by Rebecca Njau and J. P. Clark.

3 A Ghanaian journalist and broadcaster based in Nigeria, Frances Ademola was one of

the founders of the Mbari Club in Ibadan, and

also worked for a time out of the Transcription Centre in London, which produced the radio

magazine *Africa Abroad*. In 1962 she edited the first anthology of Nigerian literature, *Reflections: Nigerian Poetry and Prose*.

4 Based in Cape Town and then (after it and its editors were banned) in London exile, *The New African* was a literary-political journal “of Africa in general and South Africa in particular,” edited by Randolph Vigne, Neville Rubin, and Lewis Nkosi, designed by James Curry.

5 *Selected Poems* features complete translations of Tchicaya’s poetry published in French between 1958 and 1970: *A triche-coeur*

(1958), *Épitomé* (1962), *Le ventre* (1964), and *Arc musical* (1969). It omits his first two books, *Le mauvais sang* (1955) and *Feu de brousse* (1957).

6 *Transition* was founded in 1961 by Rajat Neogy, a young Ugandan poet and editor inspired by the example of *Black Orpheus*. Okigbo served for a time as *Transition*’s West Africa editor.

7 For an extensive account of Williams’ salad days in the UK, see Evelyn A. Williams, “Denis Williams in London, 1946–1957,” *Third Text* 109, 2011, 157–168.

8 Ulli Beier to Ivan Katz, 10 October 1963. International Association for Cultural Freedom Archives, Chicago, Box 70, Folder 2. Jelenski, a Polish writer and critic, worked on visual art and Eastern European programs for the Congress for Cultural Freedom. In 1968, the erotic publisher Olympia Press published his monograph on the Argentine surrealist painter Leonor Fini.

9 Much recent and important work has revived attention to the consistent anti-colonial politics of mainline Surrealism, and to the range and variety of surrealist activities across time and place; see Sam Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 2016; Franklin Rosemont and Robin D.G. Kelley (eds), *Black, Brown, & Beige: Surrealist Writings from African and the Diaspora*, 2009, and “Surrealism: Revolution Against Whiteness”, *Race Traitor* 9, 1998.

10 In a book of press clippings concerning the activities of the several Mbari clubs, housed in the archives of the Transcription Centre in Austin, Texas, there is an undated news item about “The Blue Rider,” an exhibition at Mbari Ibadan that included works by Paul Klee, Franz Marc, and Alexej Jawlensky, the anonymous critic (likely Ulli Beier) emphasizes the polarizing appeal of modern art: “These paintings, which caused a storm of indignation when first exhibited, are now recognized to belong to the greatest paintings Europe has produced.”

11 See *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, Duke University Press 2015, 252. Okeke-Agulu suggests that “Man likes what is sweet and obvious” was also in part a rejoinder to critiques of younger abstract artists like Eze and herself by more established figures, including Ben Enwonwu.

12 “In the fantasy world of Okeke everything is possible. There are scaly creatures with flabby wings, maidens whose eyes are cowrie shells, men whose hair is feathers. Many creatures are froglike, fearsome and cold. Others have fluid, slimy plasma forms that seem to change in front of one’s eyes. But this is not a contrived world of surrealism; we feel rather that a secret door has been opened allowing us a peep into a forbidden world that has always been there, separated from us only by a thin wall.” Ulli Beier, *Contemporary Art in Africa*, New York: Praeger 1968, 46–47.

13 *Omoluabi: Ulli Beier, Yoruba Society, and Culture*, Bayreuth: African Studies, 2004, 124. Ogundele referred in particular to a “borrowing from the other arts to broaden and deepen the literary experience,” exemplified by (among other things) “The Imprisonment of Obatala,” a poem by J.P. Clark informed by a batik painting by Susanne Wenger that had appeared in *Black Orpheus*.

14 His names were subject to various spellings. The title of Moore’s *Black Orpheus* essay, splayed out in the journal’s distinctive sculptural font (designed by Susanne Wenger), lent the name a Russian air: TSHIKAYA. Born Gérard-Félix Tchicaya, the author added U Tam’si to form a penname that meant “a little leaf that speaks for the nation.”

15 Tchicaya’s first book of poems, *Le mauvais sang* (Bad Blood), 1955, took its name from the final chapter of Rimbaud’s *A Season in Hell*.

16 “Asked in one of his own poems the nature of his destiny after death, the poet replies: ‘to be a pagan at the pagan renewal of the world...’”, Gerald Moore, introduction to *Tchicaya U Tam’si: Selected Poems*, vii.

17 Moore also quoted from a poem titled “Strange Agony.” The same issue of *Black Orpheus* featured a Tchicaya poem called “Madness”—another Omogbaian motif.

18 Ibadan: Mbari Publications 1962. In a paper on African poetry written for the Maker-

ere Conference, Beier celebrated the visceral quality of Okigbo’s verse: “I have said before that *Heavensgate* is a poem one can hear rather than see. But it is important to add that we also feel it with our skin.”

19 The translation was credited to frequent Black Orpheus contributor Sangodare Akanji—actually Beier, in one of his several Yoruba masks.

20 Tchicaya and Salahi were both scheduled to attend the anniversary events, but Tchichaya was unable to attend, due to illness. Salahi arrived early to participate in the summer art school session on the graphic arts run by Ru van Rossem. Confusingly, Salahi’s illustrations are uncredited in the publication.

21 Beier to Katz, Ibid.

22 Another touchstone was the 1959 collection of Yoruba poetry assembled by Ulli Beier and Bakare Gbadamosi. See Obi Nwakanma, *Christopher Okigbo 1930–67: Thirsting for Sunlight*, Boydell & Brewer, 2010, 217. In 1966, Okigbo refused the poetry prize awarded him at the World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar. While his objection was primarily a function of his longstanding dismissal of the “black mystique,” he also suggested, in a letter to his friend Sunday Anozie, that he personally believed Tchicaya to be more deserving.

23 Tchicaya U’Tamsi’s first child is born while he is in Leopoldville; he names him Patrice.

24 See “Ted Joans, Tricontinental Poet,” a conversation with Skip Gates, in: *Transition* 48, 1975.

25 *Live at the Pan-African Festival* LP, 1971.

26 In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire praised the most extreme of proto-surrealist texts, the “frenzied epic” *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868), as a clear-eyed depiction of bourgeois barbarism: “Lautréamont had only to look the iron man forged by capitalist society squarely in the eye to perceive the monster, the everyday monster, his hero.”

27 Best known in English as *Thor*; see also the day of the week *Thursday*. In August 1962, the Norse god of thunder was first reimagined as a superhero by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in the comic book *Journey Into Mystery*, 83.

28 Footnote in the original: “Prophet of blackness and African hope, Patrice Lumumba will undoubtedly remain a very controversial man by the whites BUT the Afro-Asian multitudes will recognize him henceforth as the martyr of their history.”

29 As he discusses in his letters to Breton, the rhinoceros was Joans’ spirit animal and surrealist icon. Joans claimed to have written to Salvador Dali about the surrealist potential of the rhino in the early 1940s; Dali never replied. In 1951, in a lecture at the Sorbonne, Dali proclaimed his “discovery” of the animal (*La Brèche*, 5, October 1963, 66–67).

30 The extra-sensical image recalls the “miraculous weapons” of Césaire’s 1946 *Les Armes miraculeuses*, which contained his most overtly Surrealist poems—most of which had appeared earlier in the decade in the journal *Tropiques*, which he edited with Suzanne Césaire in Fort de France from 1941 to 45.

31 See Kamal Boullata, “Artists Re-Member Palestine in Beirut”, in: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 32, 4, 2003, 22–38.

32 Sayigh’s “A Few Questions I Pose to the Unicorn” was celebrated as “the strangest and most remarkable poem in the Arabic language” by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, another Palestinian writer. *Karkadann*, the word translated as “unicorn,” can also refer to its Afro-Asian cousin, the rhinoceros. Sayigh was also a translator whose credits included the Arabic version of T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*.

33 Baalbaki had contributed a column, “Liberated Ideas,” to the pioneering Lebanese feminist journal *The Women’s Voice* in the late 1950s. In the early 1950s, Tawfiq Sayigh profiled the American poet Adrienne Rich in that magazine. See Mahmoud Chreih (ed.), *The Original Letters of Adrienne Rich to Tawfiq Sayigh*, [Beirut] 2011.

34 I am grateful to Nathan Suhr-Sytsma’s 2012 essay, “Christopher Okigbo, Print, and the Poetry of Postcolonial Modernity” in *Research in African Literatures*, for the reference to *The Wasteland*.

it must not rain tonight  
I fear the storm so much  
[...]

I understand that my congo  
wants to live free  
free for  
my teeth  
to be perfumed  
jackals  
every apple is sure  
when love is sad

the night will come my soul is ready

too late  
the buffaloes mount the horizons  
(the ant never did anything)  
the black flames in their iron nostrils  
gleam  
the circular gallop of the ladybirds is fused with theirs  
the gallop of fire of blood of mud  
mechanical buffaloes  
what use is the sun to me  
god only knows  
it was in the rainy season  
that they burnt the salt  
we rubbed ourselves down with brimstone  
and we felt the bronze  
the bronze of physical pleasure

the fire was no further away than the earth  
there is a hope

the salt makes me tasty to myself  
I shall survive the sun  
the night will come my soul is ready

there are the Gabon woods  
the Gabon woods burst everywhere  
dam in the river of sap  
it runs out of my prow even under my feet  
here it is I dance the voyage  
I dance as one dies as one dances  
without recognition  
I have a thousand wasps under my skin  
I close my eyes I open my arms  
the grass grows the grass grew  
the water of the river sang  
inclining the heads of the boatmen  
from poop to prow  
man has a top mast what a mast  
what a wind what a wind  
fire what a fire  
bush fire

From Tchicaya U Tam'si, "Erect", in: *Brush Fire*, translated by Sandodare Akanji, Ibadan: Mbari Publications 1964.

After the torch-light red on sweaty faces  
After the frosty silence in the gardens  
After the agony in stony places  
The shouting and the crying  
Prison and place and reverberation  
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains  
He who was living is now dead  
We who were living are now dying  
With a little patience

From T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, 1922, "Part V: What the Thunder Said"<sup>34</sup>

# Colette's Decision?

I saw the quote come up on the screen. It was sensational. There were immediate side discussions laced with different blends of onomatopoeia. It brought excitement! In an era of a plethora of mastication and morphing of individual ideologies of the now, decolonization. It was fuel to the fire.

I sat there taking it all in. I listened to Colette in the voice of a man, she is in a world away from mine; her simple expression quips, but potent enough to distract. I thought of Colette, I thought of myself and all the pink markers. I wonder if anyone wants to hear the voice beneath, the one under the quick, quip message. Stepping back in time to the influences, I wonder what the demons were. The beautiful abstract with the wanted primal flavour. She referred to her work outside of herself, but what about Colette? What did she want? What were the hushed undertones in her experience in relinquishing representation? I read her manifesto, the author does not seem to be given to the crowd. The author has so much more to draw from. Could one find Colette's shoes? Would one fall into the abyss of the plausible in those shoes? What were the particles in the space she occupied? The space that generates and destroys. So where do we find those shoes to see the particles in her space?

Odun Orimolade  
Lagos, May 23, 2018

I stopped practicing after my doctorate degree in New York University. When I returned to Nigeria, I went into the federal civil service. And I couldn't accommodate part time art practice and my work in the civil service was so congested and I couldn't afford the time even though I moved away from Nigerian traditional religion. So I was a full time civil service worker and administrator.

2018, Colette Omogbai in a mail to Iheanyi Onwuegbucha, see p 17.

Odun Orimolade, *Colette's Decision*, 2018. Mixed media collage on board, 76 x 76 cm.



P 22 Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi, *In Plain Sight (After the Tripode)*, 2013.  
Oil on canvas, 190 x 145 cm.

P 23 Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum, *Unfathom*, 2013.  
Pencil and walnut ink on 6 sheets of paper, 110 x 300 cm.

P 24 Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum, *Dazzle*, 2015.  
Pencil, watercolour, and marble dust gesso on wood panel, 160cm x 120cm.

P 25 Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi, *Nana (After Gladys Nana Nkosi)*, 2018.  
Oil on canvas, 50 x 50 cm.

## Radical Sharing Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum & Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi



These are not new conversations. People have been questioning dominant sites and structures of knowledge production long before me, and I am aware of some of those efforts. But until now, I hadn't looked closely at my own work or the work of those whom I admire to see how they function as sites of knowledge production. And I think it's time. Because this work of naming what you know as knowledge is so empowering, as is widening the scope of what we deem to be sites of knowledge production. (257)

I argue that we need to complicate the idea of who "knows", who "doesn't know". To recognise the subjectivity of it. To see how it shifts and changes depending on circumstances. To widen the field of knowledge production to include more ways of knowing, of expressing that knowing, and of documenting and sharing that knowing. (258)

I share a studio space. Although emerging out of financial need, it was also a strategic decision I made with my studio mate, artist Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum. What began as a sharing of creative space and the cost of that space soon grew into, what we call, a "collaboration of ideologies". (261)

I recently interviewed Pamela about our collaboration, which has grown into an artistic collaboration as well. I told her I'd come up with a name for what I thought we might be doing in our practice, and what I thought the projects in Multiplier were doing in their work: radical sharing. Here is what I asked Pamela:

**Me:** If I throw this idea of radical sharing at you, do you think we are just sharing, or do you think that there is something radical about it?

**Pamela:** I think that is an important distinction: the difference between sharing and what you're calling "radical sharing". How and when does sharing become radical? I think that the way we share becomes radical when your successes are literally my successes. That we stop seeing a distinction between the two.

What has been so important about sharing a studio space is that anybody who comes in necessarily has to meet with, or deal with, or see both of us. I think that's radical. Straight sharing sometimes implies that something becomes less because you've divided it. Whereas radical sharing means that the thing becomes more because you are equally nourished by it. Rather than being about a portioning out of what's available, it's more of a pooling and then augmenting of what's available. (261–62)

There is a sense of agency evoked in an act of radical sharing. [...] As a strategy, radical sharing is futuristic. Yes, it draws on ideas from the past, from those who came before us. And yes, this strategy is a response to present conditions, growing out of necessity in some cases. But through radical sharing we imagine and manifest a world that does not yet exist; a world that, perhaps, should always remain in this realm of the future because it is something we should always aspire to, and in doing so, keep redefining. (265)

Thengiwe Niki Nkosi, "Radical Sharing," in: Lien Heidenreich & Sean O'Toole (Eds.), *African Futures*, Berlin/Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag 2016 (English version), 255–273.







## Spectacles Gladys Melina Kalichini

on a route of academically analysing archival imagery: the simplest description I can give of the painting, *The Widow*, is that it references an image of Pauline Lumumba mourning in the streets in 1961. She is held by two men, one on both her sides. I was initially drawn to this particular painting because of Pauline Lumumba. I was interested in understanding how Marlene Dumas was able to consolidate and remember Pauline Lumumba's actions of publicly mourning half-naked into painting. I must admit that when I first heard about this painting, I was more interested in reading about it, its background, and hearing what the artist had to say about the work. But as I understand now, there is something at stake in the visual language that can be expressed and triggered by its own means.

Had I just considered "text", I would have been trying to contextualize the nature of Pauline Lumumba's public expression of grief and agony. I would have further attempted to distinguish her actions from those of Zambian freedom fighter, Julia Chikamoneka—as we understand their half-naked protest as political activism. Thank God for the visual; in some ways it takes me from this quite organized way of thinking and moves me to talking about what a painting can do. The gesture of painting is done in such a way that it respectfully gives a space for the portrayal of what she documented in the photograph—which is grief, she was mourning for loss in public. In as much as the loss was a national loss, there is something quite dignifying in the way in which the painting recognizes that for Pauline Lumumba it was a personal loss of a loved one. The loss of a companion. The loss of a friend. The loss of a future. I am now thinking of biblical illustrations of grief—how people who were in agony are to be seen to have worn sackcloth and covered in ash as they wailed publicly. To some extent the painting comes across as spiritual, a ritual of remembrance.

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For a couple of years now, I have known about the work of **Marlene Dumas**. I had always seen images of her paintings and drawings but only on websites and in some books. From their virtual presence, I was drawn to their simple yet sophisticated aesthetic: simple, for their focused concreteness and sophisticated, in the way she could make sense out of her subjects beings as well as their emotional ability. Her paintings seemed to have the power to capture an essence that goes far beyond my capacity to use words. As fate would have it, I eventually saw a painting by Marlene Dumas that is part of the Rubel Family Collection in Miami. It was quite an experience; nothing to be compared to what I saw online. (Seeing her work in books has a different effect on me, but I have a bias and fascination for print and text, and I do enjoy that experience as well). The truth though is that her paintings in reality are literally breathtaking—they take the breath away—my affected body stopped breathing (I know using the word 'breath-taking' is a bit of a cliché, but I must admit that her work truly is phenomenal).

There is freedom and care in the way she makes and places the subjects of her paintings. There is seamless collaboration between the paint and the subject of the painting in the way they are presented. Nothing feels forced or too choreographed but every part of the painting seems to fall into place quite perfectly such that the painting speaks and expresses an emotion, a way of being in the world, in a way it wants to. There is a perfect balance in her work—the pallet is so great that no colours are fighting against each other and neither are they louder than the subject of the painting.

A lot of my work centres around narratives of women whom I argue are marginalized from specific historic events and national collective memory. It is not too difficult to see why I am drawn to Marlene Dumas' paintings, particularly the painting titled *The Widow* (2013) that portrays a woman (Pauline Lumumba) seemingly protesting in public space. In some of my work, I also start with archival photographs, so my fascination with this painting is rather obvious. Just to give a little bit of context, also to satisfy my fixations on going



**Barbara Bloom**

You mean that the work is narrative?

**Marlene Dumas**

No, it's suggestive, it suggests all sorts of narratives, but it doesn't really tell you what's going on at all. Someone said that it feels as if something's going to happen but you don't yet know what it is. It's as if I can make people think they are so close to me that they believe I've addressed the painting directly to them. I give them a false sense of intimacy. I think the work invites you to have a conversation with it. [...] I've always wanted my paintings to be more like movies or other art forms, where the work stimulates discussion in all kinds of directions.

Why do my pictures escape the 'voyeuristic gaze'. This was the question put to me recently. My reaction was: I am not a Peeping Tom. I am a painter, I'm not even a photographer. [...] The aim is to 'reveal' not to 'display'. It is the discourse of the Lover. I am intimately involved with my subject matter in the painting. I am not disengaged from the subject of my gaze. With photographic activities it is possible that they who take the picture leave no traces of their presence, and are absent from the pictures. Paintings exist as the traces of their makers and by the grace of their makers.

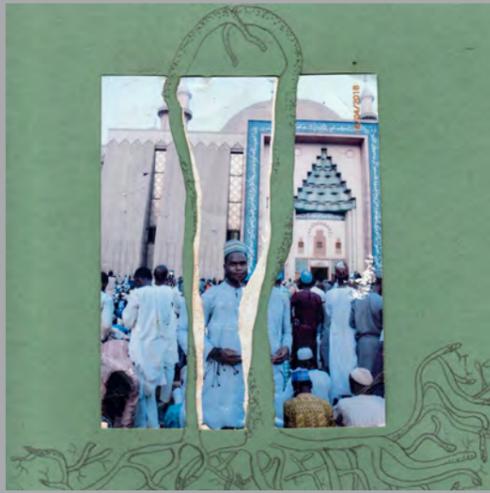
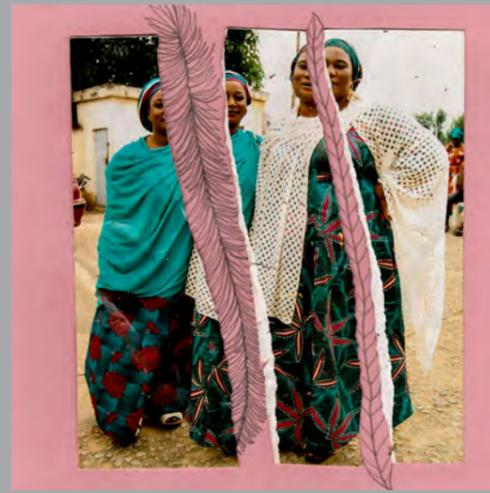
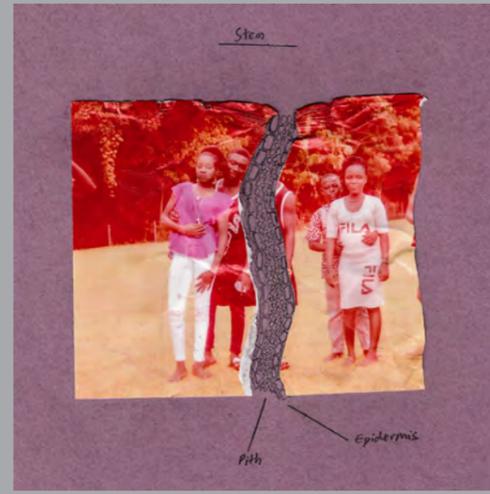
Marlene Dumas in: Marlene Dumas, *Miss Interpreted*, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum 1992, 43.

„Interview, Barbara Bloom in conversation with Marlene Dumas“, in: *Marlene Dumas*, London/New York: Phaidon 1999, reprint 2013, 7–29, 12.

Pp 26–27, Gladys Melina Kalichini, Studio. In the back:  
*A Spectacle of Death—Her Untitled Silence*, 2016.  
Oil on canvas, 260 x 165 cm.

P 28, Gladys Kalichini, *A Spectacle of Erasure—Her Present Absence*, 2017.  
Oil on canvas, 260 x 165 cm

P 30, Gladys Kalichini, *Spectacle of Erasure—Morphed*, 2017.  
Oil on canvas, 160 x 265 cm.



Rahima Gambo, *A Walk Series*, Abuja, 2018.

7 scanned collages of found photographs and pencil drawings on paper.

8 Landscape photographs taken in Millennium Park, Abuja, Nigeria, 2018. Works in progress.

## Silent conversations Rahima Gambo

the elements, the images were crumpled, soiled and stained. Slowly I started to collect these fragmented, beautifully damaged and mysterious images gifted to me by the park.

And so, we began to cross pollinate, to co-produce these hybrid children's photo-collage-illustrations that referred to botanical drawings describing the nature, process and descriptions of plant life.

Ranjana Khanna describes a similar process in her book, *Dark Continents*, the concept of bringing something that was concealed in the earth into history as "worlding... an event through which the participants are brought into temporality and history or conversely excluded from these and concealed timelessly into the earth." She was speaking of "worlding" in terms of the need to reconfigure and read psychoanalysis "against the grain" as a colonial discipline located in the global South, so that the violent ways it inscribed the others of the globe would be eased.

In a way, through my co-produced collage-illustrations, I was attempting to circumvent some of the violence of unearthing a visual narrative about this particular place into being. The illustrations attempt to peer beyond the surface to the essence and see the connections and relationships between the fragmented pieces and the nature around it.

John Berger speaks of photography as "having no language of its own", a very different medium from painting. He prompts viewers to read it like "footprints", the tracks determined by time and decision making.

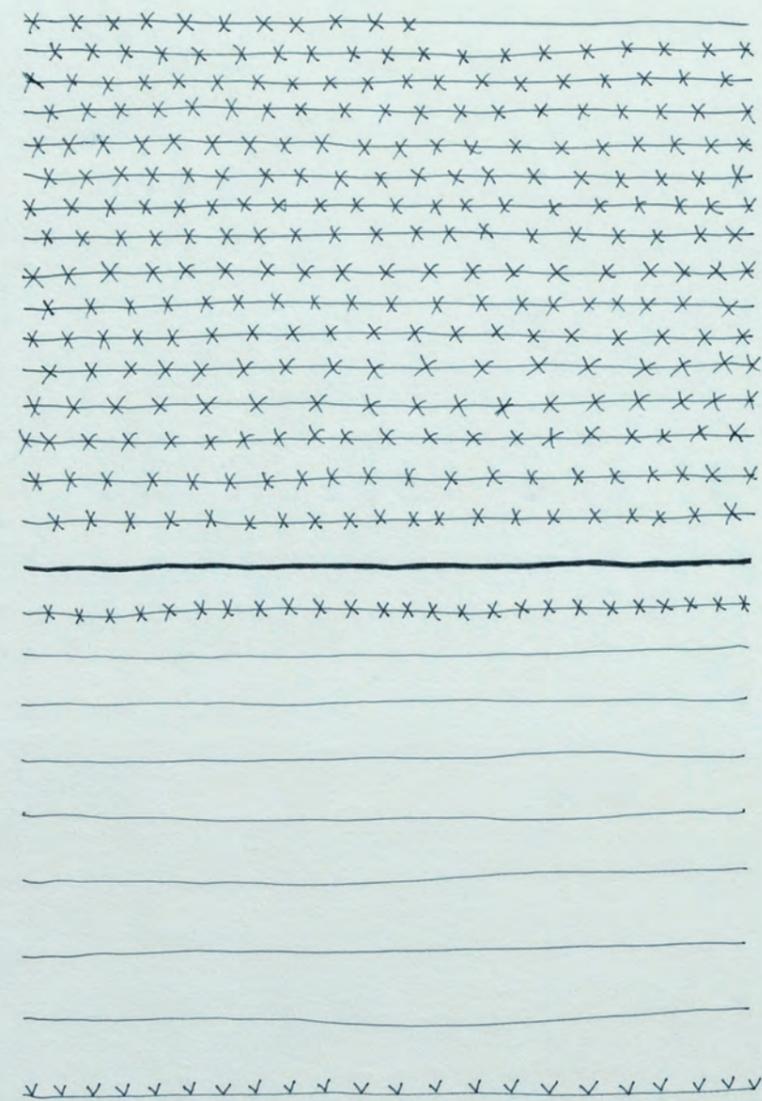
Who were the people in the images and why would they tear up their images so consistently? Some photos were obviously bad prints, discarded when inks would fail to saturate the photographic paper accurately. Just like looking over a surface of a plant, it was impossible to know the impulses and inner workings of the people in the pictures. And maybe it didn't matter so much as they began new lives in the grass.

I also wondered what happened to the photographs left in the soil, the ones I failed to recover. Did the other plants recognise them as the same? Or did they sense the strangeness of the photographs as they refused to obey the laws of nature to sprout and grow?

I responded to its promptings by picking up the organic and inorganic material it would present to me. A fiery red petal would draw my eye, I would pick up a shiny black seed just to feel its texture. I knew nothing of botany and I barely knew the names of the flowers, seeds and trees around me. As the seasons changed from dry to wet, my senses were engaged in the shifting and we went through processes together.

Soon enough, torn up photos of visitors, barely visible, left in the grass among branches and fallen leaves, began to reveal themselves. The glossy paper provided a bit of protection from the rain, but after a night left to





## Two or three questions Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi

*Who has been an important source and influence for the way you think, work and live?*

My series of paintings, which I started in 2012 and is still growing, is about remembering, documenting and meditating on the people, mostly women, who have played a part in helping to construct my ever-evolving identity and worldview. All of them feel equally important to me. They have each shaped a different part of my self and psyche. There are, among them, writers, artists, musicians. Some are very famous figures, some are hardly known at all. As my project grows and develops, I keep uncovering new influences and new parts of myself (that often feel like old parts). It's a mysterious and dynamic process. So at this point in my life it feels counterintuitive to try to privilege one source or influence. On a particular day I might feel more connected to one or another, but over the course of, say, a year, I feel the power and inspiration of all of them.

*Did you ever have a favourite heroine in fiction, in reality, in history?*

The first time I remember feeling that there was a public figure I wanted to emulate was when I saw Cindy Blackman on drums for Lenny Kravitz's band in the early 1990s. At the time—I was on the cusp of being a teenager—I desperately wanted to be a drummer. But I had never, until that moment, encountered any Black women drummers, and I thought of myself as some kind of anomaly. As result, I hadn't really been able to imagine a future in it for me. So she was an enabling image, fully embodied. It's not just that I looked up to Cindy Blackman; she made being a fully-realised person seem possible.

Pp 35/36  
Lungiswa Gqunta  
*What songs will we sing when everything returns to us*, 2018.  
Installation

*The Softness of a Woman's Touch*, 2018.  
Barbed wire wrapped in cotton sheeting

*The Flex Has a Loop In It*, 2018.  
Series of drawings, ink on paper

Installation view, *Women on Aeroplanes*, The Showroom, London.  
Commissioned by The Showroom and The Otolith Collective.  
Photo: Daniel Brooke.

## Two or three questions Emily Pethick

Who has been an important source and influence for the way you think, work and live?

Lygia Clark

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Which work of her art / literature / music / photography keeps resonating with you?

There's not a specific work, more her entire oeuvre, from early abstraction, performative participatory works, to combining art and therapy, there's a consistent practice of experimentation, critical questioning, and opening up of what art and life can be and do.

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Which of her books did you always want to read, but never found a copy, the time, the entry point?

I've only read fragments of her writing, so would like to dedicate more of my time to reading more. I've often encountered her writing through others, such as artist Ricardo Basbaum, who wrote a brilliant text on her notion of *the organic line*, which I have found important for thinking about the potentiality of *space set free*. "The *organic line* is a line that has not been drafted or carved by anyone, but results from the contact of two different surfaces (planes, things, objects, bodies, or even concepts): it announces a way of thinking beyond the logic of true or false, without awaiting a synthesis of previous counterparts to evolve—it points to a way of thinking without contradiction, without dialectics, [...]; thought that accepts divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction; thought of the multiple." <http://www.ludlow38.org/files/conceptualartorganicline.pdf> (1/19). In relation to the question of how to archive her later more experimental performative and psychoanalytical practice, Suely Rolnik made an extensive series of interviews of people who had contact with her and her art practice, I've only seen a few of them as many have not been translated and are not accessible.

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*Is there a work you would have wanted, but never managed to see properly? In a good equipped cinema, as an original in a museum? Attend the concert instead of listening to the record?*

Alejandra Riera's *Mute—Ohpera* (2014), is an incredible film that I have only seen once and have always wanted to see again. It's not distributed, and needs to be seen on screen, watched many times and studied. Realised in collaboration with the Brazilian theatre group UEINZZ, the film revolves around spaces and places of History, constructions and demolitions, such as the removal of the statue of Columbus in Buenos Aires in 2014, among others. It engages stories and storytellers, female narrators for whom there is often no space, so space has to be produced. When I've seen it again I will have more words to describe how truly affecting and inspiring this film was the first time around.

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*Who would you love to meet and have a conversation with? Where and what about?*

In collaboration with the Otolith Group, when working on The Showroom iteration of the Women on Aeroplanes project, we started looking at fiction writing from the continent, in particular science fiction. Writers who emerged from this include Bessie Head—the central figure of Pamela Phatismo Sunstrum's mural at The Showroom—as well as Octavia Butler. Kodwo Eshun of the Otolith Group has been looking at these novels as speculative theory, as testing out scenarios. Similarly in the film *Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival*, Haraway describes how some of the best thinking is done as storytelling, and how feminist writers have used science fiction writing can be read as philosophical texts. In the film she talks about a feminist consciousness towards the importance of other women's thinking as part of the battle for women not be disappeared, about changing the dominant narratives to make the weak stories stronger and the strong stories weaker. I would like to meet this great ecofeminist to learn more about her strategies for *storying otherwise*.

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*Which woman artist should be rediscovered and should get a retrospective or a solo show or a proper catalogue?*

It seems to me that there are many people working with Octavia Butler at the moment, as she keeps coming up in conversation. The great thing is that it's not through a singular effort, it's happening all over the place, and this makes it a kind of movement that is bigger than a solo show or catalogue, she is being reinstalled in a wider consciousness that is awakening the relevance of her incredible work for today.

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*Did you ever have a favourite heroine in fiction, in reality, in history?*

My great, great, great, aunt, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence was a leading suffragette, she founded the publication *Votes for Women*, she was the treasurer of the *Women's Social and Political Union*, she went to jail many times and undertook hunger strikes, her work was not in vain, women gained the vote!

## Two or three questions Bisi Silva

Who has been an important source of influence for the way you think, work and live?

Carrie Mae Weems, American artist/photographer.

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Which work of art / literature / music / photography keeps resonating with you?

Carrie Mae Weems, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995–1996)

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*Is there a work you would have wanted to, but never managed to see properly—either in a good equipped cinema or as an original in a museum or attend the concert instead of listening to the record?*

Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* (1940)

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*Who would you love to meet and have a conversation with? Where and what about?*

Clara Etso Ugbodaga-Ngu (1921-1996). A Nigerian modern woman artist of many firsts whose contribution to the development of modern art education in Nigeria and also in Cameroon has yet to be documented or adequately acknowledged.

I would love to be in residency at the same time as her in Bellagio, Italy.

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*Which woman artist / figure should be rediscovered and should get a retrospective or a solo show or a proper catalogue?*

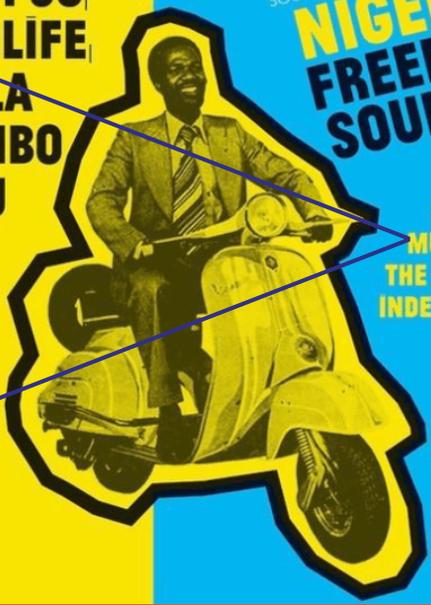
Afi Ekong (1930–2009) should get a major publication about her crucial role in developing the visual arts sector in Nigeria in the 1960s and 1970s and beyond, as an artist and an art promoter.

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*Did you ever have a favorite heroine in fiction, in reality, in history? And who would that be?*

Captain Kathryn Janeway of the USS Starship Enterprise.

**CALYPSO  
HIGHLIFE  
APALA  
MAMBO  
JUJU**



SOUL JAZZ RECORDS  
**NIGERIA  
FREEDOM  
SOUNDS!**

**POPULAR  
MUSIC AND  
THE BIRTH OF  
INDEPENDENT  
NIGERIA  
1960-63**



C. OMOGBA