



OUT of
OSTRALE
Centre for Contemporary Art

Womanism Project
Nairobi 2020
Dresden 2019

Womanism

Womanism is an international project consisting of exhibitions, workshops, artist residencies and artistic cooperation, aiming to examine and encourage the dialogue on women's rights and women's position in the art world and in society in general. It is the joint endeavor of curators and organizers Syowia Kyambi (Nairobi, Kenya), Antka Hofmann and Andrea Hilger from the OSTRALE Center for Contemporary Arts (Dresden, Germany). The project kickstarted with a residency during the Ostrale Biennale O19 in June 2019 in Dresden, Germany.

The second residency took place in Nairobi at the Untethered Magic residency space based in Ongata Rongai hosted by Syowia Kyambi, Kibe Wangunyu and Kiberu Dennis. The artists participating in this residency and exhibition at Circle Art Gallery titled **Get Your Foot Off My Neck** include **Sonia E. Barrett** (GB/DE/JM), **Frenzy Höhne** (DE) **Ramona Seyfarth** (DE), **Carolin Koss** (FI/DE), **Immy Mali** (UG), **Hanna Nitsch** (DE) and **Usha Seejarim** (ZA).

The OSTRALE – Center for Contemporary Arts has been organizing international exhibitions in Dresden, Germany and abroad since 2007. Throughout the years, the OSTRALE Biennale has grown to be Germany's third largest contemporary exhibition, with satellite exhibitions in more than 15 European cities. Its cooperation with European Capitals of Culture focuses increasingly on exhibitions abroad. It is not a sales exhibition per se, which gives it the freedom to discuss socially relevant issues in a different way, regardless of market developments. OSTRALE's guiding principles, such as peaceful coexistence, acceptance of the stranger/unknown, respect for each other, religious diversity and internationality, are always reflected in the exhibitions. OSTRALE is part of the #WOD (Weltoffenes Dresden) initiative of cultural institutions for an open-minded Dresden, and the network of the independent cultural scene of the city (Netzwerk Kultur Dresden).

Syowia Kyambi is the main curator of the Womanism project, 2019 – 2020. She is an alumnus of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has been the recipient of several awards, grants and fellowships. Her work examines how our contemporary human experience is influenced by constructed histories, creating installations that include a performative practice to narrate stories and activate objects; exploring cultural identities, linking them to issues of loss, memory, race, and gender. Syowia Kyambi practices both artistic and curatorial outputs. Her work has been shown in museums in Belgium, Finland, Kenya, Mali, United Kingdom, Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Zimbabwe, France, South Africa and the USA. Syowia Kyambi has also been part of the curatorial team that selected the artists exhibited at the OSTRALE Biennale O19.

Antka Hofmann is an artist, cultural manager and curator of the Womanism project, 2019 – 2020. Born in 1977 in Großenhain, she lives and works in Dresden and Heiligendamm. She studied painting and graphics at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts (Hochschule für Bildende Künste, 1996-2002); and did her MA studies there as well (2002-2005). After a Research and Teaching Grant (2002-2003), she was member of the Produzentengalerie Komet Berlin (formerly Rakete Berlin 2007-2009). She is also co-founder of OSTRALE, board member and part of the exhibition building team since 2013. As an artist, she had solo exhibitions in Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden; as well as various group exhibitions in Germany, Poland, Russia, Belgium, Spain and Malta. She has also been part of the curatorial team that selected the artists to be exhibited at the OSTRALE Biennale O19.

Andrea Hilger is the founder and artistic director of the OSTRALE Center for Contemporary Arts, and the main organizer of the Womanism project. Born in 1970 in Leipzig, she is also the founder of TANZart Dresden (1997) and HILLUMINATION – Light + Stage Design (2001), board member of Tanzbühne Dresden e.V. since 1999, and dancer of several German opera houses, among them the Semperoper Dresden up to this day, as well as stage and costume designer at numerous theaters in all Germany. She is the 2009 recipient of the Förderpreis of the City of Dresden, and member of the organizational team of the Konferenz der Konkurrenten (Conference of Competitors) in preparation for the European Capital of Culture 2025 applications.

Get Your Foot Off My Neck

Artists: Sonia E. Barrett, Frenzy Höhne, Ramona Seyfarth, Carolin Koss, Immy Mali, Hanna Nitsch and Usha Seejarim

Curator: Syowia Kyambi
Circle Art Gallery, Nairobi, Kenya
25th March – 25th April 2020

Seejarim's "Trophy Wives" screams get off my neck. Barrett's "Telling Time" asks why is the foot on the neck. Why do we treat time and nature in an oppressive manner? Höhne's work "SOMA SOMA - no will-power or exercise required" speaks about choices, about desires, about wanting to drink an idea that won't fill you. Childhood memories fill Mali's work. Her letters to her childhood self engage in the extraction of the foot from the neck. Koss's "The Obedient" is a dystopic search for a different future, a future unknown. Seyfarth's "I AM" is in the neck, looking at it from the inside out. Nitsch's work, "La Source / Die Quelle" lays bare the vulgarity within our society. The repeated ambush on the private and the spectacle that's created in what we consume. What we repeatedly do is step on the neck. And repeatedly the victims labor to remove the foot over and over and over. With capitalism, with the violence of our economies, with the violence of mono-culturalism, with racism, with sexism, the labor of removing feet from necks remains. Sadly, it is constant. The world is moving to more desperate times. We are suffocating, ourselves in each other. The work remains potent. Can we get to a future where there are no longer feet on people's necks?

"Get Your Foot Off My Neck " speaks to all of us, rich and poor, black and white, the yin and the yang, male and female, and the definitions in-between. It is our duty to consistently remove the foot from the neck. It is our duty to consistently revise whether our feet are on other people's necks. And if so to remove them, to remove them now.

Hanna Nitsch

* 1974 (DE)



meaning of aspects #1 | 2018

Film, Installation | Wood, mattresses, pillows, sheets, clothes, window drawing, video projections with sound, outer casing (metal and plexiglass) | 259 x 605 x 243 cm

In the project „meaning of aspects #1“, Hanna Nitsch deals with role models, fragmented identities and physical perception in an increasingly digitized world. This is a very personal confrontation with the question of our justifications for existence and with the possibility of us being many different people at once and yet being none at the same time. Are we creating digital identities because we can never fulfill these identities in real life? Do we lose ourselves in the thousand variations of our own ego? During the intensive work process, the container has lost its anonymous functionalism and has become a projection screen for individual desires and needs. The result is a special form of „digital self-portrait“, which questions artistic existence as well as the fragility of human life in general, incorporating the container as a kind of „third place“.

Hanna Nitsch

* 1974 (DE)



La Source / Die Quelle | 2020

Photography | 16 photographs | 60 x 39,80 cm each

In this series Hanna Nitsch develops photographs that she reworks and alters through various photographic “interventions”. The sources of the pictures are public YouTube-videos of women giving birth, who expose themselves publicly during one of the most existential and intimate moments of their life. There is apparently no discrepancy between maximal intimacy and extreme exposure. The artist intends to capture with the camera a moment that is only to be seen on the elated faces of these women. In this way, close-ups of female faces are produced, that at first sight do not reveal what it is exactly that unleashed their ecstatic and highly emotional expressions. As the photo of a picture displayed on a computer screen is taken, pixels, chromatic aberrations, the mouse pointer, reflections, blurring, incoming light, dust and impurities become an elementary part of the artistic work. Through this act of selecting and “displaying”, every single photograph goes through a careful, touching form of artistic appropriation.

Frenzy Höhne

* 1975 (DE)



NEUES LEBEN III (top left) | 2019 | Installation, Object | 9 books bound in linen with the title embossing (wine red, gold), bookmark ribbon (silk) wallboard shelf | 160 x 80 x 100 cm
TAUSENDUNDEINE (1001) NACHT (top right) | 2013 | Installation | towing rope (yellow polypropylene), wire, braided rubber | 47 x 30 x 30 cm

NEUES LEBEN III

The book „Weltall Erde Mensch“ is a collection on the history of the development of nature, mankind and society, which was handed out to every young person by the Central Committee for Youth Consecration in the GDR. In the Installation each volume of the book stands for a specific attitude or a point of view that has been limited through its cultural or social origin to the history of the development of Earth and of humankind. The fact that all the colours finally combine on the ground to form a colourful mass that flows in a common direction is to be understood as a plea, a plea for the bundling of the knowledge of all cultures and peoples and a united approach to the one world in which we all live.

TAUSENDUNDEINE (1001) NACHT

The blonde braid, borrowed from a fairy tale, instead of stretching up to the tower to help the knight climb up, becomes the picture of an aggressive rattlesnake who seems to be quite enraptured by romanticism. The fantastic power of love, which animates the stories of A Thousand and One Nights with their eternal happy endings, is sobered up in order to take the form of a profane tow rope.

Frenzy Höhne

* 1975 (DE)



SOMA SOMA - no willpower or exercise required | 2007

Installation | 13 bottles (glass), stick-on labels, holders, pourers, coloured water, plastic cups
| Size variable

13 bottles are filled with coloured water. Each bottle is labelled a character like POTENCE, CHARISM, POPULARITY, OPENESS, PASSION, HUMOR ... The visitors are getting plastic cups and are invited to take their choice and drink the supposed ‚emotional substances‘. At the end of the day the most frequented properties are exposed to the audience itself, that has shown its longings and needs.

Usha Seejarim

* 1974 (ZA)



Domestic Disagreement (top left) | 2015 | Object | Wood: chairs and wooden pegs | 131 x 91 x 46 cm || **A Philosophy of Habit & An Unlikely State of Peace** | 2016 | Print | Lithograph print on paper, framed | 64 x 82 x 3 cm || **Male Guilt** | 2016 | Print | Lithograph print on paper, framed | 64 x 82 x 3 cm || **Herd** (top right) | 2018 | Installation | Irons and hangers | 250 x 400 x 50 cm

DOMESTIC DISAGREEMENT

Sometimes creating new meaning can be done with a modest act as simple as reconfiguring two existing elements or objects. And this meaning is then further transformed when an individual viewer, informed by his or her own history, preferences and experience, brings his or her specific interpretations to the artwork.

HERD

These everyday „common“ items are usually used by women in their daily chores. For the many women in African countries who are domestic workers, there is a kind of empowerment allowing them to provide for their families through domesticity. Seejarim uses these banal objects to make comments on gender, women and women’s work, through which her art becomes the „guardian“ of recent changes in the role of women questioning, pointing out and envisioning these tendencies. This installation was part of a solo booth that received the „Tomorrow’s Today“ prize at the Cape Town Art Fair in 2018.

Usha Seejarim

* 1974 (ZA)



Trophy Wives I 2020

Installation, Object I Series of 6 pieces, clothes iron bases, wooden backing I 390 x 250 cm

The obvious interpretation of a series of works titled “Trophy Wives” is where an attractive, often young woman serves quite willingly as a status symbol for usually a less attractive and often older man. The stereotype character of this kind of woman is usually one that is averse to or even incapable of fulfilling domestic chores.

This series is about untruth, a pretense, an illusion of love. A relationship for exhibit. At its core, it's about a futile search for acknowledgement and recognition. Its attributes are an uncomfortable juxtaposition of violence and beauty. Decorative and (de)stabilizing, awarded for the superficial, with the deceptive promise of security. Beauty, security, status and image are ironically fleeting conditions.

It's a cold feeling to see the labia shaped out of a used iron, mounted on a trophy board, like a head on a stake. There is no redemption here, no moment of relief; she is pinned there, positioned, cheered on. She may think she chose this position, she may never get out. She's revered and pitied at the same time.

Immy Mali

* 1990 (UG)



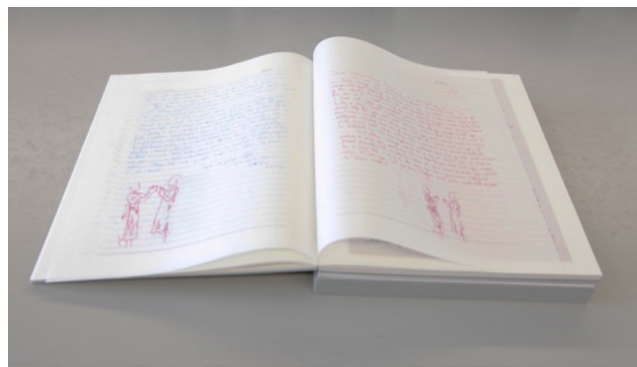
Safe Here | 2016/2019

Film, Installation | Tape, sculpture, bicycle, video | 300 x 250 x 400 cm

This installation was inspired by memories of the artist's childhood, when she had to wear a leg brace between the ages of 7 and 18, and therefore could not take part in the games of the other pupils during recess. But it is also a tribute to the only childhood friend who broke through this isolation by taking the artist on his back and becoming her partner in games and conversations. At the time of creation in 2016, the installation was complemented by a 30-minute performance that used the artist's desire and inability to ride a bicycle as a central element. At the Goethe Institute Dresden, the video recording of this performance was shown on a screen, together with the other installative elements of the work.

Immy Mali

* 1990 (UG)



Dear Marcue love Immy... | 2019

Book Installation with sound | Mixed media artist book, 5 parts | 23,5 x 29 x 4,4 cm (folded), 470 cm (unfolded)

“This is an accordion book with silkscreen print on linen cover. A Kasonko pattern divided in segments is printed on the front cover and back cover of the book. Kasonko is the name of a game I habitually played as a child growing up in playgrounds in the east and central regions of Uganda. The game was/is commonly played by girls. It focuses on physical balance, strategy, and competitiveness and has land ownership as the goal. These are a measure of stability, wealth or power within most Ugandan communities. It is a mirror of society played out by 5-12 year olds (mostly girls) and occasionally teenagers of up to 14 years of age.

Taking from the design of Kasonko, I have created a labyrinth that I envision as a place, which holds most of my childhood memories between the ages of 5-12 years of age and early teenage years. At the end of February 2017, I started writing to Marcue. To my younger self between the ages of approximately five (or less) and twelve years of age in the project Letters to my Childhood (2017-present). A journey that started as images of events from childhood times started to manifest in my work Daddy Can I Play?! (2013), a children’s playground made of objects, which a child would not be allowed to play with. A déjà vu of sorts relating to child seduction of play countered by the adult obligation of safeguarding children. These letters have become a way of revisiting childhood events juxtaposed with experiences of my current existence. The 66 letters focus on: the recreations/fictions of remembrance; notions of presence and absence; and the psychological drama of an artist striving to archive they’re being.” (Immy Mali)

Sonia E Barrett

* 1975 (GB/DE/JM)



Chair No. 33 | 2015

Objekt | wing-back chair | 80 x 60 x 140 cm

Yolk to Harness | 2014

Installation, Objekt | Series of 5 pieces, former West German horse halter and former East German horse halter, upholstery fabric, upholstered thread, nails | 73 x 39 x 12 cm

CHAIR NO. 33.

Chairs such as this can be found in gentlemen's clubs, where a good cigar or whiskey might be enjoyed in them, or a "fireside chat". These are the places where "old boys" network. It is a very British Thing. Sonia Barrett saw the body in the chair. The question was only how to make the meta-narrative of the chair explicit. Here the chair has stopped cushioning resting male bodies in the club-room, lay down and rested herself. For the artist, the space between the ears of the chair was like the space between the breasts of this figure.

YOKE TO HARNESS

The horse harness blurs distinctions between the object, person and the animal. When the artist started to transform the horse halters, she considered the physical and socio-political structures that birth a child into indentured labor. All these halters are German. The larger ones are from former West Germany; the smaller ones are from the former DDR. Some show an African aesthetic however, even though these are actually European tools and tribes. These tools were in part responsible for the beginning of European industrialization, as the horses were faster than oxen and these new halters did not inhibit their breathing while working. They enabled farmers to force the land to bear more than what a single family needs.

Sonia E Barrett

* 1975 (GB/DE/JM)



Telling Time | 2019

Sculpture | Second hand fur, watches, wood limbs | 76 x 54 x 4 cm

“Unseating Western dominant notions of time, having time told to us. I wanted to work over the watch, the gold watch in order to revision an understanding of time that is beyond dominant Capitalist Western thinking but yet close enough to that methodology to be credible and understandable. Children in the West know that you can count the rings of a cross-section of a tree and use that to tell about time. The circles are close to a spiralistic notion of time that I have researched in time concepts on the continent of Africa. In the face of environmental devastation, instead of thinking in minutes, seconds and hours we need to start looking at the time frames that trees give us. We need to be told about time. The watches are pinned on the outside of the jacket unlike aspirational fake watches sold on the street, which are pinned on the inside of a jacket. I see this as a continuation of my work eliding the person, the plant and the animal.” (Sonia E. Barrett)

Carolin Koss

* 1986 (FI/DE)



Growth (ENVIRONMENTALISM) | 2015

Film, Installation | Soil, plants, trash, video | 80 x 150 x 150 cm
run time: 11:38 min

Koss' work is characterized by a subtle reinterpretation of references to art history and contemporary culture. With a penetrating gaze, Koss examines a highly complex form of subjectivity. She interrogates the mechanics of humanity and ecology, sociological questions pertaining to the human condition, as well as the dynamics of power in today's society. Koss' works generate a multi-layered, lyrical, euphoric and yet thought-provoking energy going far beyond conventional video and digital artistic working methods and they are often presented in the form of an installation. (Art Productions, New York)

Carolyn Koss

* 1986 (FI/DE)



The Obedient | 2018

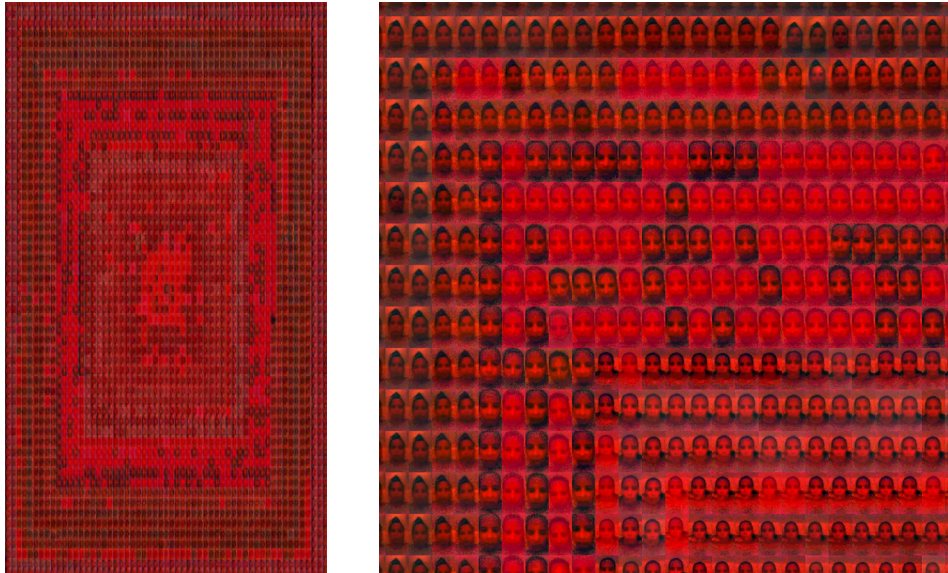
Experimental Short Film | Type: 1-channel video format, Full HD, Dolby Surround Sound
run time: 13:13 min

“The Obedient“ portrays a woman who is steered by an invisible force in a dystopian world. Guided by a black cat, she breaks out of her invisible chains and goes on a journey through dark places, hoping to find light. Her environment has a pristine, almost clinical setting, a calculated frame, each frame set up like a series of photos. There is neatness in the arrangement of the set. Yet the meal is messy, it’s a battleground, a fight played with invisible characters. She is alone and has to push through the arrangements made for her on the behalf of others. She succeeds to define her own position, her own frame, her own meal and how she intends to eat it.

“The Obedient“ is part of larger body of work titled “Emerald Green“, which is a three-channel video that was realized over a four-year period. The project is about a dystopian world, where nature has been rendered extinct, breathable air has gotten scarce and the sun has vanished due to exploitation of natural resources and human error. The focus is on three people who try to survive and escape into their sub-consciousness in order to re-imagine and re-build the contaminated world they live in. The video installation is an imaginary reaction to real issues, such as air becoming more and more polluted, water resources running dry, oceans accumulating tons of plastic waste, the human body degrading through processed food, and an obscured force steering the fate of the world.

Ramona Seyfarth

* 1980 (DE)



I Am I 2020

Photography | Self portraits braided into carpet | 100 x 180 cm

“I AM“, am I? questions the parameters of what defines our identity in relation to our surroundings. The work searches for patterns of self-determination outside the staged selfie optic and places the exemplary ego in a temporal context of now and now and now and... Forty thousand selfies taken in the private space of the bathroom: simultaneously something is being revealed and yet hidden. Braided, overlapped, recreated into carpet, and recreated again into a photograph. The repetition screaming at you to see what binds us, what binds her to herself? In the looking, what is found? The privacy of taking these in the bathroom holds the key. You are entering a private moment, forty thousand private moments at once, each singularly revealing, still all of them together, yet it is still not enough to see the whole person. We never see the whole, just passing moments of ourselves, “It is you who thinks of which I you think of when you say I.”

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Illustration cover page: Detail from the artwork *NEUES LEBEN III*
(Frenzy Höhne, 2019)