

Africa Remix; Reposted

Curating African Identity in Postcolonial & Digital Spaces

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Research Question

How does the digital platform Artspace.Africa, as a reimagined space inspired by the *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* exhibition, challenge or reinforce postcolonial narratives and perceptions of authenticity in African art and culture?

Abstract

This research interrogates the notion of "Authenticity" in the context of African art, both within the continent and the diaspora, particularly in digital platforms. Using Artspace.Africa—a reimagined version of the exhibition *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*—as a focal point, the study explores the complexities of African identity, spirituality, and spatial representation. I adapt Simon Njami's original thematic divisions—Identity & History, Body & Soul, and City & Land—while integrating Henri Lefebvre's layered concept of 'space,' involving physical, planned, and lived spaces. This curatorial approach aims to challenge monolithic perceptions of Africa, illuminating its diversity through an exploration of different types of space as theorised by Lefebvre. The methodology is qualitative, using my own curation as the primary lens for investigation. I consider the implications of digital platforms on the perceived "Authenticity" of artworks and the transformative role of the digital realm in archiving and exhibiting African art. The study also acknowledges its limitations, particularly concerning the digital divide and the limited access to the internet within a South African context. This research aims to contribute to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of African art and its multi-dimensional representations in the digital age.

The database that was built for this research can be found [here](#)¹.

The website, Artspace.Africa, can be found [here](#)².

¹<https://africa-remix.notion.site/Africa-Remix-Contemporary-Art-of-a-Continent-9fbc1dc891d4e65b3a080d4f177d034>

² <https://artspace.africa/>

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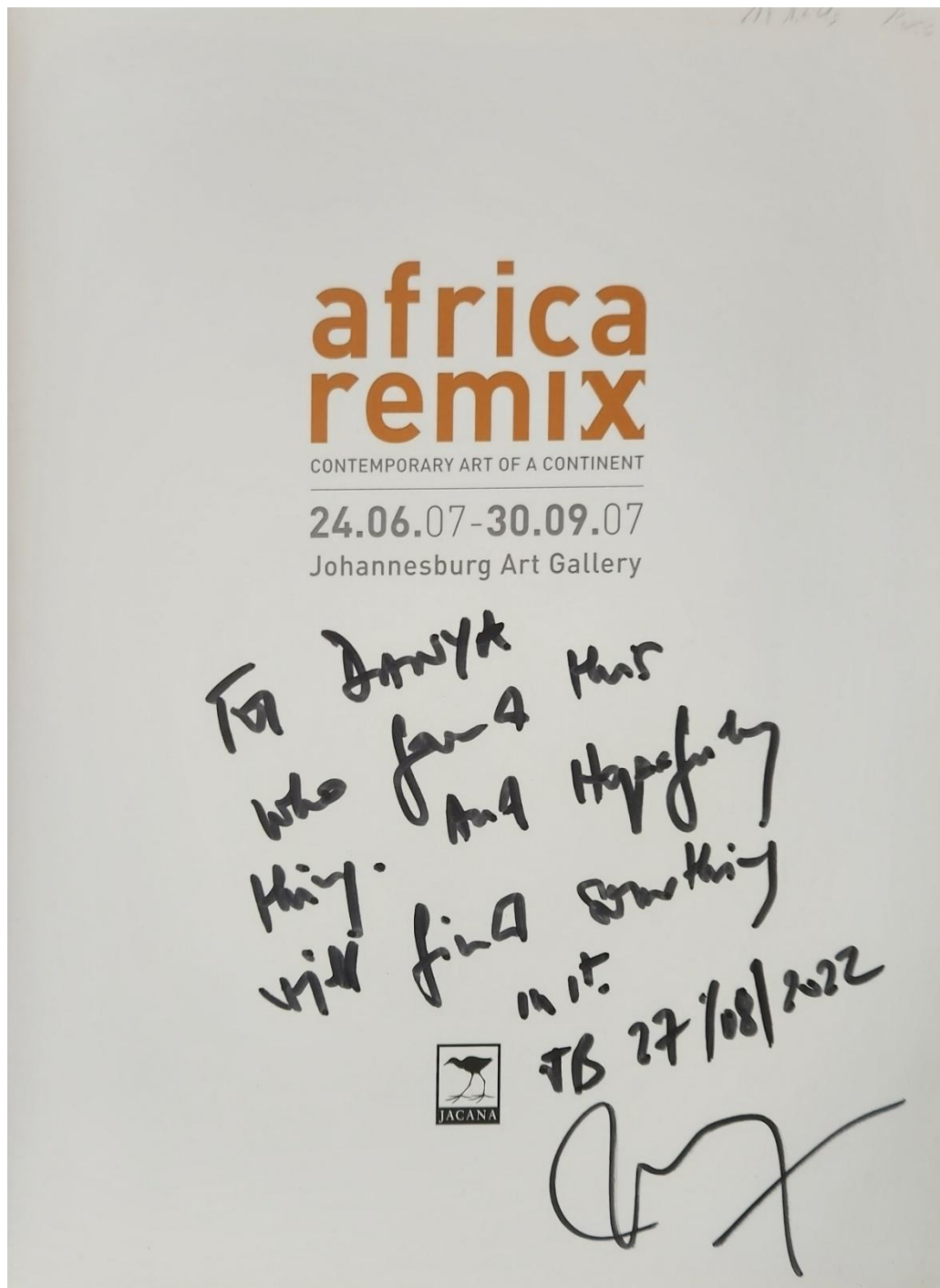
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Research Question.....	3
Abstract	4
Table of Contents.....	6
Playing Tennis with Simon Njami.....	9
Introduction.....	11
Aim	11
Methodology.....	13
Structure.....	14
Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework: My Interpretive Lens	17
Postcolonial Theory	17
Decolonial Theory	20
Postcolonial, Decolonial and the Digital	21
Space & Place	22
Cyberspaces	31
Chapter 2 – Archive and Exhibition: Their Historical and Postcolonial Contexts	36
Archive	37
Exhibition	42
The Spaces of the Archive & Exhibition.....	46
Chapter 3 – Digital Realm, Authenticity, and the Diaspora	50
Authenticity	50
African Narratives	55
Revising the Table	63
The Limitations of Digital Space.....	66
Reproducing an Artwork	66

Chapter 4 – Case Study: Navigating <i>Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent</i>	70
<i>Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Database.....	92
The Creation of the Database	112
Reflection.....	116
Chapter 5 – Curatorial Approach: Reading Africa Through Space	117
Introduction to Curatorial Journey	119
Conceptual Framework.....	120
Curatorial Analysis Revisited	125
Henri Lefebvre's Concept of Space	125
Curatorial Approach	133
Process	136
The Digital Archive as a Curatorial Tool	136
The Digital Curation Journey	136
Challenges	146
Conclusion and Future Directions	149
Contemporaneity	149
A Fire in the Cape	150
References.....	152



Note from Simon Njami on my copy of the Africa Remix catalogue. It reads: "For Danya, who found this thing. And hopefully will find something in it. JB 27/08/22"

Playing Tennis with Simon Njami

I wasn't going to finish this paper.

It's been almost two years since I started my masters. Whenever someone asks what my topic is, I can see them zone out. Bored.

Then I met Mr. Simon Njami. I was part of the Moleskine Foundation's Atwork programme. He signed the catalogue of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* that I tracked down and found. I sat with him for 5 days among another 24 creators. I thought I might learn about art. Mr. Njami forbade us from using that word, though. I learnt about myself.

When I thanked Mr. Njami for the experience, I told him that I was going to give up this topic. He asked if I play tennis. I don't. He said that when you're playing a good game of tennis and you serve the ball to your opponent, they hit it back to you. He said he had not thought about *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* in so long that he'd almost forgotten about it. That was his serve – my bringing the catalogue to the

workshop was my return.



Mr. Njami and I at the Atwork exhibition opening. Photo: Kevin Flowers

Why had Simon Njami almost let the seminal *Africa Remix* exhibition slip from his memory? Was it merely the passage of time and the constant influx of new projects that dimmed this chapter of his career, or does it suggest a deeper narrative about the lifecycle of artistic endeavors?

Njami's engagement with countless initiatives might partly explain his lapse in memory. However, considering his role as a curator and art critic, it's conceivable that his momentary forgetfulness underscores a broader truth about the art world. Art is perpetually forward-moving, always in search of the next groundbreaking idea or exhibition. In this context, even monumental projects like *Africa Remix* can recede into the backdrop, making room for new creative ventures.

When Njami inquired about my interest in the catalogue, it was as though he was challenging me to uncover layers of the exhibition itself and of the broader discourse on African art. Perhaps he hoped I would find not only inspiration but also a sense of continuity and renewal in revisiting the exhibition. By encouraging me to delve into the catalogue, Njami might have been steering me towards discovering the enduring relevance of *Africa Remix* in contemporary discussions on postcolonialism, identity, and digital representation.

In response to my ideas, Njami's perspective was both enlightening and enigmatic. His analogy of the tennis match suggested an expectation for a dynamic exchange—a hope that my research would not only draw from the foundation laid by *Africa Remix* but also contribute new insights, propelling the dialogue into uncharted territories. This exchange symbolized not just a passing of the torch but an invitation to expand the conversation beyond its original confines, exploring how digital spaces can reinterpret and immortalize physical exhibitions.

Njami's subtle encouragement served as a catalyst, urging me to approach my thesis with a sense of purpose and innovation. It wasn't just about revisiting the past; it was about reimagining the future of African art discourse through the digital lens. This journey through the catalogue, spurred by Njami's cryptic guidance, transformed my thesis into a quest for deeper understanding and fresh perspectives.

Simon Njami's brief lapse in memory and our subsequent conversation were not mere coincidences but a deliberate provocation. It challenged me to engage with the exhibition in a manner that transcends mere academic interest, urging me to contribute to the evolving narrative of African art in the digital age.

He flung the ball back into my court, so I guess I need to finish this.

Introduction

Africa has often been represented as a monolithic entity in public discourse, a simplification that obscures the continent's rich tapestry of diverse experiences, cultures, and identities. Contrary to this narrow viewpoint, this research adopts the idea that art serves as a universal language, echoing Simón Njami's perspective articulated in his seminal essay. Artists, particularly those from Africa and its diaspora, utilize this language to express intricate realities and emotions, often untranslatable through words alone.

Within this framework, the act of curation emerges not as mere assembly but as a transformative practice. It becomes a means of constructing a narrative of African identity as told by the artists themselves. This deviates from traditional archival practices that often predicate the 'archivability' of an item based on predetermined standards and norms, granting authority to institutional gatekeepers. Instead, the focus here shifts to the artists' personal stories and subjective existences, democratizing the archive and providing a nuanced' understanding of African identities.

Central to this research is the concept of "authenticity," which serves as a lens to critically examine the inherent complexities of institutionalised practices surrounding the Archive and Exhibition. By delving into the intricacies of digital curation through the case study of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, and my online exhibition Artspace.Africa, this study aims to explore how notions of space, knowledge, power, and identity are interrogated and reconstituted within digital environments.

The ultimate goal is to offer alternative perspectives on both the concept of 'authenticity' in African Art and the role of digital platforms in archiving and exhibiting this art. This is operationalized through Artspace.Africa, a curatorial endeavour that seeks to test and extend the theories and findings discussed, while also illuminating the multiplicity of African identities.

Aim

The primary objective of this research is to challenge prevailing narratives that portray Africa as a monolithic entity by leveraging art as a universal language. Drawing on the insights of Simón Njami, this study acknowledges the power of art to convey intricate experiences and emotions, often ineffable through mere words. The act of curation is hence elevated from

simple assembly to a transformative exercise, one that creates a narrative of African identities directly from the artists themselves.

Within this framework, this research aims to scrutinize traditional methods of archiving and exhibiting art, which often rest on predetermined, institutionally approved criteria. I critically dissect the complexities of the institutionalised practices surrounding the Archive and Exhibition in preserving and presenting African art, particularly in a Postcolonial context. I am interested in how these institutional practices engage with the concept of Authenticity.

I explore these issues using a case study: the exhibition *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* (2004). This exhibition, originally curated by Simon Njami, serves as a lens through which to explore how ideas of Archive and Exhibition evolve in digital spaces, particularly when considering diasporic communities.

I am specifically aiming to dig deep into digital curatorial practices through my online exhibition. Inspired by *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, I explore how concepts like space, knowledge, power, and identity are reshaped in a digital setting.

The case study, as well as my re-curation of the exhibition, intends to shift towards incorporating the artists' personal stories and subjective experiences as valid archival materials. This reconceptualises what is considered "authentic," particularly within a digital space (in my curation), moving it away from institutional gatekeeping towards a more democratized understanding.

I am particularly concerned with the exhibition and preservation of African Art in a Postcolonial paradigm. Postcolonial theory questions the production of knowledge; this ideological paradigm scrutinizes the exclusion of Africa and other non-European/Western cultures from the documentation/creation of history, as well as the notion of the West as the origin of modernity (Said, 1995). This one-sided documentation of history minimizes the West's role as an imperial institution in the domination and erasure of other cultures.

This study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the impact of digital curation on the reception and interpretation of African art and culture. Through Artspace.Africa, I seek to provide a multifaceted view that incorporates individual experiences, collective meanings, and representation, challenging traditional archival methods and illuminating the diverse identities within the African diaspora.

Methodology

Research Design and Theoretical Framework

This research employs a qualitative methodology that foregrounds curatorial practice as both subject and method. The cornerstone of this study is my curation of Artspace.Africa, a reimagining of the exhibition *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. My curatorial approach is underpinned by theoretical frameworks from key theorists like Henri Lefebvre, who extensively elaborated on the production of space, and Walter Benjamin, known for his thoughts on art and mechanical reproduction.

Curatorial Approach

One of the primary aims of curating Artspace.Africa is to deconstruct the monolithic perception of Africa. To do this, I have adapted Simon Njami's original thematic categories—Identity & History, Body & Soul, and City & Land—infusing them with Lefebvre's nuanced concept of 'space.' By doing so, I explore how different types of space—physical, planned, and lived—intersect and interact with diverse African identities and landscapes, both urban and rural. This curatorial strategy serves as a mechanism to challenge stereotypical views of Africa, broadening the discourse surrounding African identities.

Comparative Analysis

I conduct a comparative analysis between the original *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* and Artspace.Africa, with particular emphasis on how the concept of 'space' evolves between the two. This analysis serves to elucidate the transformative role of digital platforms in archiving and showcasing African art.

Data Collection

This research essentially employs a qualitative methodology, leveraging existing data and my case study for textual analysis. The study consists of both primary and secondary data; I provide my descriptive data of the case study and engage with literature reviews, discussions, and other scholarly metrics. The data was initially stored in a Notion 'database' before the curation process.

Database

I have constructed a database of the artworks showcased in the *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* exhibition. By categorizing the artworks and compiling data about the

artists, their backgrounds, and the countries they originate from, the database can illuminate the various cultural perspectives and experiences exhibited in the collection.

My objective is to provide fresh insights into the exhibition and its broader cultural and historical context. I can organize and structure information in a way that is not limited by the physical confines of a traditional exhibition space. This approach also allows for more flexibility and accessibility in terms of how the information can be presented and analyzed.

Through my efforts to establish this database, I aim to contribute to the democratization of knowledge and information, making it more widely accessible to researchers, artists, and the public.

Limitations

The digital nature of Artspace.Africa also introduces a limitation that cannot be overlooked—the digital divide. While the online platform serves as the space for challenging conventional narratives about Africa, it's essential to acknowledge that this space may not be universally accessible within Africa itself due to varying degrees of internet access. This limitation further amplifies the urgency for exploring how digital platforms can both expand and constrain the spaces in which African identities are understood and experienced.

By using Artspace.Africa as a lens, this curatorial approach not only aims to challenge pre-existing ideas about African identity but also to explore the possibilities and limitations of digital spaces in advancing this critical discourse.

Structure

Theoretical Framework: My Interpretive Lens

In the initial chapter, I not only discuss the concept of "Authenticity" but also briefly introduce other guiding theories like Henri Lefebvre's 'space.' I explain how these theories frame my approach to the study.

This chapter will include a literature review, where I delve into the key theories and debates surrounding "Authenticity" in African art.

Archive and Exhibition: Their Historical and Postcolonial Contexts

I keep my focus on Archive and Exhibition but plan to extend the discussion to how these constructs have evolved in the digital age.

Digital Realm, Authenticity, and the Diaspora

I merge my discussions on the digital realm and diaspora, examining how digitalisation affects the perception of "Authenticity" and how the diaspora engages with it.

Given that Artspace.Africa is a digital platform, a significant aspect of this study involves scrutinizing how digitalisation impacts the "authenticity" of the artworks displayed. It becomes crucial to question whether this digital medium either challenges or perpetuates existing colonial narratives, particularly when engaging with diasporic interpretations of African art.

Case Study: Navigating Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent and Artspace.Africa

I introduce my case studies and break them down into sub-sections that correlate with the thematic categories I adapted from Simon Njami.

Curatorial Approach: Reading Africa Through Space

This section will detail my approach to curating Artspace.Africa. I detail my process and curatorial choices.

My focus on curatorial approaches remains critical. I add subsections that delve into how each of Lefebvre's types of 'space' manifests in the different sections of Artspace.Africa.

One of the key ambitions in curating Artspace.Africa is to challenge the monolithic perception of Africa by illuminating the diversity of African identities, both within the continent and the diaspora. To achieve this, I have adapted Simon Njami's original thematic divisions—Identity & History, Body & Soul, and City & Land—and enriched them through Henri Lefebvre's layered concept of 'space,' comprising physical, planned, and lived spaces.

By juxtaposing Njami's themes with Lefebvre's multi-dimensional understanding of space, I aim to dissect the stereotypical images of Africa that persist in the global imagination. Each of the three sections in Artspace.Africa is designed to unravel a specific type of space, as

theorised by Lefebvre—physical spaces as geological realities, planned spaces as institutional or political constructs, and lived spaces as daily experiences and subjective perceptions. This approach seeks to excavate the myriad ways Africa exists in the real world, contrasting sharply with its often one-dimensional representation.

Lefebvre's conceptualization of space is not just a theoretical exercise; it's an interrogation of how historical processes and knowledge production have shaped the Africa we perceive today. By integrating these types of space into the curation of Artspace.Africa, the exhibition serves as a critical tool for puncturing simplistic views, revealing instead the complex tapestry of spaces that make up Africa.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Finally, I summarize my findings and suggest avenues for future research or practical applications, especially regarding how my study could influence the curation of African art moving forward.

This structure allows me to offer a rounded and in-depth exploration of my research topic.

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework: My Interpretive Lens

In this chapter I unpack Postcolonial Theory and Decolonial Theory as pertaining to culture and African Diasporic identities. I argue that postcolonial theory allows for the creation of new histories and narratives through bearing witness and recontextualization. I unpack and discuss the notions of space and place and outline the key frameworks within which I conduct my research. These form a fundamental foundation of theoretical discourse that will be broken down into the following categories: Postcolonial Theory, Decolonial Theory, Authenticity, Archive, and Exhibition.

Postcolonial Theory

Gurminder K Bhambra's 2014 *Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues* is a text pivotal to my research as it succinctly explains how Postcolonial Theory questions the production of knowledge and offers feasible solutions to create "new dialogues" (Bhambra, 2014, p. 117). Bhambra discusses how Postcolonialism and Decolonialism challenge the insularity of knowledge production by the West.

Both schools of thought challenge the one-sided historical narrative perpetuated by the West. Modernity is not an internal product created in-house by the West. The world does not exist as it does today because of a single viewpoint. Rather, it is the result of hundreds of years of cultural exchange, narratives, and subjectivities.

Postcolonialism is an intellectual movement. It is a response to nineteenth and twentieth century European imperialism and is primarily concerned with material, socio-economic, and cultural issues. It is the primary paradigm through which I approach my research. Postcolonial theory concerns itself with the interconnected issues of race, nation, empire, migration, and ethnicity within cultural production from the moment of colonization to the present day. In contemporary society, the interaction of race, empire and ethnicity is not a disinterested interaction as the historically dominant metropolis – the West – and its diasporic post-colonies interact with non-western cultures in a manner that replicates the old hegemonies. Rather, they interact in a subtler way than before, reflecting changed political circumstances.

Bhambra elaborates upon three core contributors to the theoretical landscape of Postcolonial studies: Edward W Said, Homi K Bhabha and Gayatri C Spivak (Bhambra, 2014, p. 115).

Edward Said questions the production of knowledge from a global perspective (Said, 1995). He explains that there is no such thing as a "universal truth" because historical documentation divides the West and the other. The other is then either excluded, or they are absorbed into a broader history, spoken about only in terms of their contact with the West. A fallacy reliant on the divide between "the West" and "the rest". This results in the exclusion of "the rest" from the documentation/creation of history and, consequently, modernity (Bhabra, 2014, p. 116). This one-sided history falsely credits the West as the origin of modernity, minimizing its role as an imperial institution in the domination and erasure of other cultures.

Homi Bhabha, another key Postcolonial theorist, engages with the representation of contemporary inequalities, their historical conditions, and the relationships between these aspects. Per Bhabha, Postcolonial theory is an attempt at interrupting Western modernity by re-inscribing non-Western discourse, critical theory, and perspectives into narratives of modernity. Doing so intends to transform the narratives both historically and theoretically as opposed to merely altering their names or contexts (Bhabra, 2014, p. 116).

Bhabha argues that new narratives can be constructed when observing or witnessing alternative (to the West) histories. Doing so, he purports, turns the individual from observer to interrogator, establishing and creating new histories, presents, and futures (Bhabra, 2014, p. 116). However, Gayatri Spivak emboldens the idea of creating/perpetuating narratives by highlighting the significance of who is telling the story. In her argument of speaking on behalf of the subaltern, Spivak expresses her fear that attempting to speak on behalf of the Subaltern is a limited approach. This is because doing so seems to inevitably flail around in hegemonic concepts and diction (Spivak, 1990, p. 70). Essentially, attempters would be merely speaking to themselves within their own discourse. Within the confines of my research, Bhabha's is a productive approach to reclaiming narratives/the production of knowledge. However, I cannot do so without acknowledging Spivak's work and being cognizant of how I may or may not be approaching this research within the confines of the discourse that I seek to undermine. I address this in detail when I discuss my case study.

In the chapters to come I discuss at length the Archive and Exhibition as institutions for storage and display, whereby the preservation and curation of historical objects perpetuates existing narratives as documented by the Western imperial forces that established the concepts of such institutions to begin with. But that aside, the approach that Bhabha takes to reclaiming the narrative speaks to an ability that supersedes these institutions and the

physicality of the items they contain. It is through the viewers' observations and recontextualizations that new narratives form.

Knowledge production and the notion of modernity is challenged in the Postcolonial establishment of new discourse. The intention is to bring new understandings to modernity as it exists in a socio-political realm (Bhabra, 2014, p. 116).

The role of Postcolonial scholarship in challenging popular/Western discourse cannot be understated. We understand the world around us because of contextual conventions. In a world saturated with knowledge produced and distributed by the West, Postcolonialism strives to reclaim not just the narratives themselves, but the coded system in which they were documented.

Decolonial Theory

I cannot entirely dismiss Decolonial Theory. Reconstructing narratives of non-western histories that had been abolished by colonialism requires subverting the conventions/institutions which maintain or enforce those colonial dynamics to permeate how knowledge is produced, displayed, documented, etc. In a de-colonial context of 'de-linking' the terms (concepts) and the content (histories) of the conversations on modernity/coloniality, non-Western localities need to be understood as prior to European incursions. As such, a decolonial epistemic shift would have to take place. This shift would reveal a locality – let's say here, South Africa – it would expose and display South Africa's history and culture as it was before it was colonized (Mignolo, 2007). This would then lead to a new understanding of "the rhetoric of modernity" and would emancipate "ideals of modernity in the perspective of coloniality" (Bhabra, 2014).

Western knowledge production has removed the presence of "the other". Decolonising knowledge means acknowledging where knowledge came from, as well as how that knowledge is enacted/practiced outside of a Western frame of reference.

Since codes and institutions govern how knowledge is created and stored, and what knowledge is important, when those institutions are Western, their codes and customs seek self-affirmation and radical removal of the "other". De-linking requires one to look at things through a different frame of reference, not only through the lens of those institutions.

It was not until I read Henri Lefebvre's "The Production of Space" that I fully understood the necessity and true meaning of decolonialism. It only appears second because without Postcolonialism, there would be no essay. This is because Lefebvre dissects the production of knowledge in the same manner that Postcolonial theory as an ideology concerns itself with questioning the way power underpins knowledge and its production (Bhabra, 2014, p. 120). Postcolonialism attempts to disrupt this "universality" and construct new narratives of modernity (Bhabra, 2014, p. 120).

Postcolonial, Decolonial and the Digital

It is vital for me to address the way digital technologies impact Postcolonial and Decolonial theories.

Digital space – specifically the internet – has facilitated rapid globalization, yet there are cultural disparities in global and local engagements with digital infrastructure. In this section, I unpack these disparities; the key themes being "cultural imperialism", "digital empowerment" and "geographical knowledge".

Space & Place

In this section, I discuss the terminology and conceptualizations of space and place. This means tackling the concepts from socio-political, physical, and digital angles. The conceptualization of "Space" cements the conventions and codes prevalent in Western institutionalised practices, while the notion of "place" - and in turn, "Cyberspaces" - may provide a way we can engage with the case study, in a digital setting, that is exempt from Western institutional framing.

Types of Space

In his 1974 book entitled "The Production of Space", Henri Lefebvre, discusses different types of spaces and how they flow in and around each other, cementing the objects, interactions, and internalizations of all that exists: perceived, conceived, and lived space (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 19-22). The three types of space he identified are as follows:

Perceived space

This type of space refers to the physical environment that we experience through our senses. It is the space we see, hear, feel, taste, and smell; it is subjective and can vary based on an individual's perception, cultural background, and personal experience.

Conceived space

This is the space that is created through planning and design. It is deliberately constructed for specific purposes, such as urban planning, architecture, and landscape design. Conceived space is a product of social, economic, and political processes, and it reflects the values and interests of those who create it.

Lived Space

Also known as "social space," this is the space that is created through social interaction and daily life. It is the space where people come together and engage in social and cultural activities, such as work, leisure, and social gatherings. This is the most complex and dynamic of the three types of space, as it is constantly being redefined and reshaped through human activity.

The Production of Space

Henri Lefebvre views production as a fundamental aspect of social life and argues that the production of space is closely tied to social relations and the exercise of power. He claims that the production of space is not solely a technical process, but also a social and cultural process that reflects the values and interests of those who control the means of production (Lefebvre, 1974).

Lefebvre also highlights the role of space in the reproduction of social relations and the maintenance of power. He argues that space is not neutral, but rather it is produced and shaped by social relations and power dynamics. The production of space, in turn, influences social relations and power dynamics. As part of his criticism of capitalism, Lefebvre comments on how space is often treated as a commodity, where the production of space is driven by profit and private interests rather than the needs and desires of communities. This commodification of space leads to social and spatial inequality and the displacement of marginalized communities.

Understanding Space

Based on his work, as well as other key theorists in this paper, I have established three similar categories of space. The following three categories are vital in understanding how Western conventions have framed the perceptions and conditions with which African art is created and viewed.

Mental Space (Representational System)

The structural conception of culture ("social space") revolves around symbolic forms in systematized contexts, and the further social contextualization of such symbolic forms (Thompson, 1990, p. 359).

"Mental space" is produced through signs and symbols, representing people or concepts, ideas, or feelings - it is a language; representational system (Hall, 1997, p. 1). It is the space in which thoughts, ideas, and feelings are represented and is central to producing meaning. It is a space produced through shared codes in which the dynamic between the signifier and its counterpart are forged. However, mental space is reliant on social space (culture) to provide a framework in which to establish these relationships between signifiers and concepts (Hall, 1997, p. 21).

Physical Space (Naked Existence)

Physical space, while not primarily referring to that which we can perceive through our senses, also relates to the immediacy typically associated with what exists within the physical realm (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 19-22).

This type of space is not unlike what Aldous Huxley refers to as "naked existence" (1962, p. 17) in "The Doors of Perception", where meaning and existence, pattern and colour become more significant than spatial relationships and time. In this "naked existence", duration is replaced by a perpetual present, and where impressions are intensified and experience is not limited by chronological flow (Huxley, 1962, pp. 20-21, 24). However, Huxley was experimenting with hallucinogens.

Lefebvre's physical space reminds me of Huxley because of the immediacy of the now. We often think of it as what we see when we see it as it is in that moment without considering all the moments that came before. If physical space is the realm of existence, however, can space be empty? Existence does not stop because you have left the room.

There is an interesting link between "physical space" - "naked existence" - and the moment of interaction with an artwork.

In my honours thesis in History of Art (2018), I looked at art as the moment of interaction between subject, artist, and viewer. Evrard and Krebs stress that this dynamic is a core aspect of authenticity in Western art (Evrard & Krebs, 2017, p. 358).

With Diego Velazquez' *Las Meninas* as my primary case study, I wrote the following:

Las Meninas presents an intricate diagram of the mechanics of representation. The painting's discourse is "as constructed around what you can't see as it is around what you can see," (Hall, 1997, pp. 58-61).

In the painting, Diego Velazquez stands behind a canvas with a brush in hand. We (the viewers) cannot see what he's painting. There is a mirror on the back wall of the room and the attention of the visible subjects appears to be divided between the Infanta and an unseen subject, located in the same position as the viewers (Foucault, 1970, pp. 14-15). The absent subjects could be King Phillip IV and Maria Anna – as implied by the mirror on the wall opposite the viewer. But the location of the royal couple marks the point at which each of the

three parties (artist, viewer, and subject) have been, or are implied to have been, relatively located to the scene.

Looking at this painting is like stepping into a dimension in which viewpoints and subjectivities collide. It's a motif in creative expression, whereby the work becomes alive in the moment that the artist, viewer, and subject collide. The act of looking – or interacting – seeming takes a moment, but in that time, captures the convergence of these viewpoints; it is a "direct and tangible confrontation," (Evrard & Krebs, 2017, p. 358).

The only thing that's ever agreed upon (Lefebvre's words) is that production exists. Hence, *The Production of Space*. Physical space exists as a production of the moments before it (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 19-22). This is relevant to the notion of the Aura, which I discuss in a later chapter.

Social Space (Culture)

Social space is the space that produces the conventions through which we speak, learn, live, and think (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 27-34). There is a striking similarity between what Lefebvre calls "social space" and what Stuart Hall calls "culture", which Hall regards as a space for shared meaning (1997, p. 1).

According to Hall, culture comprises exchanging symbolic forms within structured social contexts in which they are produced and received. Stuart Hall asserts that culture is fluid. It is not something which already exists, transcending place and time. It is a brewing pot that produces identities which reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes. It is a frame of reference (Hall, 1990, p.132).

There is a common link with what Homi K. Bhabha suggests regarding modernity: it is not a singular event; rather, it is the amalgamation of a historical enunciation based upon dominant discourse (Bhabha, 1994; Bhabha, 2014, p. 116). Social space is the space produced by historical conventions and context. It's a child of the intimate affair of power and knowledge. It's how history is told by the victor and is built around an illusion of totality, suggesting a clear, easily justifiable narrative that links the past to the present concisely. It's colonialism.

To draw a link here with Postcolonial theory: as an ideology, Postcolonialism concerns itself with questioning the way power underpins knowledge and its production (Bhabha, 2014, p.

120). Postcolonialism attempts to disrupt this "universality" and construct new narratives of modernity (Bhabra, 2014, p. 120).

Place

While Lefebvre regards space to be the place-maker of all that comes – the producer of places – other theorists disagree. Guo Zhang and Elin K. Jacob contest Lefebvre's notion that place is a production of space (Zhang & Jacob, 2012, p. 93-94), claiming that they are entirely independent concepts. In "Reconceptualizing Cyberspace: "Real" Places in Digital Space" (2012), Zhang and Jacob discuss the notions of space and place. They explain and outline two main schools of thought on the notions of space and place: horizontal and vertical (Zhang & Jacob, 2012, p. 91). Horizontal approaches to the space/place dichotomy focus on a space being a physical construct and a place being a conceptualization. In this school of thought, place is not a type of space; space is a fact, place is a product that emerges, evolves, and disappears in history (Zhang & Jacob, 2012, p. 91-93). Vertical approaches view space and place as having a hierarchical relationship, in which place is subordinated to space. In this context, place cannot exist without space; place is occupied space (Zhang & Jacob, 2012, p. 91-93).

Zhang and Jacob acknowledge the similarity between these notions of "place" and Lefebvre's "social space" (Zhang & Jacob, 2012, p. 91). They conclude that physical space is not the catalyst of a place because space is not reliant upon a physical environment/location. In turn, a place does not need to be contained within a physical space. Space and place are linked practically and experientially, and through their interaction, we, as humans, experience "spatiality, location, identity, belongingness, and the sense of place," (Zhang & Jacob, 2012, p. 94).

Place is a setting defined by inclusivity; "supporting the feeling of being somewhere as opposed to just anywhere" (Kalay & Marx, 2001, p. 19-21). There is a communal aspect in that individuals are exchanging social and cultural interactions in the same environment (though not necessarily geographically linked). This suggests that space is the physical framework in which "place" happens; "a place is a space activated by social interactions, and invested with culturally-based understandings of behavioural appropriateness," (Kalay & Marx, 2001, p. 19-21). 'Place' is what happens in a space - but more than that, it also frames the context for social behaviour. While space can be "imaginary", 'places' cannot.

Cultural practices that result in the "give and take" of meaning could be associated with this conceptualisation of place (Hall, 1997, p. 1). Having a shared sense of place enables individuals to engage in similar activities within same space. It provides a shared understanding that orients themselves in the space they occupy physically and behaviourally. This enables them to engage with each other - and the world - meaningfully (Kalay & Marx, 2001, p. 19-21).

If place is a setting defined by inclusivity and community but not geographical proximity (Kalay & Marx, 2001, p. 19-21), it can be explored in relation to the notions of imagined worlds, community, nation, and diaspora.

The concept of imagined worlds refers to the ways in which people create and inhabit fictional or virtual environments that may or may not reflect aspects of the real world. This notion highlights the importance of human creativity and imagination in shaping our understanding of the world around us. Through imagined worlds, individuals and societies can explore alternative realities, experiment with new ideas and values, and challenge existing social norms. These imagined worlds can take many forms, such as novels, films, video games, and virtual reality experiences (Wolf, 2012, p. 3).

Imagined worlds can also have political and social implications. For example, the fictional worlds depicted in dystopian novels and films often serve as cautionary tales about the dangers of totalitarianism and the importance of individual freedom. Video games that feature diverse characters and perspectives can challenge stereotypes and promote empathy and understanding.

The concept of imagined worlds can be linked to Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of space in several ways. Both concepts emphasize the importance of human creativity and imagination in shaping our understanding of the world, and the role of mental maps and representations in shaping physical space.

Lefebvre's emphasis on the social production of space suggests that the physical environment is not fixed and unchanging, but rather a dynamic product of human imagination and action. This view aligns with the idea of imagined worlds, which emphasizes the importance of human creativity and imagination in shaping our understanding of the world around us.

Lefebvre argues that space is not just a physical entity, but also a social and cultural construct that reflects the values and beliefs of a society. He contends that space is produced through a dialectical interplay between perceived space (how we experience and understand space) and conceived space (how space is planned and designed) (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39-40). This dialectical process involves the creation of mental maps, images, and representations of space that are shared and reproduced through social practices.

This emphasis on the role of mental maps and representations of space in the production of physical space echoes the concept of imagined worlds. Imagined worlds are not just fictional or virtual environments, but also mental constructs that shape our understanding of the world and our actions within it.

I would argue that one type of imagined world is an imagined community, which is a construct discussed in detail by scholar and author, Benedict Anderson (1991). Like an imagined world, an imagined community is a construct created through a particular way of seeing and understanding the world. Anderson's concept of an imagined community emphasizes the importance of cultural practices in creating a sense of belonging and identity and highlights the role of discourses and cultural symbols in shaping how individuals understand their place in the world (Anderson, 2006, p. 6).

Where the two deviate is that Anderson's concept of an "imagined community" is created through shared cultural symbols and practices. This links closely with Lefebvre's argument that space is a social product that is produced and reproduced through human activity (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre suggests that space is an active force that shapes social relations and structures. Anderson uses the concept of "imagined communities" to refer to the way that nations are created and sustained through shared cultural practices and discourses (Anderson, 2006, p. 6).

Anderson defines an imagined community as a socially constructed entity that is imagined by its members as both limited and sovereign. It is limited in the sense that it has boundaries that distinguish it from other communities, and sovereign in the sense that its members believe in its autonomy and self-governance (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). He goes on to define nations as imagined political communities that derive from the shared belief in a common ancestry, culture, and history (Anderson, 2006, p. 7).

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990), Stuart Hall defines diaspora as a "cultural condition" that arises from the dispersal of people from their original homeland or territory to other parts of the world (p. 223). He goes on to say that diaspora is not just about physical movement or displacement, but also about the formation of new cultural identities and practices that reflect the experiences of displacement. This comes as a result of a "splitting" of identity, in which individuals are "doubly articulated" between their cultural roots and their new location (p. 225). This leads to a sense of "in-betweenness" or hybridity, as diasporic communities create new cultural forms that incorporate elements from their original culture as well as from the cultures of their new location(s). Returning to Anderson briefly; he argues that nations are not natural or objective entities, but rather social constructs - places - that are produced and reproduced through cultural practices and discourses (Anderson, 2006, p. 7). In this sense, Anderson's articulation of national identity encapsulates what Hall outlines as diasporic identity.

Hall's unpacking of Diaspora and hybridity warrants considering the extent to which the notion of a "Third Space" may also tie in to this understanding of place. Homi K. Bhabha, a postcolonial theorist, defines the third space as an "interstitial passage between fixed identifications" (1994, p. 37). Bhabha argues that the third space is a site of hybridity, where different cultural elements come together to create new cultural forms and identities (Bhabha, 1990; Kraidy, 2005, p. 380). It is a space of negotiation and contestation, and this place enables the negotiation of "the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37).

Cyberspaces

The distinction of a space and a place is vital when considering the digital realm because digital spaces can be viewed as an altogether new dimension (Zhang & Jacob, 2012, p. 96). Digital realms, henceforth referred to as "Cyberspaces", can be thought of as "places" rather than "spaces" because of their ability to facilitate human interaction for the required purpose and context (Kalay & Marx, 2001, p. 19). The type of social interaction facilitated by digital spaces, can promote/perpetuate cultural values within and among an unspecified, vacuous void, which can just as easily contain its inhabitants and enable them to browse and/or utilize data, communication, and services.

Cyberspace can be viewed as a spatial metaphor comprising three key sectors (Zhang & Jacob, 2012, p. 96). The first two are the physical and the technological infrastructures, and the third is the social and cultural conventions entrenched within the interactions/exchanges that take place online (Zhang & Jacob, 2012, p. 97).

Globalization

Globalization is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has transformed the world in numerous ways. It has been shaped by advances in technology and communication, as well as by political and economic factors. While it has brought about many benefits, it has also created new challenges and raised important questions about how to create a more equitable and sustainable global system.

The term itself refers to the increasing interconnectedness of the world's economies, cultures, and populations, fuelled by advances in technology and communication. It is the result of the "pace and nature of the pathways taken by the Internet ... [and has] been influenced by many actors, including users, making decisions in a variety of specific political, economic, and social contexts," (Haigh et al., 2015, p. 147) and has led to the integration of markets and the growth of global trade, investment, and migration. It has also facilitated the spread of ideas, values, and cultural practices across national borders.

Due to the wide-reaching nature of the internet, it is indisputable that contemporary society has an increased awareness of belonging to a global community (Giddens, 1990, p. 64). Subsequently, local communities and identity are constructed within a global context. This is made far more complex when considering the dynamic between the West and the Global

South. Despite being separated spatially, the internet has allowed for "decentred interlocality" which "...depends upon an interplay between Global South and Global North in which the significance of the local increases with the recognition of its connection to the circuits of power, equally intractable and ubiquitous, but simultaneously present in other locations as well," (Trefzer, Jackson, McKee, & Dellinger, 2014, p. 4). As such, the notion of "decentred interlocality" illuminates the process through which the disparities between the Global North and Global South may be recognized and altered. Sociologist and scholar, Anthony Giddens, explains globalization as an "intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities" (1990, p. 64). Globalization compresses time and space, meaning that the world is becoming more interconnected and events in one part of the world can have repercussions in another part. Giddens writes, "the world is increasingly becoming one single place, with events in one part of the globe having consequences for people far away" (Giddens, 1999, p. 64).

Some scholars argue that globalization is driven by the convergence of technologies and the rise of a global economic system, whereby advances in communication and transportation have made it possible for businesses to operate globally and for individuals to connect with each other across national borders. Some scholars argue that this indicates that globalization is a global condition that frames the social and political workings of the world (Gittinger, 2014, pp. 510-511), whereby the "global competitive playing field is being levelled...in a way that I believe is without precedent in human history" (Friedman, 2005, p. 7).

Economic growth, increased access to information and technology, and cultural exchange may be viewed as its perks, but globalization does not come without its pitfalls.

Cyberimperialism

One of the primary criticisms of globalization is cultural homogenization (Gittinger, 2014, p. 509). Professor Edward Said's concerns regard cultural homogenization as a form of "cultural imperialism" (Said, 1993, p. 10), resulting from the way the immediacy and reach of the internet enables the dilution of spaces.

"Cyberimperialism", a term first coined by scholar James F. Carey in 1992 (Carey, 1992), refers to the domination of global digital communication technologies by developed countries and the ways in which this domination perpetuates unequal power relations between nations.

This term highlights the need for a more equitable and democratic global digital system. Cyberimperialism is perpetuated through various mechanisms (Dyer-Witheford, 1999), namely: the digital divide between developed and developing countries, the use of English as the dominant language in cyberspace, and knowledge production (Deibert & Rohozinski, 2010, p. 43-57).

The notion of "geographical knowledge", which alleges that representation is closely associated with power (Graham, 2014, p. 6), is significant in this regard. Information geographies is a concept that refers to the study of how information and communication technologies (ICTs) interact with and shape geographic space. The term was first coined by Mark Graham and Matthew Zook in their 2013 article "Augmented realities and uneven geographies: Exploring the geolinguistic contours of the web" (Graham & Zook, 2013), in which they argue that the internet and other ICTs are not evenly distributed across geographic space, but rather are concentrated in certain regions and languages (pp. 77-99).

Information geographies have a close link to the digital divide, as digital technologies can contribute to new forms of spatial inequality, as parts of the world may not be able to access and interact in such spaces (Gittinger, 2014, pp. 510-511). The "Digital Divide" is a term ascribed to the global circumstances surrounding various countries' capacities to access the internet (Gittinger, 2014, p. 511). This is consequential to a country's economy and infrastructural capabilities and may even take place within a single nation in a manner that demonstrates the disparities between economic classes. These regions are characterized by limited access to ICTs, low levels of digital literacy, and a lack of digital content that reflects local cultures and languages (Graham, 2011, pp. 211-227). The physical infrastructure that underpins ICTs, such as fibre-optic cables, data centres, and server farms are unevenly distributed across the globe, with many developing countries having limited access to high-speed internet and other digital infrastructure (Graham & Mann, 2013, pp. 345-371).

Information geographies highlight that the internet and other ICTs are not neutral, but rather reflect and reproduce existing social and economic inequalities. Graham and Zook (2013, pp. 77-99) note that the majority of online content is produced in a small number of languages, primarily English, and that this linguistic bias reinforces the dominance of Western cultural and economic power.

Scholars argue that the "Digital Divide" is rapidly narrowing (Rangaswamy & Arora, 2015, pp. 611-613) as technology gradually becomes part of daily life by means of "leisure avenues" and providing individuals with "diverse levels of literacy" (Rangaswamy & Arora, 2015, pp. 615-616). However, many developing countries are marginalized in that they have limited access to the benefits of digital space. This notion points toward a form of systemic imperialism – an instant whereby dominant cultures implement their societal norms upon other localities (Gittinger, 2014, pp. 512-514; Manovich & Lovink, 1999, p. 83). The result of such imperialism is that the paradigm of information production and consumption may be entirely altered. For example, the most popular global social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, are owned by Western companies. These platforms have become crucial channels for communication and information sharing, but they are controlled by a handful of companies based in developed countries. This concentration of power has led to concerns about the potential for censorship, surveillance, and the manipulation of public opinion (Deibert & Rohozinski, 2010, p. 43-57), which could perpetuate colonial aspects of power and knowledge as "...the core nations could, in theory, control the world through how they describe political events, ideologies, or other civilizations..." (Gittinger, 2014, pp. 512-514).

Information geographies is a concept that highlights the ways in which ICTs interact with and shape geographic space. This field of study emphasizes the importance of understanding the uneven distribution of digital infrastructure, the linguistic and cultural biases of online content, and the potential for new forms of spatial inequality created by digital technologies (Graham, 2014, pp. 7-9). This greatly impacts the sources from which information is produced, and the socio-economic circumstances leading to the information manifesting in such a manner (Graham, 2014, p. 4, Gittinger, 2014, pp. 516-518).

However, Globalization does not inevitably lead to homogenization, although it does use similar "instruments of homogenization (armaments, advertising techniques, language hegemonies, and clothing styles) that are absorbed into local political and cultural economies..." (Appadurai, 1990, p. 48). Cyberspaces may also provide the foundation for marginalized voices to define their own image in a manner that reflects diversity (Gittinger, 2014, pp. 512-514). The notion of "imagined worlds" could pose as an alternative framework to theorize globalization in its acknowledgement of "the complexity of the current global economy", which implicates a "certain fundamental disjuncture between economy, culture

and politics," (Appadurai, 1990, p. 41). The global reach of Cyberspaces may enable individuals to deliberate and project meaning from their local contexts. Online engagements serve as integral foundational sites, accessible despite spatial and social constraints, whereby a bi-directional flow of information allows for an immersive dynamic to emerge between "people, digital media and informal learning," (Rangaswamy & Arora, 2015, pp. 611-613). Hybridity, the "interpenetration and intermingling of cultures", and the creation of new cultural forms and identities (Kraidy, 2005, p. 380), has emerged as a result of cultural globalization, which is leading to the creation of new hybrid cultural forms and practices.

To revisit the concept of "imagined worlds" (Rangaswamy and Arora, 2015, p. 616-618), digital technology may form an integral part of the facilitation and sharing of cultural symbols and practices, providing a platform on which Cyberspaces can construct and reconstruct diasporic identities (Rangaswamy and Arora, 2015, p. 616). As a result, communities determine and define the dynamic between general understandings of technology, and how these technologies are used by their community (Rangaswamy & Arora, 2015, pp. 615-616). Websites and other digital technologies have the potential to create new cultural forms and practices that challenge traditional notions of identity, culture, and place.

Cyberspaces can be viewed as "third spaces" in that they challenge traditional notions of identity, culture, and place (Bhabha, 1990; Kraidy, 2005, p. 380). They create new forms of cultural expression that are not tied to any particular culture or identity, but rather emerge from the interaction between different cultures (Kraidy, 2005, p. 380). Such spaces are important for understanding the complex and dynamic nature of cultural globalization, and for developing new ways of thinking about identity, culture, and communication.

Chapter 2 – Archive and Exhibition: Their Historical and Postcolonial Contexts

In this chapter, I unpack the notions of the Archive and the Exhibition. I conclude with a section that suggests a framework for how these two concepts function spatially, and how this is relevant going forward.

The acts of collection and display – the archive and the exhibition – are part of a larger colonial enterprise described as "a hegemonic activity, an act of appropriation," (Kasfir, 1992, p. 42) as well as an anthropological method of documentation. It is the West that determines an art-object's authenticity. This is part of the construction of the fallacy of a 'universal' truth (Said, 1995), which divides "the West" and "the rest" and proceeds to exclude the latter from any meaningful contribution/documentation of history and, consequently, modernity (Bhambra, 2014, p. 116). Postcolonialism attempts to disrupt this "universality" and construct new narratives of modernity (Bhambra, 2014, p. 120).

Archive

The Power of the Archive and its Limits by Achille Mbembe (2002) forms part of a debate formulated in the book *Refiguring the Archive* (2002), that interrogates how the concept of the archive preserves the past and/or determines the future. Mbembe classifies the term 'archive' as a public institution as well as a process of preservation.

As a "public institution", the archive plays a complex and contested role in the dynamic between the state, civil society, and the public sphere in contemporary democracies (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19). The term "public institution" refers to any organization or structure that is established by the state or other public authorities and serves a public function. While they are an essential part of modern democracies, as they provide the infrastructure and services necessary for the functioning of society, Mbembe also acknowledges that public institutions are not neutral or apolitical entities. Rather, they are shaped by the social, political, and economic contexts in which they operate, and are often sites of contestation and struggle over power, resources, and representation (Mbembe, 2002, pp. 19-22)

Mbembe specifies in his definition of the term 'archive' that it refers to the dynamic between the architectural space in which the archived documents are stored, and the rituals by which they are categorized and deemed "archivable" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 20). It is an entity that serves to collect histories, and the way the archive is accessible in the present day serves as linking the past to the present (2002, p. 19). However, the archive protects mere snippets of history – it does not preserve a nation's entire past.

The reason for this may lie within the notion of "archivability", which refers to the capacity of an object or event to be preserved in repositories of historical records and documentation. In other words, archivability is the quality that makes an object or event worthy of being remembered and recorded for posterity.

Mbembe asserts that an imperative aspect to the qualification of "archivability" is the notion of death, as death is one of the most "radical attempts to destroy life and all relations to it" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 22). The archive prevents the remainders of death from being eliminated, preserving histories so that they may one day "acquire life" once again (Mbembe, 2002, p. 22). The building in which the archive is held constitutes a type of tomb – not necessarily to lay the documents in a perpetual slumber, but to preserve their content.

Archivability is closely linked to issues of power and representation. There is an inherent bias in which documents are considered "worthy" of being archived, as Mbembe explains, "for a memory to exist, there must be a temptation to repeat an original act," (Mbembe, 2002, p. 24); an item that is archivable is one that has the potential to become part of the historical record and to shape our understanding of the past and the present (Mbembe, 2002, p. 21). Archivability is not a neutral quality but is shaped by the dynamics of power and representation (Kasfir, 1999, p. 47).

Material Status

The physical/architectural space of the archive is an integral part of identification and interpretation. Mbembe asserts the preference of such "material status" in an age before the digital archive. Such a status appeals to senses, whereby the archived document can be engaged with via touching, viewing, and a cognitive process of reading and decoding (Mbembe, 2002, p. 20). There are similarities between Mbembe and Lefebvre's texts in that they both highlight the ways in which material objects and spaces are not simply physical entities but are actively produced through social practices and carry cultural and political meaning. By examining the interplay between materiality, power, and space, these theorists offer insights into the complex dynamics of social life and the ways in which culture and politics are intertwined with the physical world.

There are several points of connection between Mbembe's notion of material status and Lefebvre's ideas about the production of space. Firstly, Mbembe argues that material objects can become "archives" that carry the weight of history and memory, and that these archives can be mobilized for political purposes (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19). Lefebvre argues that space is produced through social practices that carry historical and cultural meanings (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 91).

Mbembe discusses the ways in which archives can be used to reinforce or challenge dominant power relations (Mbembe, 2002, p. 18). Lefebvre argues that the production of space is intimately tied to struggles over power and control (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 283).

Mbembe also emphasizes the importance of "rituals of consumption" that imbue material objects with social and cultural meaning (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19). Lefebvre argues that the production of space is tied to consumption practices and the commodification of urban life (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 217).

Imaginary status

The concept of "imaginary status," refers to the ways in which objects and artifacts can become invested with symbolic and cultural meaning that transcends their physical properties (Mbembe, 2002, p. 18). In the context of Achille Mbembe's articulation of the way the archive links the past to the present so as to preserve memory (2002, p. 22), the process erects an "imaginary status", in which the role of the archive is to reassemble the debris of lost histories. Doing so explores the power of the archive as an instituting imaginary that serves as a manner of recalling (Mbembe, *ibid.*). This proposes that through archived documents, time can be pieced together as fragments are recovered, providing the illusion of totality, suggesting a clear, easily justifiable narrative.

Just as nations are constructed through the circulation of symbolic forms, including language, print culture, and visual media (Anderson, 1991, p. 6), Mbembe argues that objects can become invested with symbolic and cultural meaning through their circulation in networks of power and through the narratives that surround them (Mbembe, 2002, p. 18). Lefebvre argues that the production of space is tied to the circulation of signs and symbols, which can produce particular meanings and associations (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 81).

Mbembe emphasizes the importance of historical narratives and memories in shaping the imaginary status of objects (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19), which add to the historical narratives and mythologies that shape collective imagination and history (Anderson, 1991, p. 15). Lefebvre argues that the production of space is tied to the construction of historical narratives and the commemoration of events (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 87).

Mbembe also discusses the role of the imagination in producing and sustaining the symbolic and cultural meaning of objects (Mbembe, 2002, p. 18). Lefebvre emphasizes the importance of the imagination in the production of space, arguing that it is through the imagination that social actors can create new spatial possibilities and challenge dominant spatial formations (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 97). This is not unlike Benedict Anderson's thoughts on imagined communities, as he argues that the construction of nations is closely tied to the exercise of power, including the power to define who belongs and who does not belong to the national community (Anderson, 1991, p. 7). The symbolic and cultural dimensions of social life are produced through shared cultural practices and narratives.

Collective Ownership

The conceptualization of the archive as an "instituting imaginary" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 23) relies on a parasitic relationship between the archive and the state whereby neither could exist without the other. There would be no state without the archive to document its history and no governing body to regulate what constitutes "history". Time, with relation to archives, has a political dimension – it exists within a realm of "collective ownership" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19).

The transition from viewing documents as components of an archive to considering art-objects in a similar vein necessitates an understanding of archives not just as repositories of textual records but as comprehensive collections that encompass a wide array of cultural artifacts. This broader conception aligns with the idea that archives serve as sites of memory and history, preserving the tangible manifestations of culture, identity, and heritage.

Art-objects, much like documents, are imbued with narratives, contexts, and significances that contribute to the collective memory and identity of societies (Mbembe, 2002, p. 18). When these objects are archived, they are not merely preserved; they are inserted into a narrative framework that institutionalizes their meaning and importance. This process of archiving art-objects extends the archive's role beyond the preservation of state and official documents to include the safeguarding of cultural heritage and artistic expression.

However, this inclusion also introduces complexities related to the "discrimination of selection" mentioned by Mbembe (2002, p. 20). The decision-making process about what art-objects are archived often reflects power dynamics, cultural biases, and historical narratives that privilege certain viewpoints over others. This selection process can lead to the recontextualization of non-Western art-objects, where their original meanings, functions, and cultural significance are reframed to fit into the Western archival and historical narratives. This recontextualization can detach art-objects from their cultural and geographical origins, transforming them into objects of study rather than lived heritage, and contributing to the phenomenon of the "nameless artist" as described by Kasfir (1992, p. 44).

The archival process can strip art-objects of their original functions and meanings, relegating them to historical artifacts rather than living components of their cultures. This detachment raises questions about ownership, representation, and the role of archives in constructing history. It underscores the need for an inclusive and reflective archival practice that

acknowledges the diverse origins and significances of art-objects and strives to preserve their connections to their cultural contexts.

In sum, the inclusion of art-objects in archives underscores the political dimension of archival practices and highlights the need for critical engagement with how cultural artifacts are selected, preserved, and interpreted. It challenges us to reconsider the archive not just as a space for storing history but as an active participant in the creation and perpetuation of cultural narratives and identities.

Exhibition

"Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space" is an essay by Brian O'Doherty that explores the ways in which the gallery space shapes our experience and understanding of art. The essay was originally published in *Artforum* in 1976 and comprises critical reflection on the way the gallery space is an "ideological apparatus" that frames and shapes our perception of the artworks (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 13). There are three key characteristics of the gallery space that contribute to this ideological framing: its white walls, its uniform lighting, and its spatial configuration.

According to O'Doherty, the white walls of the gallery space create a sense of "purity" and "isolation" that separates the artwork from the outside world and presents it as a self-contained object (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 13). The uniform lighting of the gallery further emphasizes this isolation by creating a "totalizing" effect that erases any sense of depth or texture in the artwork (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 15), while its spatial configuration, with its carefully controlled circulation and viewing angles, directs the viewer's attention and shapes their experience of the artwork (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 16). These features create a "spectacle" of the artwork that emphasizes its formal qualities and aesthetic value, while obscuring its social and historical context to reinforce the social and economic power of the art world and its institutions (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 17).

Like an archive, the term "exhibition" refers to both objects on display as well as the physical space in which it takes place. Another crucial link relates to archivability, in that the art objects chosen for an exhibition can reveal a form of historical revisionism, as they are often selected and displayed from a position of privilege (O'Doherty, 1986, p. 70).

Exhibitions are paradoxical in that they are fleeting moments in time and space, yet they want to exist outside of such restraints. This space is set up with the intention of suspending time and space temporarily so that artworks may be viewed without the socio-political implications brought upon by the time that has passed since their creation (O'Doherty, 1986). However, the exhibition is bound to exist in a predetermined and limited time and space, existing onwards in "afterlives". The concept of exhibition afterlives recognizes that the impact of space on spectatorship extends beyond the immediate exhibition context. It can continue to shape our perception of art even outside of the exhibition space and time. O'Doherty argues that the space in which art is exhibited has a lasting impact on our

understanding of that art, even when we encounter it outside of the exhibition context (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 15). While O'Doherty's concept of exhibition afterlives focuses specifically on the art world and the impact of exhibition spaces on our perception of art, it draws an important link with Lefebvre's "Production of Space." The impact of space extends beyond its immediate context (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 26).

Key aspects to the understanding of the exhibition are the notions of spectatorship and curation. As the white cube gallery space "insists on the viewer's isolation" (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 14), it is designed to control the behaviour and movement of the viewer. Through the curation of the space, an ideological construct emerges, and it separates art from its context and reduces it to an aesthetic experience (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 14). In doing so, the space asserts and assigns certain meanings and values, such as the importance of certain artists or the relationship between different pieces of art (Fischer, 2004, p. 83). This reveals the way the curation of exhibition spaces is part of the production of space and reflects the power relations and social structures that shape our experience of space (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 37). Critic and curator Paul O'Neill, in his book "The Curatorial Conundrum", cements this notion by stating that "curatorial practice is never neutral; it is always embedded within a complex web of political, social, economic, cultural and institutional interests" (O'Neill, 2016, p. 11).

O'Doherty refers to the implication of this space on spectators as a "ritualistic" experience, in which individual viewers lose their autonomy and become part of a collective "hive mind" (O'Doherty, 1986). As the exhibition space creates an artificial, unshadowed, white, and clean environment that eliminates personal subjectivity and creates a timeless, eternal display for the artworks (O'Doherty, 1986, p. 15), the viewer's self is meant to be eliminated.

An interesting concept to consider is the flâneur, as described by French poet and cultural critic Charles Baudelaire. The flâneur is a leisurely stroller who wanders the streets of the city, observing and absorbing the urban environment. Baudelaire described the flâneur as a "viewer who takes pleasure in abandoning himself to the artificial world of high capitalist civilization," (Lauster, 2007, p. 140). This concept has been taken up by scholars and critics in the fields of art and cultural studies as a way of exploring the relationship between the individual, the city, and the spectacle (Baudelaire, 1995, pp. 1-40).

Walter Benjamin, for example, views the flâneur as "a Marxist critique of commodity fetishism," (p. 140). To Benjamin, the flâneur is almost a satirical parody of capitalism; "an

observer and connoisseur of market fluctuations... on a reconnaissance mission in the consumer's realm... to register all the signs of commodification," (p. 140). This notion aligns with O'Doherty's description of how the hivemind functions in the exhibition space. The hive mind operates and thinks as a single mass, and the exhibition space reflects the abandonment of personal subjectivity in a "neutralized" environment that allows the viewer to experience art in a detached and disembodied way (O'Doherty, 1986, p. 15).

However, Baudelaire discusses the concept of the *flâneur* as both the subject and the object of the spectacle. In his essay "The Painter of Modern Life", he argues that the *flâneur* is a privileged figure who can observe the world around him while remaining detached from it. The *flâneur* observes and reflects on the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the urban environment; (Baudelaire, 1995, p. 14). Meanwhile, the urban environment is also a spectacle; created and maintained by the cultural and social practices of its inhabitants (1995, p. 10).

The *flâneur*'s experience of the urban environment is akin to that of a spectator who enjoys the spectacle from a position of detachment. Curation, then, is a crucial element in the dynamic discourse of knowledge production between the artists and audiences (Johnston, 2014, p. 23). The notion of "socially engaged curatorial practice" may pose a solution to detached spectators, as it intends to address the "production, distribution, and consumption of art through multiple platforms with an emphasis on process and connecting with audiences," (Johnston, 2014, p.24). The limitation, here, however, is that this process prioritizes the curator's role in the understanding of an exhibited artwork, "as well as innovative methods and approaches to mediation—which is often from the inception of a project to production and presentation," (Johnston, *ibid.*).

The most pertinent part of socially engaged curating is the way it highlights the experience of viewing an artwork. Doing so requires an attempt "to activate the space between object and audiences," (Johnston, 2014, p. 24). The city (to Baudelaire), just like the exhibition space, is not just a physical space, but is also a social and cultural space that is constantly being shaped and remade by the practices of its inhabitants. The *flâneur* is not just a passive spectator but is also an active participant in the urban spectacle (Baudelaire, 1995, p. 13). Spatial practice - the ways in which people use and interact with space - is a key element in the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 26), and socially engaged curating appears to be a key aspect in

empowering the spectator to be an active participant, impacting how meaning is created and exchanged.

The Spaces of the Archive & Exhibition

Guo Zhang and Elin K. Jacob propose a framework that may be useful in understanding space, place, and their interrelationships. This is especially helpful when considering how space and place transform and shift when considered digitally. It is also extremely beneficial when considering the complexities of the archive and the exhibition as institutions - spaces - as well as places.

There are four dimensions that Zhang and Jacob break down.

	Space	Place
Shape	Spatial; neutral; objective.	Spatiotemporal; affective; intersubjective.
Structure	Undifferentiated; without boundary.	Distinct; bounded.
Context	Incomprehensible; a collection of possibilities; without behavioral constraints; conceptually unconstrained.	Known; recognized opportunities; with behavioural guidelines and expectations; conceptually constrained.
Experience	Uninhabited; potential mental framework for human experience; unfamiliar and unknown.	Inhabited; everyday classification/representation of human experience; familiar.

Table A: Four-Dimensional Perspective on Space and Place (Zhang & Jacob, 2012, p. 94).

Based on the detailed framework provided by Guo Zhang and Elin K. Jacob regarding the concepts of space and place, it's clear how these distinctions can be instrumental in examining the roles and functionalities of archives and exhibitions within the digital and physical realms. This framework lays a foundational understanding that space, characterized by its neutrality and potential, contrasts with place, which is imbued with specific meanings, experiences, and social constructs. The application of this four-dimensional perspective enables a deeper exploration into how exhibitions and archives, as institutions, navigate between being spaces—containers of infinite possibilities—and places—sites of curated narratives and preserved histories.

In the context of digital transformation, Zhang and Jacob's framework becomes particularly salient. Digital platforms dissolve traditional boundaries and expand the notion of space, allowing for a reimagined engagement with place. Archives and exhibitions, when digitized, transcend physical limitations, offering new ways to interact with, experience, and interpret art and historical documents. The digital shifts the experience from a physical to a virtual realm, where the interplay between space and place is reconfigured, challenging traditional notions of accessibility, interpretation, and engagement.

For archives, the transition from physical to digital spaces opens up unprecedented possibilities for access and engagement, while also raising questions about the authenticity and preservation of digital artifacts. Digital exhibitions can extend the reach and impact of art beyond conventional gallery walls, fostering an inclusive and interactive engagement with audiences worldwide. However, this also necessitates a reevaluation of how we curate, experience, and understand art and history in the digital age.

By applying Zhang and Jacob's framework, we can critically assess the evolving dynamics of space and place in the digital landscape, offering insights into the potentialities and challenges faced by archives and exhibitions. This perspective not only enhances our understanding of these institutions in a digital context but also prompts a reconsideration of how digital spaces can serve as new sites for cultural expression, memory, and identity construction.

In exploring exhibitions and archives within the realm of art history, it is essential to dissect the intricate dynamics between 'space' and 'place'—concepts that, while often used interchangeably, possess distinct qualities that profoundly shape our interaction with and understanding of art and historical narratives. Drawing upon the theoretical framework proposed by Zhang & Jacob (2012, p. 94), this examination adopts a 'four-dimensional perspective' that delineates 'space' as an abstract, potentially neutral container of possibilities, and 'place' as a defined, contextually rich site imbued with specific meanings and experiences. This differentiation is crucial in understanding how art exhibitions and archives, as institutions, function both as physical and conceptual entities.

The following tables are constructed with the intent to elucidate the complex interplay between 'space' and 'place' across two distinct but interrelated domains: exhibitions and archives. By dissecting these dimensions, we aim to reveal how the spatial configurations and the curated or archived content within these settings not only coexist but also interact to create rich, multifaceted experiences. These explorations are grounded in the notion that 'space' and 'place' are not merely passive backdrops but active participants in the creation and interpretation of art and history. Through this lens, we seek to uncover how exhibitions and archives serve as crucibles for cultural expression, memory preservation, and the negotiation of historical narratives, contributing to a deeper understanding of their roles in shaping our perception of art and its historical significance.

Archive (Table B)

	Space	Place
Shape	A public institution; has a physical address and a tangible structure; storage for various documents that are typically text-based.	A process of recollection; preservation of history.
Structure	Characterized by the architectural and organizational setup that houses documents and facilitates access to them, emphasizing the materiality and sensory engagement with archived materials (Mbembe, 2002).	Shaped by the archival practices, policies, and rituals that determine what is deemed 'archivable,' highlighting the socio-political and cultural contexts that influence these decisions (Mbembe, 2002).
Context	A neutral, potential-filled container that physically preserves history, providing a space where the past can be stored and accessed (Mbembe, 2002).	A dynamic process informed by power relations, representation, and collective memory, where the archive serves as a site for contestation over which histories are remembered and how (Mbembe, 2002).
Experience	Involves direct, tactile interaction with archival materials, engaging the senses and allowing for a personal connection with history (Mbembe, 2002).	Engages with the symbolic and cultural meanings of archives, where documents and objects transcend their material status to become part of broader narratives and imaginaries (Mbembe, 2002).

Table B: Four-Dimensional Perspective on Space and Place of the Archive

This table articulates the multifaceted nature of archives, distinguishing between their physical embodiments ('Space') and the processes and implications of archiving ('Place'). It highlights how the architectural and organizational structures of archives facilitate the preservation and access to historical documents, while also underscoring the role of societal norms and institutional policies in shaping what is preserved. Through this distinction, the table explores how archives serve as both repositories of tangible documents and as sites where historical narratives are constructed and legitimized. The emphasis on 'Experience' reflects on the sensory engagement with archived materials and the role of archives in affirming historical narratives, contributing to our collective understanding of the past. This approach aims to provide a clearer understanding of how archives function within society, bridging the gap between their physical infrastructure and their cultural and historical significance.

Exhibition (Table C)

	Space	Place
Shape	An institution in which artworks and art-objects are displayed, emphasizing the physical and architectural aspects.	A specific curation or exhibition within a space, focusing on the intentional arrangement and presentation of artworks.
Structure	Serves as a neutral backdrop, aiming to communicate narratives through thematic grouping of items, yet influenced by institutional power dynamics.	The detailed orchestration of artworks, influenced by curatorial decisions that shape the narrative, interaction, and engagement with the art.
Context	The 'white cube' concept isolates art from external environments, creating a universal viewing context that emphasizes the art's autonomy.	The context is dynamically shaped by the specific curation and exhibition, highlighting the relationship between art, its presentation, and the viewer's interpretation.
Experience	Designed to suspend sociopolitical implications temporarily, allowing for a focused engagement with the art itself.	Influenced by the interactions among artists, curators, and viewers within the exhibition. The experience is shaped by the familiarity and personal engagement each stakeholder has with the space and the art, fostering a unique interpretive community.

Table C: Four-Dimensional Perspective on Space and Place of the Exhibition

The purpose of this table is to delineate the conceptual distinctions and interactions between 'space' and 'place' in the context of art exhibitions. By comparing these dimensions, the table clarifies how the physical environment ('space') and the curated experience ('place') influence the perception and interpretation of artworks. The inclusion of stakeholders (artists, curators, viewers) under 'Experience' emphasizes the importance of human interaction in shaping the exhibition's impact. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how art is experienced and interpreted within the gallery framework, highlighting the dynamic interplay between architectural neutrality, curated narratives, and participatory engagement.

Chapter 3 – Digital Realm, Authenticity, and the Diaspora

Now that I have discussed how the archive and exhibition are institutions that promote and perpetuate their spaces and places, I discuss the notion of authenticity. This will lead to a discussion regarding how the archive and exhibition shift in a digital space.

Authenticity

In an era where the digital and the postcolonial intersect with unprecedented complexity, the discourse surrounding authenticity, Aura, and the reproduction of art objects finds itself at a critical juncture. At the heart of this discourse lies a profound inquiry into the nature of art, its cultural significance, and the mechanisms through which it is curated, archived, and exhibited. This exploration necessitates an understanding of authenticity, a concept deeply entwined with the historical and social contexts of art production and reception. As we delve into the realms of African art and digital spaces, questions of cultural authenticity and the creation of meaning become paramount, challenging traditional narratives and inviting a reevaluation of what constitutes the original and its Aura in a digitally saturated landscape.

The Aura

There is a vital link between the archive and the exhibition: both terms encompass a technical system of collecting/storing/displaying art-objects, as well as a physical location. When extending questions of archive and exhibition to African art, there are two critical elements: Who creates meaning for African art? And who/what determines its cultural authenticity? (Kasfir, 1992, p. 41) The notion of authenticity is pivotal to this research because of the controversial perception of African art as a product of Western colonial history. Authenticity is the concept that links Postcolonialism to the Archive and Exhibition. It is a multi-faceted point of philosophical debate and provides a framework to consider how and why Western exhibitions and archives establish a definitive discourse to classify, label, and canonize (or decanonize) non-Western artworks (Kasfir, 1992, p. 45).

This concept is most clearly understood by linking the notion of authenticity to that of the Aura. Walter Benjamin's concept of the Aura refers to the sense of uniqueness that surrounds an original work of art. According to Benjamin, the Aura is the "unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (Benjamin, 2008, p.19). It is the sense of awe and reverence that we feel in the presence of an original work of art, which he argues is due to its

unique existence in time and space. Authenticity works its way to the forefront of the meaning of an artwork as it is the "essence of all that is transmissible"; all meaning that it contains. Technological reproduction of an art-object, while not directly altering the artifact, invariably leads to a diminished presence and perceived value. As Benjamin and Jennings (2010, p. 4) elucidate, reproduction techniques extricate the object from its traditional heritage, fundamentally altering its essence and uniqueness by proliferation. This is particularly evident in the realm of digital reproduction, where the limitless capacity for replication further distorts the original's authenticity.

However, if the Aura of an artwork, as Benjamin suggests, is the sense of "its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, 2008, p.19), perhaps its authenticity depends on its relationship to the historical and social context in which it was created and exists. This would mean that authenticity and Henri Lefebvre's idea of the production of space share a common focus on historical and social contexts. Lefebvre's production of space theory emphasizes the importance of understanding these contexts, as well as the social and power relations that produce spaces. These perspectives, then, highlight the need to critically examine the ways in which objects and spaces are constructed and how they shape our experience of the world.

The Singular Rule

Walter Benjamin's contemplations on the Aura of art in the context of mechanical reproduction have never been more relevant than in today's digital age. The proliferation of digital art, characterized by its inherent reproducibility, challenges traditional notions of the original and its associated Aura. Benjamin's concerns, articulated during the era of photography and film, echo with renewed urgency as we grapple with the implications of digital technologies on art and its societal role (Avital & Dolandka, 2023, p. 95).

Contrary to the apprehension that digital reproduction diminishes the Aura or authentic experience of art, the digital age offers a new paradigm through which we can understand these concepts. Digital art, by its nature, invites us to redefine what constitutes the original and its Aura; it is not bound by the physical limitations of traditional media. Its essence lies in its code, its interactivity, and its ability to transcend spatial and temporal boundaries. In this

sense, the originality of digital art is embedded in its conceptual design and the unique experiences it facilitates, rather than in its physical singularity (Avital & Dolandka, 2023, p. 95-96).

Avital and Dolandka (2023, p. 96) highlight the story of Han van Meegeren as an exploration of the complex relationship between authenticity, art, and Aura. Van Meegeren successfully forged Johan Vermeer's paintings, particularly *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus*. His doing so not only challenged the traditional notions of originality and authenticity but also brought to light the role of Aura in the appreciation and valuation of art. This case underscores how the perceived historical and contextual significance of an artwork can influence its reception, often independent of its material authenticity.

Van Meegeren's methodical approach to forgery, from studying Vermeer's techniques to aging his own paintings to mimic 17th-century works, demonstrates a deliberate attempt to replicate not just the physical appearance of Vermeer's paintings but also their historical Aura. By introducing his forgeries into the art world, Van Meegeren challenged the mechanisms of authentication and the art market's reliance on expert opinions, exposing vulnerabilities in the valuation of art (Avital & Dolandka, 2023, p. 99).

Avital and Dolandka extend their discussion to the idea of the "Singular Rule," a concept suggesting that artworks operate under a unique rule that admits variations without altering the fundamental gestalt of the original (2023, p. 102). This approach allows for a reevaluation of the uniqueness and multiplicity of artworks, especially in the digital domain where reproduction and alteration are inherent properties.

The concept of the "Singular Rule" introduces the idea that art can embody a singular rule that admits variations without altering the core perceptual gestalt or identity of the work. (Avital & Dolandka, 2023, p. 103). This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the artwork's identity and uniqueness, beyond the mere physical or visual aspects. It challenges the traditional notion of uniqueness by showing that even works produced from the same mold or digital code can be considered unique if they adhere to the singular rule that defines their identity.

Artefacts and Artworks

Benjamin identifies a distinction between two types of art-objects: artefacts and artworks. An artefact as an object that was made for a specific, intended purpose and contextualized through traditional/ritualistic means. An artwork, on the other hand, was created for its aesthetic qualities – it has no other practical use. This distinction is important as a tool to easily recognize the hypocrisy of Western canonization: what is artefact to a culture in the Global South is an artwork to the West, as the latter has no practical use for it (Benjamin & Jennings, 2010, p. 6). Essentially, we may view authenticity as primarily an ideology of collection and display, ensnaring certain types of objects ("art-objects") and imbuing them with an Aura of "cultural truth" (Kasfir, 1992, p. 46). By implication, these art-objects are records/documentations of culture (Kasfir, 1992, p. 46). An art-object is a product of its time, recording the way it was made, the spatial-temporal situation, and the socio-political context, and so it is vital to consider the implications to its Aura when that context is altered (Benjamin & Jennings, 2010, p. 5).

When considering the notion of archivability, the distinction between art-objects and artifacts reveals specifically how the institutions produce knowledge and enact historical revisionism, as an item's intended function is made completely irrelevant - it only serves as something to collect and display (O'Doherty, 1986, p. 70). This can have a significant impact on the way that people understand and perceive the cultures and societies from which these artifacts originate, influencing their mental spaces and shaping their perceptions of the "other" (Kasfir, 1999, p. 47). This is especially true when it comes to African art objects, which were often taken out of their original contexts by colonial powers and reclassified in ways that both canonized and decanonized them (Kasfir, 1992, p. 45). Exhibitions that toured Europe with these "export items" contributed to the way that Africa was perceived by outsiders and had a significant impact on African artistic output (Bargna, 2015). Kasfir (1992) discusses the "radical transformation in warrior masquerades ... with the coming of the British" (p. 42). Initially, south-eastern Nigerian dancers wore skulls atop their heads, adorned in crudely replicated eyeballs and hair. Few, if any, evidence of such artifacts remains today – they have been replaced by painted wooden imitations. However, these wooden variants are regarded and sought after as authentic. This exemplifies the way in which "Western taste ... has dictated what is art and what is merely ethnographic specimen" (Kasfir, 1992, p. 42).

In the insight on modernity offered by Homi K. Bhabha, he suggests that modernity is not a singular event; rather, it is the amalgamation of a historical enunciation based upon dominant discourse (Bhabha, 1994; Bhambra, 2014, p. 116). This implies that there is no pre-modern "before" time marked, at its end, by colonialism. Rather, there exists a historical framework through which the West viewed the rest of the world, comprising "a felicitous combination of imperial design, social Darwinism, and collecting," (Kasfir, 1992, p. 43). Colonialism is not an "unbridgeable chasm between traditional, authentic art and an aftermath polluted by foreign contact," (Kasfir, 1992, p. 43). Localities within the Global South, individually do not have a "timeless past"; the "before" was not a static state of being in which art was produced, consumed, and utilized for a single purpose in an unchanging manner for millennia. To ignore the fluid nature of African cultural development before the presence of the West and simplify it to a static, "timeless past," correlates to there being an "ethnographic present" (Kasfir, 1992, p. 43). The implication is that the latter – the present – is irrelevant and inauthentic (Kasfir, 1992, p. 43). This mode of thought implies that non-Western cultural change took place in a single, cataclysmic instant (colonialism) which caused the immediate cessation of any future transformation (Kasfir, 1992, p. 43).

In a digital space, when the institutions of the archive and exhibition dissolve and the art-objects are accessible without a physical location, perhaps new narratives can arise. Perhaps, because digital media is inherently malleable and flexible, the computer is the master of interaction: rather than rendering fixed representations, it is creating, manipulating, and processing symbols (Malina, 1990, p. 33), discourse can be viewed and recontextualized using a plethora of tools readily available: image processing, visualization, simulation, and network communication.

African Narratives

In an essay published in the 2007 catalogue of the exhibition, Njami called Africa schizophrenic (Njami, 2007, p. 13). It is a continent comprising nations that are linked to each other through history and geography – and the chaotic result of those two elements. Africa is not a single mass. Each nation has its own history and its own response to evolving past those histories.

The idea of Modern Africa is one whereby Africa is noted as a space within which a multiplicity of identities, events, meanings, and places can manifest. (Bargna, 2015). Art exhibitions, pre-COVID, functioned as "contact zones" – spaces in which individuals could exchange views and challenge perceptions, authorities, identities, and assumptions. However, it is imperative to note that Western museums comprise stolen objects from the Global South, and even today these objects have not been returned. The solution may lie in the digital realm – whereby the objects themselves are not exploited; they are merely virtual re-presentations (Bargna, 2015).

There are a lot of African artists that prefer to remain silent – despite their works being displayed to a large crowd. The works are renowned – some names are famous. But artists from Africa, per Njami, suffer in that they are inevitably a suspect in a covert quest for the Western art-world to find "the authentic African." The silence was a breeding ground for terms like "Aura" to populate the narrative, but it was by no means a reluctance to participate. Rather, it was a blatant sign that participation and creation took place in a space outside of Western conventions. But when we cannot see something unfold, we assume it does not exist (Njami, 2007, p. 16).

There are labels that exist, such as 'scholarly art', 'international art' that seek to categorize and organize non-Western art into more digestible boxes. Njami argues against the idea that there is a single, static definition of authentic African art. Instead, he emphasizes the diversity and complexity of African artistic traditions and the ways in which they have evolved over time. Creativity reflects the complex histories and cultures of the continent. He writes, "African art is marked by a diversity of forms, techniques, and meanings that reflect the continent's complex history and cultural richness." (Njami, 2007, p. 17).

African art cannot be reduced to a single style or genre, as it encompasses a wide range of practices and traditions. As such, Njami claims that "the concept of 'authentic' African art is

elusive and contested," (2007, p. 17). This is because the idea of authenticity is often used to create a fixed and static notion of African art that does not reflect its diverse and dynamic reality. He places emphasis on recognizing how "African artists have always been innovative and experimental, adapting their techniques and styles to changing circumstances and influences." (p. 18). This ongoing evolution is part of what makes African art so vibrant and dynamic.

The notion of "authenticity" in African art, often tied to ethnographic and anthropological discourses, further complicates the understanding of contemporary practices. This concept of authenticity, linked to a perceived untouched aesthetic or the idea of an art form that taps into essential life forces, is a construct often used to exoticize and otherize African art (Kellner, 2007, p. 23-24).

The identity of the African artist is not static or confined to historical stereotypes but is fluid, multiple, and continuously evolving (Kellner, 2007, p. 25). The post-colonial subject navigates multiple identities, adapting and revising them in response to changing circumstances. This fluidity challenges the binary oppositions often imposed on African art and artists, allowing for a nuanced understanding of their work as part of a global artistic conversation (Kellner, 2007, p. 24-25).

African artists' engagement with technology and contemporary mediums challenges outdated notions of African art and highlights the continent's rich, diverse, and evolving cultural landscape. It calls for a reevaluation of the frameworks through which African art is viewed, critiqued, and categorized, urging a move beyond the colonial legacies that have historically shaped perceptions of African creativity.

African artists take agency in defining their own artistic conventions rather than ascribing to a "fixed notion of authenticity," (Njami, 2007, p.17). Njami elaborates in saying that African artists operate within an entirely different discourse, defining their own artistic practices and conventions.

The Diaspora

The African Diaspora is diverse and complex, comprising communities connected through shared experiences of displacement, migration, and cultural exchange (Bernal, 2016, p. 67). Victoria Bernal, a scholar who has written extensively on African diaspora and digital media,

argues that the African diaspora is not a fixed or homogeneous entity, but rather a dynamic and diverse network of communities that are constantly evolving and adapting to new social, economic, and political realities. Bernal states that digital technologies have facilitated the formation of new diasporic identities that are not bound by geographic or national boundaries (Bernal, 2005, p. 4).

Bernal's work in examining the impact of digital technologies on African diasporic identities reveals that digital spaces – Cyberspaces – have created new possibilities for diasporic communities to connect, communicate, and mobilize around shared political and social issues (Bernal, 2005, p. 5).

Bernal acknowledges the challenges and limitations of digital technologies in the context of the African diaspora. She notes that digital technologies can reproduce and exacerbate existing forms of inequality and exclusion, particularly in terms of access to technology and digital literacy (Bernal, 2005, p. 7). She highlights the need to be aware of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the African diaspora and to recognize the potential for digital technologies to perpetuate cultural hierarchies and power relations (Bernal, 2005, p. 8). The challenges and limitations can be summarized as relating to access, representation, power, and appropriation (Bernal, 2021, p. 88 -91)

1. Access: The disparities in access within and between different African diaspora communities perpetuate existing inequalities and exclusions (Bernal, 2012, p. 88).
2. Representation: Digital technologies can reproduce and reinforce dominant representations and stereotypes of African diaspora communities, perpetuating the marginalization of alternative perspectives and narratives (Bernal, 2012, p. 89).
3. Power: The power dynamics in digital spaces may not be neutral, perpetuating existing inequalities and exclusions (Bernal, 2012, p. 90).
4. Appropriation: Digital technologies can be used to appropriate and commodify African diaspora culture. This can lead to the erasure of the cultural significance of diasporic practices and the exploitation of diaspora communities. (Bernal, 2012, p. 91).

In her article "Mapping African Diaspora Studies: Toward a Transnational and Decolonial Framework," Bernal argues that scholars studying the African diaspora must engage with transnational and decolonial perspectives to move beyond the limitations of national frameworks and Eurocentric perspectives (Bernal, 2016, p. 66). She suggests that a

transnational and decolonial approach can help to challenge dominant narratives and create space for alternative perspectives.

Bernal defines a transnational perspective as an approach that "emphasizes the connections and relationships between people, cultures, and nations across national and geographic boundaries" (Bernal, 2016, p. 67). Bernal suggests that a transnational perspective can help to challenge the limitations of national frameworks, which may obscure the transnational connections and relationships that exist between diasporic communities. By focusing on these connections and relationships, Bernal argues that a transnational perspective can provide an understanding of diasporic experiences, which acknowledges the ways in which diasporic communities are connected and intertwined.

Bernal also emphasizes the need for a decolonial perspective, which seeks to challenge and subvert dominant cultural and political narratives that are rooted in colonialism and imperialism. She argues that a decolonial approach can help to centre the experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities, and provide a framework for challenging the hierarchies and power relations that perpetuate inequality and exclusion (Bernal, 2016, p. 69).

Cyberspaces enable diasporic communities to connect, communicate, and express their cultural identities in new and innovative ways - taking a transnational and decolonial approach and providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the African diaspora.

"Space, Time, and Culture on African/Diaspora Websites: A Tangled Web We Weave" is an article written by Inge Brinkman and Daniela Merolla (2012, p. 145-162) that explores how digital technologies have enabled diasporic communities to create new forms of cultural expression. Through an analysis of several African and diasporic websites, Brinkman and Merolla demonstrate the extent to which online spaces - Cyberspaces - constructs and negotiates cultural identities and facilitates connection across physical borders (Brinkman & Merolla, 2012, p. 147 - 153).

This text is interesting in that it reveals the way websites can be considered cultural products as well as digital spaces. As cultural products, websites reflect the values, beliefs, practices, and symbols of a particular cultural group or society, and they are created and maintained by individuals who are situated within particular cultural contexts. As spaces, websites provide a

virtual environment where users can interact, share information, and engage in cultural practices and activities.

Brinkman and Merolla define a cultural product as "any object, artifact, or text that is created by humans and that reflects the values, beliefs, practices, and symbols of a particular cultural group or society" (Brinkman & Merolla, 2012, p. 149). Websites can be seen as cultural products in the sense that they are designed, created, and maintained by individuals who are situated within particular cultural contexts, and who draw upon their cultural backgrounds and experiences to construct their websites. Websites offer a platform for the expression and dissemination of other cultural products such as music, literature, and art, enabling individuals of African and diasporic communities to showcase and promote the cultural products to a global audience (Brinkman & Merolla, 2012, p. 153).

Brinkman and Merolla further claim that African and diasporic websites are "virtual spaces that are created and maintained by African and diaspora people, and that are devoted to the exploration and celebration of African cultures and identities" (Brinkman & Merolla, 2012, p. 149). These spaces - Cyberspaces - facilitate the creation of new forms of cultural expression that are not bound by physical location or traditional cultural norms. It empowers individuals to explore and negotiate cultural identities and hybridities that are not limited by geographic or social boundaries (p. 151). As they incorporate a range of different technologies and media, digital technologies allow for a rich and dynamic representation of African and diaspora cultures (p. 147).

The authors also highlight the challenges and complexities of constructing and negotiating cultural identities in virtual spaces. Like Bernal, they note that the internet can create new forms of inequality and exclusion, particularly in terms of access to technology and digital literacy (Brinkman & Merolla, 2012, p. 147-151). They point out that the cultural and linguistic diversity of African and diasporic communities can make it difficult to create unified cultural identities online (Brinkman & Merolla, 2012, p. 147 -151).

Reclaiming the Narrative

The perception of African art through a Western lens often falls into reductive stereotypes and essentialist notions rooted in 19th-century colonialism. This historical backdrop is crucial for understanding why contemporary African art, especially works involving technology, video, new media, and installations, is frequently misinterpreted or underestimated by

Western audiences. The colonial perspective posited Africa and its people as lacking technological sophistication and intellectual advancement, casting them as primitive and static. This view was propagated through colonial exhibits and the portrayal of Africans as unchanging "natives," reinforcing a narrative of African people as historically and culturally stagnant (Kellner & Njami, 2007, p. 23).

In an article on the AtWork website entitled "For a Poetics of Immateriality", Simon Njami discusses the relationship between art, reality, and communication in Africa, where oral language is still a primary medium of communication. Njami argues that art is a mirror that reflects the reality of a fiction and that it is impossible to capture the whole world in art. Art gives us an illusion of a structured world and that life is just a series of fragments and moments. Fairy tales are close to reality because they make it clear that they are just an illusion. Njami talks about the psychology of African narratives and how they are conveyed through action rather than through long monologues. In African narratives, the end is not the aim of the story and that descriptions are not symbolic but are a vehicle for action.

Africa is shaped and reshaped by social technologies and that exhibitions and museums have contributed to shaping Africa as a real and virtual image (Njami, 2007, pp. 13-20). The way in which Africa is perceived and represented is shaped and influenced by the social technologies that are used to create and display it (Bargna, 2015). Exhibitions and museums, from colonial exhibitions to contemporary art biennials, have played a role in shaping the image of Africa and its representation. However, these representations of Africa are also open to local forms of re-appropriation. In addition, these technologies also change the strategies for resolving conflicts related to material properties, such as the objects stolen from Africa during the colonial period that are now being claimed back by their owners. These objects can physically stay in the museums and be virtually returned through data banks or virtual exhibitions. The question arises whether this is a real restitution or a strategy to avoid it. In the context of anthropology of the contemporary world, it is important to consider how these new forms of construction of reality are created, perceived, and affect people's beliefs and opinions (Bargna, 2015).

The concept of tactile appropriation can help to illuminate the ways in which websites as cultural products are not simply passive objects but dynamic, interactive environments that enable active participation and co-creation of meaning. Walter Benjamin discusses tactile appropriation as an important aspect of understanding its Aura and historical context.

However, when an artwork is viewed online, it seems as though it is not possible to physically interact with it. Benjamin notes that the reproduction of an artwork, whether through photography or other forms of mechanical reproduction, lacks the "unique existence" and physical presence of the original (Benjamin, 2008, p.19). On one hand, this suggests that reproductions of art can undermine our ability to fully appreciate and understand it. Benjamin writes, "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, 2008, p.19). This would negate the existence of tactile appropriation when an artwork is viewed online.

On the other hand, separating the artwork from its Aura and original context may not eliminate the possibility of tactile appropriation, but transform it into a different experience, one in which the viewer actively engages with the artwork (Bødker, 2016, p. 415). The viewer becomes a co-producer of meaning, rather than a passive spectator (Benjamin, 2008, p. 36).

When considering websites as cultural products, they can also be subject to tactile appropriation, as users engage with the content, interact with other users, and create their own content. Websites are not static objects but dynamic, interactive environments, and users can actively participate in the construction of meaning and the creation of new cultural forms.

As Brinkman and Merolla note, websites provide a space where users can engage in cultural practices and activities, share information and knowledge, and create new cultural forms (Brinkman & Merolla, 2012, p. 147 - 153). This is yet another way in which digital spaces - Cyberspaces - can be viewed as "third space" in which new cultural forms and practices emerge from the interaction of different cultures, identities, and practices. Such spaces are "emergent, unpredictable, and irreducible to any essentialist notion of identity or culture" (Kraidy, 2005, p. 380). This interactive and collaborative process of meaning-making is similar to Benjamin's notion of tactile appropriation, in which the viewer actively engages with the artwork.

The concept of cyberspaces as "third spaces" offers a compelling framework for understanding the transformative potential of digital environments in fostering new cultural forms, identities, and practices (Bhabha, 1990; Kraidy, 2005, p. 380). These spaces are characterized by their emergent, unpredictable nature, and their ability to transcend

traditional notions of identity and culture. This dynamism in cyberspaces mirrors Walter Benjamin's idea of tactile appropriation, where the engagement between the viewer and the artwork is not passive but active and participatory, allowing for a collaborative process of meaning-making.

In the realm of art, as discussed by Emison (2021, p. 15), this interactive engagement is crucial, especially when artworks are designed to convey specific viewpoints. While Benjamin did not necessarily view the alignment of art with certain norms or orthodoxies as problematic, the risk arises when art becomes a vehicle for ideological messages, potentially transforming into a tool for political ritual rather than a means of democratic engagement.

The parallel between cyberspaces and Benjamin's vision of art suggests a broader reimagining of how art can function in society. Just as cyberspaces serve as platforms for the convergence and interaction of diverse cultural expressions, art too has the potential to operate in a "third space" that is neither confined to ritualistic purposes nor solely for art's sake. In this space, art can foster dialogue, challenge existing norms, and introduce new perspectives, without necessitating a singular interpretation or response from its audience.

The emphasis on tactile appropriation in Benjamin's theory highlights the importance of active engagement and reflection in the appreciation of art, a principle that is increasingly relevant in the digital age. As artworks navigate the complexities of conveying messages within and beyond cyberspaces, the goal remains to inspire contemplation and foster a deeper connection with the audience, moving beyond mere admiration to a nuanced and critical interaction with the artwork.

In essence, linking the concept of cyberspaces with the dynamics of art and cultural expression underscores the evolving relationship between technology, art, and society. It points towards a future where art transcends traditional boundaries and orthodoxies, engaging audiences in a participatory and reflective manner. This evolution reflects Benjamin's aspirations for a new aesthetic that embraces both the artist's and critic's freedom from authoritative constraints, signaling a transformative shift in our collective engagement with art and culture in the digital landscape.

Revising the Table

Essentially, space does not have to be simulated to give the illusion of three-dimensions. It is more about the space and place as a means of defining the boundaries, framing the experience, and then establishing the conventions to enable individuals to experience that place in a meaningful way. I hope to achieve that in this data series. The conventions of the archive and the exhibition are subverted as I do not formally canonically label the artworks and their styles/mediums in any western framework. Unlike the archive, the database does not necessarily strip art objects of their cultural context and function or reduce them to mere artifacts. Instead of reducing artworks to objects to be preserved and displayed, the database allows for a multiplicity of interpretations and connections between artworks. I have also ensured that the artists maintain agency over their art by including links to their websites (where applicable) and as much information about them as I could find.

In the digital realm, the traditional boundaries between archive and exhibition blur, offering a unique opportunity to reimagine how art is curated, displayed, and experienced. This database serves as a nexus where the archival function of preservation meets the exhibition's role in interpretation and presentation. By not adhering strictly to canonical labels or Western frameworks for categorizing artworks, the database challenges conventional narratives and invites a multiplicity of interpretations. This approach also maintains artists' agency by linking directly to their personal websites, preserving the cultural context and function of their art.

Dimension	Space	Archive	Exhibition
Shape	A digital repository accessible to anyone with the link.	A digital repository with open-ended engagement, transcending original temporal and spatial constraints.	A curated presentation that leverages digital space to challenge and reinterpret artworks beyond traditional exhibition norms.
Structure	A database containing details of all works in <i>Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent</i> and artists.	Contains comprehensive details of works and artists from "Africa Remix," organized in a non-linear, accessible manner.	Reflects the curatorial insights of "Africa Remix," emphasizing postcolonial narratives and subverting traditional art categorizations.
Context	Simple and basic UI (user interface); easy navigation.	Facilitates easy navigation with a simple UI, emphasizing the database's role as an interactive, learning environment.	Asserts artists' agency and representation, challenging Western-centric art narratives through digital curation.
Experience	The user can interact at their own pace; however, they can only see re-presentations/photographs of the original exhibition.	Offers an interactive platform for users to explore at their own pace, emphasizing re-presentations and enabling diverse interpretative pathways.	Encourages engagement with artworks as dynamic entities, fostering a convergence of subjectivities and interpretations across time.

Table D: Four-Dimensional Perspective on Space and Place of the Archive & Exhibition (adapted from Zhang & Jacob, 2012, p. 94).

Merging Archives and Exhibitions: Affordances and Challenges

The digital convergence of archive and exhibition within this database affords a democratization of art access and interpretation, breaking free from the constraints of physical space and traditional curatorial practices. This approach allows for each piece to be explored in its cultural and historical context, where artists retain a voice in how their work is represented.

However, this merging also presents challenges. The absence of a physical space alters the traditional experience of art, relying on digital representations that might not fully capture the texture, scale, and presence of the original works. The open-ended nature of digital curation requires careful consideration to avoid overwhelming users with information while still providing meaningful context and connections between artworks.

By embracing the digital space as both an archive and exhibition, this project aims to redefine the experience of art in the digital age, offering new ways for audiences to interact with, interpret, and appreciate contemporary African art beyond conventional boundaries.

The Limitations of Digital Space

Before proceeding, I must examine the limitations and obvious impossibilities that arise when asserting that an exhibition moves into the digital realm.

With the transition to digital space, the way a spectator approaches an exhibition suffers greatly as a result of the way digital media is consumed. We cannot ignore that social media is a form of digital media, and its nature, to be compelling in its false presentation of "complete knowledge," is hard to overcome. Spectators must overcome assumptions and perceptions that they may not even realize are inaccurate (Amorim & Teixeira, 2020, p. 7). On social media, content is curated algorithmically with the "biases, prejudices and ethnocentric judgements of those who produce them in the first place" (Amorim & Teixeira, 2020, p. 7; Sardar, 2020, p. 9). This is not unlike what the exhibition and archive as institutions do.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, artistic and cultural activities were severely impacted, including but not limited to the closure of museums, cinemas, concert venues, and performance spaces (Amorim & Teixeira, 2020, p. 2). This prompted a migration of art forms to a digital space – a feat seemingly seamless for mediums such as cinema and music but significantly complicated for contemporary art and exhibition. This results from the fact that digital reproduction is not on par with nor can it accurately replicate the experience of live events or screenings and in fact "raises several questions about the economic sustainability of artists and industry" (Amorim & Teixeira, 2020, p. 2). While many institutions may have initially intended for the transition to be temporary, the scale and duration of the pandemic led to a dramatic increase in online exhibitions, evolving to include input from Digital Artists (Amorim & Teixeira, 2020, p. 2). This means that instead of online exhibitions merely allowing viewers to access images or videos of physical artworks, artworks and exhibitions were made with the intention of being viewed online. This impacts every aspect of the exhibition, from the content or artworks displayed to the UI with which spectators engage with the exhibition.

While means of replicating such artworks through virtual or augmented reality programs exist, the costs are unfeasible (Amorim & Teixeira, 2020, p. 2). Digitization comes with a based fear of losing not only visitors or viewers but also "the attachment to Auratic and presential experiences of art" (Amorim & Teixeira, 2020, p. 2). It is vital to examine the way

an artwork's Aura is altered when it is reproduced digitally. Certain forms of artistic presentation require physical interaction with an audience, namely painting, sculpting, etc., but Digital Art, Cinema, and Music can be experienced online with no alteration to their Aura or impact. However, it is easy for the lines to become blurred, such as if painters and sculptors presented original work using digital tools or software (Amorim & Teixeira, 2020, p. 7).

Reproducing an Artwork

Walter Benjamin's stance is that authenticity works its way to the forefront of the meaning of an artwork as it is the "essence of all that is transmissible"; all meaning that it contains. When an art-object is reproduced technologically, these elements may not impact the work itself, but "the quality of its presence is always depreciated" (Benjamin & Jennings, 2010, p. 4). Essentially, "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" (Benjamin & Jennings, 2010, p. 4). It can then be said that the reproductive process destroys the value and uniqueness of an art-object by making copies. All of this is in the context of technological reproduction. Digital reproduction takes it a step further as there is no finite number of "copies," forever altering the authenticity of the art-object.

The concept of authenticity and the Aura, as it pertains to art objects originating from non-Western regions and placed within imperial institutions, is pivotal to understanding their transformation in digital spaces. In such traditional contexts, the inherent purpose of these art objects is often sidelined, making their original functions seem irrelevant. However, as these institutional constraints dissolve, enabling global, location-independent access to these art objects, there emerges a potential for crafting new narratives. The inherent adaptability and flexibility of digital media serve as a catalyst in this transformation, with computing technology playing a pivotal role in the dynamic interaction with art. Unlike static representations, digital platforms facilitate the creation, manipulation, and processing of symbols, allowing for a rich recontextualization of discourse through a wide array of tools including image processing, visualization, simulation, and networked communication (Malina, 1990, p. 33). This shift not only challenges our preconceived notions of representation but also opens up avenues for a deeper engagement with art, transcending traditional barriers and fostering new interpretations and meanings.

The transition from analog to digital does not diminish the significance of originality but rather transforms it, necessitating a reevaluation of how we perceive and engage with art. As we move forward, the challenge lies in balancing the appreciation for traditional notions of originality with the opportunities and challenges presented by digital reproduction, ensuring that art remains a vibrant and evolving form of human expression (Avital & Dolandka, 2023, p. 99).

In the digital age, where reproductions and simulations become increasingly indistinguishable from originals, it is imperative to reevaluate the criteria by which we judge and value art, and perhaps suggest a shift from focusing on historical authenticity to an appreciation of artistic intention, creativity, and the emotional resonance of an artwork. This transition highlights the enduring relevance of Benjamin's reflections on Aura and reproduction, inviting continued dialogue on the meaning and significance of originality in a digitally saturated world (Avital & Dolandka, 2023, p. 97).

African art, with its rich historical context and cultural significance, often faces challenges when presented within Western frameworks that may prioritize historical authenticity over the intrinsic values of the art itself. The digital age, by blurring the lines between originals and reproductions, necessitates a reassessment of how we value African art. It suggests moving away from a sole emphasis on the historical and geographic origins of these artworks towards a broader appreciation of the artists' intentions, creative processes, and the emotional impact their works can have on audiences globally. This reevaluation aligns with Walter Benjamin's musings on the Aura of artworks in the face of reproduction technologies, highlighting that the essence of art transcends its physical uniqueness. For African art, this means that digital reproductions and simulations offer an opportunity to reach wider audiences and foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the art beyond its original context. The digital representation of African artworks can be seen not as diminishing their value but as amplifying their voices and stories, allowing for new narratives and interpretations to emerge that resonate with diverse audiences around the world.

This approach encourages a dialogue that is not confined by traditional boundaries but is open to exploring the multifaceted dimensions of African art. It acknowledges the potential of digital platforms to democratize access to art and to highlight the creative ingenuity, artistic intention, and emotional power of African artworks. This perspective shifts focus from

verifying the historical authenticity of an object to engaging with the rich tapestry of meanings, experiences, and expressions that African art embodies.

Chapter 4 – Case Study: Navigating *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*

Simon Njami's *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* was an art exhibition that featured individual artists who expressed their identities within the constantly changing entity of Africa. Before diving into the exhibition itself, I must unpack the role of the curator. Curating is a complex and multifaceted activity that involves the exhibition of art and the production of knowledge (Johnston, 2014, p. 24). Megan Johnston's work on curating explores the dynamic relationship between curators, artists, and audiences in the production of knowledge. Johnston suggests that curators can be seen as knowledge producers, as they work to facilitate a deeper understanding of the artworks they exhibit. She also introduces the concept of "socially engaged curatorial practice," which emphasizes the importance of process and audience engagement in the production, distribution, and consumption of art through various platforms. This approach to curating places a strong emphasis on the curator's role in mediating the understanding of an exhibited artwork, and on the use of innovative methods and approaches to facilitate this process. Socially engaged curating also seeks to "activate the space between object and audience," (Johnston, 2014, p. 24) creating a renewed semiotics and a new "language" through the shared experience of viewing an artwork (Johnston, 2014, p. 23 - 24). This can be seen as a way of contesting and challenging the symbolic forms that shape our understanding of art and culture (Lister, 1995, p. 93).

Njami believes that art is a means of communication, and that the most effective works are those that speak to the viewer. In discussing post-colonialism, Njami argues that the contemporary African art scene has evolved so much in recent decades that it is important to avoid confusion when approaching it. Instead of trying to classify African creativity into distinct categories, the exhibition focuses on the individual artists and their productions. Njami believes that it is through the works themselves that we can gain a deeper understanding of contemporary African art and engage in renewed reflection.

Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent

Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent (2004) comprises work from eighty-seven artists based in Africa and the diaspora (Kapferer, 2005; Njami, 2007) and is split into three categories: *Identity & History*, *Body & Soul*, and *City & Land*. In the exploration of such themes, the exhibition contrasts the experiences of urban and rural life; tradition and modernity; the relation of the individual to the community; and religion and sexuality. Curated by Simon Njami, the exhibition first debuted in 2004 in Dusseldorf, Germany, before travelling to Paris, Tokyo and Stockholm. In 2007, *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* came to South Africa's Johannesburg Art Gallery from June to September (Kellner & Njami, 2007).

The questions that have been raised in recent years about so-called "African creativity" are no longer relevant to understanding the processes employed by contemporary African artists (Njami, 2007, pp. 13-20). African creativity in the latter half of the 20th century has undergone so many changes that it is important to avoid confusion when examining the current phenomenon. The exhibition's three parts each examine the forces at work in contemporary African art. These categories are not meant to classify the art, but rather to provide a theoretical framework for understanding it. It is important to note that *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* is primarily a contemporary art exhibition, and it highlights the individual artists rather than attempting to address the existence of a homogenous collective African creativity. The answers to questions about African creativity can be found in the works themselves, rather than in debates that may not necessarily be relevant to the artists.

Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent, in its content and history, exemplifies the complexities of African identity and culture. John Picton's essay "Made in Africa", which is included in the exhibition's catalogue, discusses the challenges and opportunities involved in promoting and supporting contemporary African art and design. Picton argues that African art and design have traditionally been undervalued and overlooked in the global art market, and that this is due in part to stereotypes and misconceptions about African culture and identity (Picton, 2005, p. 10).

According to Clive Kellner, being African is not about race, geography, or biology. Instead, it is a state of mind that is defined by a connection to the land, a respect for tradition, and a

sense of community (Kellner & Njami, 2007, p. 7). It is not a static concept, but one that is constantly evolving, as Africa is a continent that is full of contradictions and complexities, and as such, African identity means embracing these contradictions and finding unity in diversity.

However, African identity exists amid stereotypes and misconceptions (Picton, 2005, p. 12). This comes as a result of the historical construction of African identity having been shaped by colonialism and that it has often been exclusionary, homogenizing, and essentializing (Mbembe, 2013, p. 242). As such, individuals within Africa and the Diaspora are constantly negotiating their multiple identities and finding new ways of relating to each other across the lines of race, class, location, and culture (Kellner & Njami, 2007, p. 47). As a result, Western viewers tend to see African art as primitive or exotic, rather than as a sophisticated and complex artistic tradition. This view is based on a lack of understanding and exposure to African art, as well as colonialism, racism, and cultural difference (Picton, 2005, p. 12)

The discourse surrounding African art, particularly in relation to technology, innovation, and authenticity, is profoundly shaped by historical legacies and contemporary realities. The historical image of Africa, painted with broad strokes of primitivism and technological backwardness, is a remnant of 19th-century colonialist ideologies. These ideologies positioned African societies as fundamentally uncivilised and incapable of intellectual or technological advancement, a view that has persisted, albeit subtly, in certain Western artistic and academic circles (Kellner & Njami, 2007, p. 24).

This perception is challenged by contemporary African artists who engage with technology, video, new media, and installations, demonstrating that being African is not synonymous with a lack of sophistication or innovation. The attempt to pigeonhole African art within the confines of traditional, ritualistic, or ethnographic domains overlooks the dynamic and evolving nature of African cultural production..

Jean-Hubert Martin's essay "The Reception of African Art" (1992) discusses the historical and cultural context in which African art has been received and exhibited in the West. Martin suggests that this view of African art as primitive or exotic has persisted in Western art institutions and museums, even as attitudes towards African culture have begun to shift in the postcolonial era. He notes that African art has often been presented as a curiosity or ethnographic object, rather than as a work of art in its own right (Martin, 1992, p. 15).

This then appears confusing, as despite comprising African artworks, this exhibition debuted in the West and predominantly travelled around Europe. Curator, Simon Njami, has also claimed that *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* serves as an 'ethnographic exhibition' (Njami, 2007, pp. 13-21). On one hand, this enables the exhibition to be a major catalyst for agency and representation of art that, historically, has been defined and written by Western curators and historians. On the other, it leaves doubt as to the extent to which Postcolonial narratives may be added to modern discourse when Western scholars continue to speak on Africa's behalf. The exhibition's arrival at the Johannesburg Art Gallery marked a pivotal moment, facilitating access for an audience outside the Western mainstream to engage directly with its content. This shift in venue underscores the exhibition's exploration of 'African' identity as a multifaceted concept that transcends geographical boundaries, embracing the diasporic realities of the artists, curator, and artworks themselves. Simon Njami, alongside scholars like Kellner, challenges us to consider not just the physical location but the diverse narratives and histories that shape the African experience. The exhibition operates not only as a showcase of art but as a critical commentary on and a nuanced critique of the institutions and global order governing the art world. By doing so, it invites a reevaluation of how African art is categorized, understood, and valued on the international stage, highlighting the intricate interplay between place, identity, and diaspora in shaping artistic expression and reception.

Some of David Elliot's essay "Africa, Exhibitions and Fears of the Dark: Reflections on the Venice Biennale" is included in the *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* catalogue, and explores the ways in which contemporary African art is presented and received within the context of global art exhibitions. He notes that Africa has historically been marginalized within the global art world, and that this marginalization has been perpetuated by the limited opportunities for African artists and curators to participate in major international exhibitions. Elliot states that "Africa is a dark continent in more ways than one. Historically, it has been overlooked and marginalized by the art world, and its artistic traditions have been given only limited recognition and respect" (Elliot & Njami, 2007, p. 31).

So this "ethnographic exhibition" of which Njami speaks is, perhaps, a manner of overcoming one of the key challenges in presenting African art to a global audience; subverting stereotypes and preconceptions about African culture and identity. Using the

specific language employed by the West, who saw African art as exotic or primitive, Njami invites them to *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* so that he can challenge the superficial and reductive understanding of African culture (Elliot & Njami, 2007, p. 32). Elliot suggests that one way to address these issues is to foreground the diversity and complexity of African culture, and to highlight the ways in which contemporary African artists are engaging with global artistic traditions and discourses. He believes that providing a platform for artists to showcase their work will enable them to challenge preconceptions about African art and culture.

The reason that *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* only came to South Africa – specifically the JAG – was twofold: cost and capacity (Njami, 2007). The Johannesburg Art Gallery was, at that time, the only institution large enough to hold an exhibition of this size, and the cost of having all the artworks shipped to South Africa from Europe was monumental. This speaks to access – to space, to knowledge, to discourse.

The exhibition has since been made available online and is accessible through [Google Arts & Culture](#) as well as [Universes in Universe](#). While doing so enables a broader audience to access the content, it is imperative to acknowledge the limitations that come along with this. Practically, the physical space is no longer applicable as the artworks have been digitized.

It is essential that I acknowledge the implication of my interaction with *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* being solely digital. There is undoubtedly a dislocation from myself and the art-objects; I cannot speak of the exhibition in the same discourse that I would have had I witnessed it myself. I have included all the information that I do know, which has been provided to me by [Universes in Universe](#), in the database - which I discuss next. This includes the way the building was laid out, the themes that categorized the artworks, the artists involved, and consequently, the demographics as to who participated and in what categories. I tabulated where the exhibition's featured artists originated from and currently reside. I assess how the spatial layout impacted the artworks, closely considering the impact of its moving to a digital space.

The consequences of experiencing the exhibition virtually rather than physically are numerous. Perhaps one of the most tragic are those relating to the installations. While videos, images and sounds may be experienced digitally, there are a number of installations whose full impact fails to reach me via the internet. Yet my core question, despite this, remains

intact: if we are looking at the production of knowledge, is digital media a neutral space that enables the interaction of multiple subjectivities in and around a postcolonial paradigm?

Curatorial Analysis

Sections

City and Land

The "City and Land" section of the exhibition delves into the tangible experiences of urban and rural African landscapes. It encourages visitors to immerse themselves in the sensory aspects of African cities and lands, fostering a direct and intimate understanding of these environments. This segment likely highlights themes of environmental contrast, urban-rural differences, and their relation to contemporary African art (Njami, 2007, pp. 164-165).

Key insights from this section include:

- **Contradiction and Complementarity:** The exhibition portrays city and land as interdependent, highlighting the land as a symbol of roots and tradition, while the city represents modernity and functionality.
- **Colonial Impact and Transformation:** It explores the colonial influence on African cities, leading to social and economic divisions, and reflects the cities' transformation as a mirror of broader political and cultural changes.
- **Urbanization and Migration:** The dynamic nature of African cities is showcased, focusing on migration and the mixture of cultures and ethnicities it brings, along with feelings of uprootedness and nostalgia.
- **Artistic Perspectives:** Artistic expressions inspired by urban and rural landscapes are presented, contrasting the exuberant, articulate city-based artists with those connected to the land, who often work more introspectively.
- **Unity and Identity:** Both city and land are shown as crucial in fostering political and moral unity, with the land representing homeland and the city as a unifier of the nation's diverse parts.
- **Magic and Melancholy:** The exhibition captures the mystical and emotional aspects of both city and land, portraying the city as a place of adventure yet tinged with longing, and the land as evoking nostalgia and connection.

The "City and Land" segment of the exhibition interrogates and deconstructs the prevailing binary oppositions of "civil" versus "primitive," which have often been imposed upon African contexts. This critique is reminiscent of Edward Said's seminal analysis of Western depictions of the "East" in *Orientalism* (Said, 1995), where he argues that such representations are not neutral or objective but are imbued with power dynamics that serve to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the Orient. This section echoes Stuart Hall's influential work on identity and representation (Hall, 1997), particularly his insights into how cultural identities are not fixed but are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power. By concentrating on the unmediated realities of African landscapes, the exhibition endeavors to offer a representation that is authentic and resonates with the lived experiences of Africans, challenging reductive Western narratives and encouraging a re-evaluation of how African spaces are depicted and understood. In doing so, it navigates away from simplistic categorizations and aligns with broader postcolonial critiques of representation and identity.

History and Identity

The "History and Identity" section of the exhibition probes deeply into the concept of identity within the diverse cultures of Africa. It scrutinizes historical imbalances in the representation of African artists and how they were depicted in the past. Central to this exhibition part are themes of identity, tradition, and modernity (Njami, 2007, p. 62-63)

This section explores the evolving notions of individuality, community, and nationhood within the African continent and how artists have engaged with these themes:

- **Identity as a Dual Concept:** The exhibition suggests that identity is not solely a personal attribute but also a communal or national characteristic. It acknowledges the complexities in defining identity, linking it to historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts.
- **Construction of Modern African Nations:** It discusses the formation of African nations post-colonization, reflecting the tumultuous 20th-century history. The narrative highlights the adoption of pan-African nationalism as both a refuge and a form of collective identification.

- **Post-Colonial Shift:** The text explores the transition from pan-African unity to localized or individual identity quests, shifting the focus from a collective to a nuanced existential consideration of the African individual in a global context.
- **Art as a Reflection of Identity and History:** The evolution of African art and various art festivals are depicted as reflections of the continent's identity and historical journey. The transition from a collective identity era to the age of globalization is marked by artists' crucial role in defining post-colonial Africa.
- **Challenges and Contradictions:** The text delves into the inherent difficulties in defining African identity amid a rapidly changing world, considering the artists' marginal status, the end of cultural isolationism, and the challenge of defining an aesthetic code within a global framework.
- **Memory, Existence, and Personal Destiny:** Linking identity and history to memory, the section underscores the need for Africans to forge a new destiny aligned with their evolution. It also explores the personal journeys of individual artists who confront their memories and dissect elements contributing to their existence.
- **The Role of the African Artist:** Artists are depicted as foreigners, ironic observers, ethnologists, and memorialists, who navigate the challenges of a fragmented personality and engage with the unconscious, playing with clichés and constructing personal identities.
- **Conclusion:** The section concludes with a metaphor of the perpetual multi-faced Janus, illustrating the fragility and complexity of identity as depicted by African artists.

This exposition vividly portrays the intricacies of African identity and history, emphasizing their continuous evolution and multifaceted nature. The role of the artist as an interpreter, chronicler, and challenger of these themes underscores the deep connection between art and life in the African context.

The section delves into the abstract realms of power, tradition, and identity, highlighting how history and social structures shape our understanding of space. The artworks prompt visitors to explore how notions of authority and identity are constructed, offering an opportunity to reflect on the societal roots of their personal experiences (Njami, 2007, p. 62-63).

Body and Soul

The "Body and Soul" segment of the exhibition explores the intricate connection between the physical and the spiritual, delving into the interplay of human forms and spiritual aspects. This exploration is conveyed through diverse artistic mediums, such as painting, sculpture, video, and photography.

This section places a significant emphasis on personal experience, spirituality, and emotion, offering a deeply human perspective on the concept of space. It underscores the ongoing evolution and negotiation of personal and collective meanings, fostering a strong resonance with visitors as they recognize their continuous involvement in shaping and redefining the spaces they inhabit (Njami, 2007, p. 114-115).

Central themes of the "Body and Soul" section include (Njami, 2007, p. 114-115):

- **Inseparability of Body and Soul:** The exhibition posits that the body and soul are intrinsically connected, with the body serving as an instrument for the soul. This perspective challenges the traditional religious dichotomy and presents a more secular understanding of the soul as a force imparting nobility to an individual.
- **Representation of the African Body:** It confronts and dismisses racial stereotypes, highlighting the complexity and multiplicity of the African body. The representation of the African body is shown to be diverse, encompassing multiple ethnicities, and is considered African when it is identified as such.
- **Artistic Expression and Communication:** The body is portrayed as a medium for artistic expression, serving as a tool for materializing ideas and engaging with observers. The depiction of the body becomes a complex process through which artists communicate their perspectives and thoughts.
- **Perception and Self-Image:** This theme addresses the conflict between self-perception and external perception of the body. It involves understanding the soul and navigating a complex negotiation of one's place in the world.
- **Spirituality and Transcendence:** The exhibition explores the role of the body in African religious traditions, where it can act as an intermediary or a mediumistic instrument with a direct link to the sacred. It references various religious practices, such as Vodun, Sufism, and the Gnawa of southern Morocco, that maintain a magical dimension and a direct connection to the divine.

- Artists as Instruments: Artists are depicted not merely as creators but as conduits for a higher power, emphasizing a profound spiritual relationship within artistic creation.
- Fusion of Carnal and Spiritual: The section concludes with the concept of merging the physical and spiritual realms. This fusion blurs traditional boundaries and initiates a process of transubstantiation, where the immanent and transcendent meld into one.

This part of the exhibition delves into the complex relationships between body, soul, artistic expression, self-perception, and spirituality. It presents a multifaceted view of the body, not only as a physical entity but also as an expressive and spiritual instrument, and examines how cultural norms, traditions, and power dynamics shape individual and collective identities, particularly within the African context (Njami, 2007, p. 114).

Artworks Analysis

It is evident that the exhibition's thematic concerns are numerous, but at its core, *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*'s fixation seems to be expressing a Postcolonial cultural identity while subverting the Western canonical framework. The exhibition presents a compelling paradox: while it showcases artworks that challenge and diverge from Western artistic norms, its curator, Simon Njami, was born and raised in Europe. This duality prompts a deeper exploration of African identity as articulated by Njami and scholars like Kellner, which extends beyond mere geographic location to encompass the diasporic experiences shaping the artists, the curator, and perhaps the exhibition itself. It raises pertinent questions about how the exhibition navigates and critiques the frameworks of the art world and global order. How does the exhibition reconcile its critique of Western conventions with its European-curated origins? And how does it engage with the diasporic dimensions of African identity, challenging and redefining the institutional and global narratives surrounding African art? To attempt to answer some of these questions, I would like to dissect a number of artworks featured in the exhibition.

Artworks featured in the exhibition transcend traditional Western conventions of African art, presenting multifaceted view of the continent's creative output. Hicham Benohoud's *Salle de Classe* series, for instance, subverts conventional educational narratives, engaging viewers in a performative exploration of space, identity, and power dynamics. This series transcends traditional classroom settings to engage in a performative exploration of space, identity, and the dynamics of power and resistance within educational institutions. Through the surreal juxtaposition of students engaged in ordinary activities while simultaneously being

transformed into symbolic figures, Benohoud invites viewers to reconsider the roles of education, authority, and the formation of individual and collective identities. This series reflects on the broader themes of *Africa Remix* by challenging viewers to question and reevaluate preconceived notions of African societies as static or monolithic.

William Kentridge's *Drawings for Projection* directly engages with the historical and socio-political landscape of South Africa, particularly the legacy of apartheid. Through his innovative animation technique, Kentridge offers a narrative that captures the complexities of memory, history, and the human condition. This work exemplifies the exhibition's emphasis on contemporaneity and diverse methodologies, showcasing how African artists address both personal and communal experiences within a global context. *Africa Remix* challenges institutional and global narratives by presenting African art not as a monolithic category but as a vibrant and diverse field of artistic expression. The inclusion of artists from various African countries and the diaspora underscores the exhibition's commitment to showcasing the multiplicity of African experiences and perspectives.

Abdoulaye Konaté's *L'Initiation* is a striking textile installation that exemplifies Konaté's distinctive approach, where he employs cotton, dyes, and other materials to craft large tapestries that convey his artistic vision (Marclenot, 2015). By employing textiles to tackle global issues, Konaté bridges the gap between Mali's rich cultural heritage and contemporary global discourses. This approach not only challenges Western homogenization of African art but also asserts the relevance and innovation of African artistry within the contemporary art world.

Hassan Musa achieves something similar in *Great American Nude*, which critically engages with Western art history and global politics through the figure of Osama Bin Laden (Hassan Musa, n.d.). By



L'Initiation, 2004, Abdoulaye Konaté, Installation, 7 parts. From *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, Kunst Palast.



Great American Nude, 2002, Hassan Musa, Ink on textile. From Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent, Kunst Palast.

reinterpreting iconic Western artworks with contemporary figures, Musa challenges viewers to reconsider the relationships between art, myth, and power. His incorporation of Bin Laden as an emblem of American influence critiques the creation and demonization of 'the other,' highlighting the complexities of identity, representation, and cultural exchange (Ehrmann, n.d.).

Musa's work questions the impact of global narratives on African identities and artistic practices.

Myriam Mihindou's *Folle* and Samuel Fosso's *Tati* series stand as narratives that use the human body as a canvas for exploring identity, memory, and the post-colonial condition. These pieces transcend conventional portrayals, offering a dynamic tableau of contemporary African self-representation that challenges and redefines static notions of African identity. Myriam Mihindou's performance piece *Folle*



Folle (Mad Woman), 2000, Myriam Mihindou, Video installation. From Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent, Kunst Palast.

delves into the connections between body, memory, identity, and territory, embodying spaces and depicting states of transition. By incorporating therapeutic materials and engaging in a reciprocal choreography of performance, language, and sculpture, Mihindou creates a 'sacred pharmacy' that infuses society with positivity and evokes a sense of awakening (Aware Women Artists, n.d.). Her work confronts the experiences of cleansing spaces, intertwining aesthetics with rituals, and challenges viewers to explore the relationships between the body, cultures, and nature. *Folle* reflects Mihindou's interrogation of limits, showcasing the harmonization of opposing energies and the potential realization of knowledge through art (Le Cube - Art, n.d.).



Le Marin, Tati: Self Portraits, 1997, Samuel Fosso, C-Prints. From Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent, Kunst Palast.

In Samuel Fosso's *Tati* series, Fosso takes on fictional personas. This challenges conventional notions of African identity, offering a visual commentary on the complexities of post-colonialism and the influence of globalization (Tate, 2021). Each photograph in the series serves as a tableau that captures the essence of a specific character, blurring the lines between self and other, native and foreign, tradition and modernity. Fosso's work is situated within the broader context of performative photography and self-portraiture, drawing on a lineage of artists who have used their bodies for social and political commentary.

Wim Botha's *commune: onomatopoeia* interrogates Afrikaner identity and cultural icons through a series of intricate installations. Botha's work blends historical and contemporary symbols to challenge traditional narratives and provoke reflection on identity, memory, and transformation (O'Toole, 2003). His trilogy, including *commune: suspension of disbelief* and *commune: fusion/fission/dissipation*, offers a critical examination of Afrikanerdom, contributing to the exhibition's dialogue on the diversity of African experiences and perspectives.



Commune: Onomatopoeia, 2003, Wim Botha, Installation, mixed media. From Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent, Kunst Palast.

The exhibition profoundly engages with the diasporic dimensions of African identity by showcasing artworks that address themes of cultural hybridity, colonial legacies, and post-colonial realities. Zoulikha Bouabdellah's video installation *We Dance* is a powerful exploration of cultural hybridity, challenging French-Algerian stereotypes through a provocative fusion of iconography and sound. By draping the French national colours around her hips in a belly dance, Bouabdellah not only subverts traditional symbols of national identity but also critically engages with the complex legacies of colonial history and post-colonial realities (Zoulikha Bouabdellah, 2016). This artwork humorously yet incisively



Dansons (We Dance), 2003, Zoulikha Bouabdellah, Video installation. From *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, Kunst Palast.

addresses themes of exoticism, racism, and the impacts of globalization, embodying the exhibition's commitment to exploring contemporary African identities in a global context.

Critiques of Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent

A 2019 article written by Julia Friedel and published by *Contemporary And* opens up new avenues for reflection and critical analysis. Below, I have elaborated on some of the key points and their relevance.

Curatorial 'Straitjacket'

Critics of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* focused on the exhibition's curatorial limitations, likening its concept to that of a commercial gallery or art fair. The categorization of the works was seen as too narrow, random, and insufficient in challenging stereotypes about Africa that the curator intended to counteract (Friedel, 2019).

Generalizing Language

The language used in the catalogue, especially Njami's discussion of "African production," was criticized for reinforcing the exhibition's conceptual weaknesses. Critics perceived a tension between the celebration of diversity and the generalized and homogenizing language.

Ambiguous Title

The title "remix" promised a fresh perspective and a progressive, hybrid approach that critics found lacking in the exhibition. This term suggested an innovative conjunction of elements, but critics found the curatorial narrative to fall short of this promise.

Chaotic PresenTation

The Johannesburg Art Gallery's presentation of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* was criticized for its abundance of exhibits, leading to an overwhelming and

chaotic impression akin to a market. Rory Bester's commentary on infrastructure highlights the need for proper support in promoting exhibitions like *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* on the continent.

Relevance and Impact

Despite these critiques, the exhibition's presence on the continent represented a significant achievement. Colin Richards recognized the importance of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* as both a window and mirror on the African experience, reflecting both internal and external perspectives.

Mixed Reception

The exhibition provoked heated debates and elicited both positive and negative reviews. It contributed to the discourse and allowed for pluralistic engagement, as evidenced by different websites and catalogues for various venues.

Need for Redefinition

Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent illuminated the urgent need to redefine exhibition roles, shifting the focus from bringing European-conceived exhibitions to Africa, towards presenting shows designed in Africa to Europe.

The critique of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* provides valuable insights into the challenges of curating and representing African art. It underscores the tensions between generalization and specificity, the expectations set by innovative concepts, and the complex dynamics of presentation. It highlights the broader implications for the future of exhibition-making and the critical role that exhibitions like *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* can play in reshaping how African art is perceived, understood, and engaged with, both on the continent and beyond.

This reflection and critique offers guidance and caution for my ongoing project, particularly in considering curatorial decisions and thematic groupings, and ensuring that the exhibition serves as both a meaningful representation and a catalyst for dialogue and redefinition.

Digital Representation Analysis

The main resources I been relying on are the Universes in Universe and Google Arts and Culture websites. Interestingly, Google Arts and Culture sources its information from the

Hayward Gallery, which I initially believed holds a significant portion of the exhibition's artifacts.

The online representations of exhibitions on these two platforms underline the importance of presentation and curation in digital spaces. They suggest that the method of displaying artworks online can significantly affect the audience's engagement and understanding, just as it does in physical gallery spaces. Digital mediums can either enhance or limit our experience and understanding of art exhibitions.

Universes in Universes

The digital platform Universes in Universe presents a comprehensive catalog of artists and outlines the exhibition's spatial arrangement. However, its capacity for visual engagement is limited; it doesn't fully recreate the exhibition's immersive experience through its images and spatial descriptions. While it methodically details the exhibition artist-by-artist, I observed that some artists are notably absent. Despite these omissions, it offers significant insights into the breadth of the exhibition.

Universes in Universe delineates the three thematic zones of the original exhibition in relation to its physical layout:

- History & Identity: Positioned on the ground and first floor left.
- City & Land: Situated on the first floor right, featuring a purpose-built platform.
- Body & Soul: Located on the second floor left.

It includes related links to the Kunst Palast museum and the 2004 Düsseldorf opening, alongside a photo report capturing the Düsseldorf presentation, with images of 73 artists' works, exhibition hall views, and portraits of 26 artists. Navigation options include following arrows to thematic areas or accessing a complete list of artists.

Online Iteration Limitations

Limited Visual Portrayal: The site offers textual descriptions of thematic areas but lacks in-depth visual representation of the artworks, impeding a comprehensive understanding of their visual and aesthetic dimensions.

Absence of Interactivity: The site's format, although including links to thematic areas and artists, lacks interactive elements that would allow users an immersive engagement with the artworks.

Insufficient Contextual Details: Critical contextual information about the artworks, artists, and curatorial perspectives is missing, limiting the viewer's comprehension of the exhibition's significance and themes.

What Remains

Accessibility: The online format extends the exhibition's reach to a broader audience.

Documentation: It serves as an archival record, detailing the exhibition's themes, layout, and associated events.

Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent on Universes in Universe provides a textual survey of the exhibition's themes and framework. Yet, it lacks the depth and interaction necessary for a fully engaging visual experience. The absence of detailed visual representations and contextual details diminishes the viewer's capacity to thoroughly engage with and appreciate the exhibition. While the online format enhances accessibility, it does not capture the richness and complexity experienced in a physical visit.

Comparatively, the online iteration is akin to an exhibition guide as per Table C, albeit somewhat lackluster. It enumerates all artists and illustrates the exhibition setup through labels, with photographs that fall short in reconstructing the actual ambience. In contrast, Google Arts and Culture provide a superior representation, with larger images and varied angles, though fewer in number. Their approach to showcasing artworks and grouping artists offers an insightful perspective into the exhibited works.

Google Arts & Culture

The Google Arts and Culture platform appears to provide an engaging and immersive exploration of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. This platform showcases larger images and diverse angles of artworks, paired with an intuitive arrangement of artists and their works, offering a comprehensive and interactive experience. Such a presentation

style likely influences the viewer's perception and interaction with the artworks, furnishing a contextual and potentially memorable encounter.

In the realm of space and place, these digital resources represent a curated collection of items, with Google Arts and Culture providing an especially immersive representation. The platform not only showcases images but enhances the experience with additional elements like video content, resonating with my thesis's emphasis on digitally recontextualizing physical exhibitions.

The content of the exhibition was varied and comprehensive, including a 2005 exhibition poster, views of the installation, a guide to the exhibition, an invitation card for the private view, a list of the featured works, and media credits. The exhibition linked to related themes, such as "Hayward Gallery at 50: Uncovering the Archive."

The layout and structure of the online iteration were thoughtfully designed. The layout comprised a header with various navigation options, a main content area that blended text and images, and a footer offering translation options and links to Google apps. Despite these features, the online version faced several limitations. The absence of a physical experience meant that the digital format could not replicate the tangible experience of viewing artworks in person, resulting in a loss of texture, scale, and spatial dynamics. The representation of individual artworks was restricted, limiting the appreciation of their intricacy and nuances. The format also suffered from limited interactivity, lacking features that would allow for immersive engagement with the artworks. There was potential loss of context, as the digital version might not fully convey the exhibition's contextual elements, such as spatial arrangement, lighting, and ambiance, which are integral to the experience.

Despite these limitations, the digital format had its advantages. It significantly extended the exhibition's reach, making it accessible to a broader audience, including those who could not visit in person. The platform also served as a valuable archival resource, preserving images, guides, and other exhibition-related materials. This ensured that the essence and memory of the exhibition were maintained for future reference and exploration.

Closing notes on the Digital Representations

The interplay between these two digital platforms illustrates how an exhibition can extend beyond its physical space into the digital realm, where it can reach a broader audience and create new narratives.

I have encountered various independent art websites that offer fragmentary insights into the *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* exhibition. These websites augment my research by presenting diverse interpretations and online displays of the exhibition's artworks.

Mori Art Museum

This Japanese website features a succinct overview of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* and categorizes the artists by the exhibition's sections. Its user interface, dominated by bright yellow, green, and red colors, is visually striking but lacks user experience. The website includes small images of some artworks, but unfortunately, many links to additional content like sound or movie files lead to 404 errors. Notably, this resource proved useful for verifying the correct copyright attributions for several artworks.

Contemporary And (C&)

An article by Julia Friedel, published in January 2019, provides a critical analysis typical of a platform dedicated to contemporary African art. The piece begins, "In this series, C& revisits the most discussed, loved, hated, thought-provoking, and game-changing exhibitions featuring contemporary art from African perspectives in the past decades. We take a closer look at the exhibition *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* curated by Simon Njami." It covers the record attendance at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2007 and delves into the conceptualization and critical reception of the exhibition. The article critically examines the curatorial approach, highlighting both the exhibition's ambition to represent a diverse range of African art and the criticism it faced for its perceived conceptual shortcomings and generalizations. This source enriches the understanding of the exhibition's impact and the discourse surrounding African contemporary art.

Moderna Museet

This website provides a comprehensive overview of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* during its time in Stockholm, including an agenda of the exhibition's events. It features brief biographies of Simon Njami and Annika Gunnarsson and an interview between

Paulina Sokolow and David Elliot, offering insights into the curatorial perspectives and the broader context of African art in the global art scene.

Each of these websites contributes uniquely to the understanding of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. The Mori Art Museum offers basic information and visual snippets; Contemporary And provides an in-depth, critical perspective; and Moderna Museet gives context to the exhibition's presentation in Stockholm. Together, they provide a multifaceted view of the exhibition, enhancing the comprehension of its scope, reception, and significance in the realm of contemporary African art.

Exhibition Layout

In the layout of 'Universes in Universe' (Universes in Universe, n.d), the exhibition was organized in the following manner:

1. History & Identity (Ground floor and first floor left):

Purpose and Positioning: This segment, primarily dealing with the dynamics of power, modernity, tradition, and collective identities in Africa, was placed at the beginning of the exhibition. This strategic positioning on the ground and first floor potentially served to introduce visitors to Africa's broad historical and cultural backdrop.

Sequential Logic: Initiating the exhibition with this theme possibly intended to establish a foundational understanding of the forces that have shaped Africa, preparing visitors for the subsequent artworks.

2. City & Land (First floor right, featuring a specially constructed platform):

Purpose and Positioning: This part of the exhibition delved into the dichotomy of urban and rural existence, a pivotal element of African culture. The custom-built platform likely aimed to enhance the display of certain significant works, such as the 'cloth of gold' which stood eight meters high.

Sequential Logic: Following 'History & Identity', this section might be seen as a bridge connecting Africa's past to its present, visually narrating the continent's historical and cultural evolution through its urban and rural landscapes.

3. Body & Soul (Second floor left):

Purpose and Positioning: Here, the focus shifted to personal identity, religion, spirituality, and the human body.

Sequential Logic: Positioned on the uppermost level, this section offered an introspective experience. It invited visitors to contemplate the personal and emotional dimensions, following their exploration of collective history and urban-rural dynamics.

This thoughtful progression from a broad historical perspective to the interplay of urban-rural environments, culminating in the realm of personal experience, might represent a journey from collective to individual facets of African culture and society. It encourages deep contemplation on how history, community, and individual identity intersect in contemporary African art.

However, the exhibition's configuration in Johannesburg, its sole African venue, presented a different order (Njami, 2007):

1. Identity and History:

Positioning and Rationale: Retaining its primary position, this section aimed to establish a foundational understanding of the historical and collective identity shaping contemporary African art, especially resonating with the African audience.

2. Body and Soul:

Positioning and Rationale: This mid-exhibition placement signifies a transition from a broad historical overview to more specific themes, underscoring the embeddedness of personal and human aspects within historical and social contexts.

3. City and Land:

Positioning and Rationale: As the concluding section, it focuses on the dynamic interplay between urban and rural settings. Especially relevant in Johannesburg, this arrangement could lead visitors from an appreciation of historical and personal narratives to the tangible, contemporary realities of African society.

The variation in the exhibition's layout underscores the adaptable nature of curation, where artwork arrangement is sensitively tailored to the venue's context and audience. This alteration for the Johannesburg audience reflects a nuanced understanding of how these themes are best communicated in different cultural landscapes, highlighting the curator's skill in presenting the multifaceted themes of African art to diverse audiences.

Database

Click [here](#) to view the database.

I created this database as a means of engaging with the case study in a manner that sheds new light on the artworks and the questions surrounding authenticity, by placing the focus on the experience of the audience and the meaning they imbue the works with, rather than on prescribed interpretations and preconceptions.

Relying on the audience to come up with their own interpretations seems as though I am adding to the problem, but this is not necessarily the case. While it is true that this can lead to a range of possible meanings, it can also encourage critical thinking and engagement with the work. By allowing for a multiplicity of interpretations, the database may challenge dominant cultural narratives and provide space for diverse perspectives and voices to be heard. However, it's also important to consider the context in which the database is presented and how it may be received by different audiences. While I may not be able to control how it is interpreted, I can still take steps to provide context and encourage engagement with the work in a thoughtful and responsible way.

Database as a Digital Repository

Before proceeding, I would like to unpack the terminology used in this section a bit further. When using the term "Database", I am referring specifically to the data repository that I set up using [Notion.io](https://www.notion.io). I am not referring to databases in general.

A database is a collection of information that is organized in a way that allows it to be easily searched, updated, and analyzed. It is a structured set of data that is designed to support the storage, manipulation, and retrieval of information. Databases can be used in a wide range of contexts, including scientific research, business operations, and government administration.

According to Jeffery Ullman and Jennifer Widom, two prominent computer scientists, a database is defined as "a large, integrated collection of data, stored in a standardized format, that is accessible to multiple applications" (Ullman & Widom, 1997, p. 2). The data in a database is typically organized into tables, with each table representing a specific category of information.

I requested clarification from my work colleagues to explain a database as simply as they could. They told me that a database organizes data into tables consisting of rows and columns. Each row represents an individual entry or item, while a table groups a specific set of these items. Fields, or properties of these items, are organized into columns, each column headed by a descriptor that defines the nature of the field (Boxall & Papoutsis, pers. comm.).

Databases are used to store and structure information so that it can be easily searched, updated, and analyzed (Ullman & Widom, 1997, p. 2). It is a critical tool for managing large volumes of data and is used in a wide range of applications across various fields. Archived documents, for example, may be categorized in a database and attached to an online portal, enabling users to access its contents. As such, I must acknowledge and emphasise the distinction between the notion of an archive and this database.

Both databases and archives are used to store and organize information, but they differ in their purposes, structures, and methods of access. A database is a "systematically arranged collection of data" that is designed to be easily searchable and manipulable (Gitelman, 2013, p. 1), and an archive enacts a process of selecting and preserving an item for its historical or cultural value (Steedman, 2002, p. 13). Essentially, a database is a manner of digitally

storing/sorting information so that it is easy to navigate, while an archive is a means of documentation by collecting fragments of history to piece together a narrative.

It's important to recognize the differences between databases and archives in how they relate to institutional frameworks and temporal orientations. According to Achille Mbembe, archives are typically associated with public institutions (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19) and often have formal connections to governmental or other established entities. In contrast, databases are not inherently linked to any specific institutional framework. This distinction highlights the flexible and independent nature of databases. Databases are primarily focused on current and future information needs, serving as repositories for contemporary data that supports immediate and forward-looking activities. Archives, conversely, tend to be directed towards historical preservation, playing a crucial role in maintaining and providing access to records that document past events and cultural narratives.

Another difference is the way in which information is organized and accessed. Databases are typically organized around a particular theme or set of categories, and are designed to be searchable and navigable through various interfaces or software. Archives, on the other hand, are organized around provenance and context, and often require specialized knowledge or training to access and interpret.

The Digital Reproduction of the Artworks

It is important that I acknowledge the re-presentation of space, particularly in photography and visual mediums. The artworks in this database exist as at least one of three forms:

- Digitized photographs and pictorial works
- Photographed installations, often taken from multiple angles and locations.
- Video content



Kushinga Portraits, 2002, Guy Tillim, Colour photographs. From Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a



L'homme sans cheval, 2004, Mounir Fatmi, Installation. From Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent, Kunst



Oye Oye, 2002, Michele Magma, Video installation. From Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent, Kunst

In focusing on the digital reproduction of the artworks in the exhibition, I must acknowledge that two-dimensional pictorial works and photographs present a distinctive concept of space and intersubjectivity. This comes as a result of a photograph serving as a two-dimensional portrayal of a three-dimensional real-life occurrence, capturing a particular moment and place in two dimensions. The photograph manipulates space and time, creating a sort of accordion effect.

This does not mean that one cannot interact with a photograph of a space/installation. A photograph serves as a site for human interaction and is connected to notions of memory, status, ownership, and personality. It encapsulates the individuality of the artist and subject, asserting their uniqueness while still maintaining some recognizable likeness.

Intersubjectivity, which refers to the merging of two distinct subject positions, allows for an exploration of the fluidity of identities as opposed to a singular or coherent notion of self. According to Hall, a "subject" is conventionally understood as an individual imbued with sentience, autonomy, and agency (Hall, 1997, p. 55). I posit that the artwork, rather than any human subject, can be the central focus the photograph.

This argument has been made by art historian Rosalind Krauss, who argues that with installation art, "the work becomes the subject of its own documentation" (Krauss, 1999, p. 8). In other words, the photograph captures the artwork as the primary subject, rather than any individual or object within the installation.

Artist and writer Hito Steyerl, who has written extensively on the relationship between photography and installation art, further argues that the photograph of an installation "becomes a document of a spatial and temporal event" and that "the installation as an artwork is reconfigured through its photographic documentation" (Steyerl, 2007, p. 77). In this way, the photograph serves as a representation of the artwork itself, rather than a representation of any individual or object within the installation.

However, the objectivity of any likeness is questionable due to the subjective presence, history, and expectations of the individual viewing the photograph (Lister, 2009). This becomes even more of a concern in a gallery space, where photography may fall victim to the White Cube, leading to colonial academic interpretations, in which personal associations with the artwork are lost and a historical backdrop imposes a narrative that does not align with the work's intent. This can result in the silencing of the subaltern (Spivak, 1999).

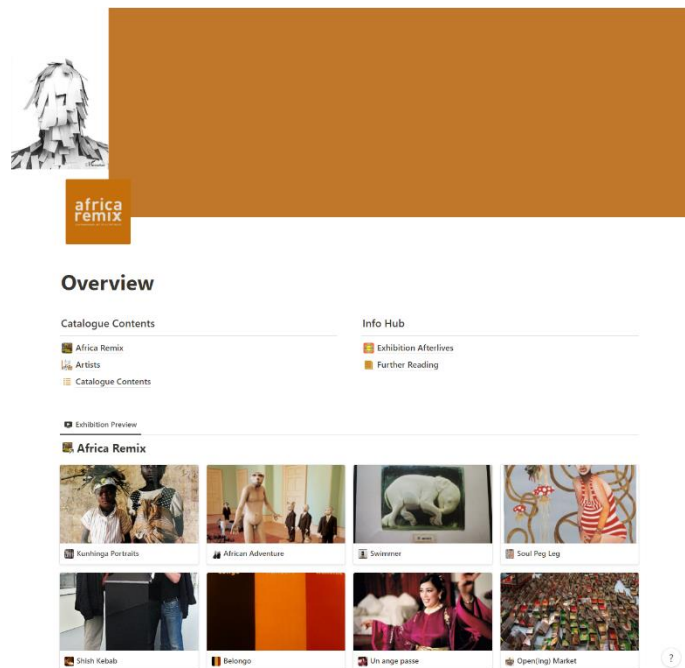
My intention with this digital repository is to facilitate people's interaction and engagement with the art. This idea aligns with Sontag's view that comprehension involves the ability to reject, and that the capacity for understanding is founded on the ability to refuse (Sontag, 1973, p. 92). It is crucial to approach photographs with a critical eye and avoid accepting them without scrutiny.

Digitization and the Democratisation of Knowledge

The database is a valuable tool for analyzing the works included in the exhibition and understanding their themes and subject matter. By breaking down the artworks into categories and compiling information about the artists, their backgrounds, and the countries they come from, the database can help to shed light on the diverse cultural perspectives and experiences represented in the exhibition.

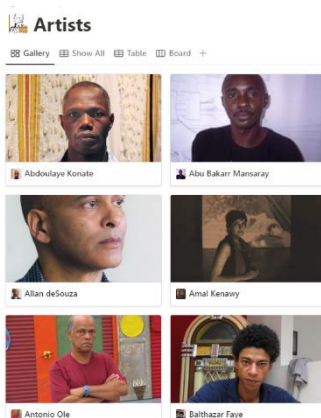
My approach of striving to produce a space that is free from the conventions of the archive and exhibition intends to organize and structure information in a way that is not bound by the physical limitations of a traditional exhibition space. This approach also allows for greater accessibility and flexibility in terms of how the information can be presented and analyzed.

According to Mbembe, archiving objects confers an "imaginary status" on them, allowing the archive to



Database landing page

function as a reconstructive tool for lost histories. The archive serves as an "instituting imaginary" which enables the recovery of fragments, helping to piece together time and present a seemingly coherent and justifiable narrative. However, this illusion of totality is just that, an illusion, as the archive inevitably leaves gaps and silences that distort the historical record. When cultural artifacts are removed from their original context and placed in an exhibition space, they may lose their original intended purpose and meaning and be



Each artist's page contains links to their websites, work, and biography.

interpreted differently by different audiences. This is because the institutional framework within which the artifact is displayed can shape the way in which it is interpreted, often reinforcing dominant cultural and historical narratives.

In contrast, the database can encourage digital empowerment by providing a platform for the amplification of diverse voices and

perspectives, which can contribute to the democratization of knowledge and the diversification of cultural narratives. By encouraging critical thinking and active participation in the creation and dissemination of knowledge, the database can empower individuals to challenge dominant cultural and historical narratives and to develop their own understandings of the artworks and themes they address. The digital nature of the database can make the information widely accessible, which can help to bridge the digital divide and promote greater digital inclusion and empowerment.

Through my work in building this database, I aim to contribute to the democratization of knowledge and information, and make it more widely available to researchers, artists, and the general public.

"Place" and "Cyberspaces" - New Modes of Engagement

In his work, Lefebvre calls for a democratic and participatory approach to the production of space, which would prioritize the needs and desires of communities over private interests and profit (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 19). The internet has the potential to create inclusive and diverse information geographies by allowing individuals and communities from the Global South to participate in the creation and dissemination of knowledge. This is particularly true through social media platforms that allow for the sharing of information and experiences across spatial and social boundaries, which can create a dynamic and fluid exchange of ideas.

I utilize the concepts of "place" and "Cyberspaces" as a means of engaging with the case study through utilizing the internet – or Cyberspaces – as the type of democratic and participatory space production foretold by Lefebvre. This will challenge the dominant Western perspective and seek to create an alternative mode of engagement that is not bound by institutional norms and conventions. By centering on the notion of "place," the focus is shifted to the experiential aspect of engaging with the artworks, and the use of Cyberspaces as a platform has the potential to create a dynamic and inclusive space for this engagement.

However, I must reiterate and acknowledge the extent to which the internet, and cyberspace, still operate in a western context in terms of infrastructure, language, and layout. I explore this in depth when I discuss the limitations.

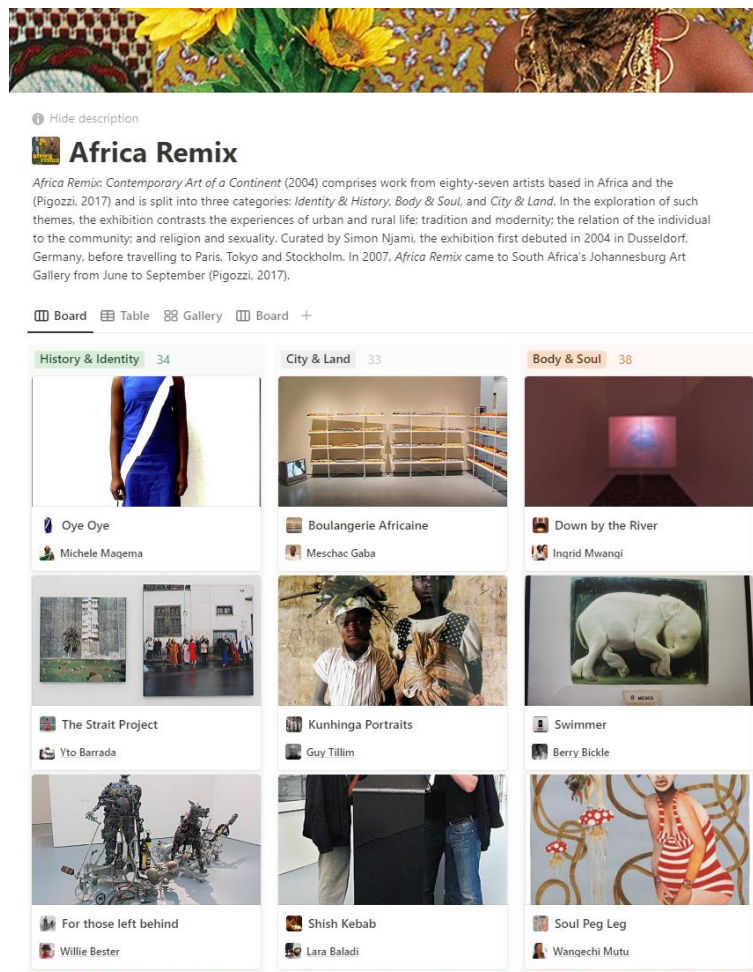
This approach is particularly relevant in the context of the questions surrounding authenticity, as it allows for a nuanced and multi-faceted exploration of the meaning and value of the artworks. Rather than relying on prescribed interpretations and preconceptions, this approach prioritizes the experience of the audience and the meanings they ascribe to the works. As such, it has the potential to contribute to an inclusive and democratic understanding of the cultural production and representation of Africa in the 21st century.

This approach falls in line with Homi K. Bhabha's, who contends that by observing or experiencing non-Western histories, new narratives can be constructed. In the context of the database I built, users can search, filter, explore links, and comment on the artworks. This process transforms the individual from a mere observer into an interrogator, capable of creating new histories, presents, and futures (Bhabha, 2014, p. 116). On this same note, I must return to Gayatri Spivak's emphasis on the significance of who tells the story. She

cautions against attempting to speak on behalf of the subaltern, as doing so is often limited by hegemonic concepts and language (Spivak, 1990: 70). In other words, such attempts may result in the speaker merely talking to themselves within their own discourse, rather than truly amplifying the voices of those they seek to represent. I created the database to offer a fresh perspective on the case study by emphasizing the role of the audience in interpreting and attaching meaning to the artworks, in that they can interact with the content and explore the works within. The aim is to move away from preconceived notions and prescribed interpretations of authenticity, and instead explore the various meanings that different individuals and groups may derive from the works.

Curation in Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent.

Curating involves both the exhibition of art and the production of knowledge, making it a concept worthy of significant analysis. The design of an exhibition space through curation is aimed at creating a specific experience for the audience. This environment is often static and limited, removing social variation from the displayed art (O'Doherty, 1986, p. 9).



A view of the database, in which the artworks are categorized by the themes establish by Simon Njami

Johnston discusses "socially engaged curatorial practice," a process that emphasizes the production, distribution, and consumption of art through various platforms, focusing on process and audience engagement (2014, p.24). In this approach, the curator plays a critical role in understanding the exhibited artwork and utilizes innovative methods and approaches to mediate the project from inception to production and presentation.

The role of the curator in the interpretation and presentation of art is crucial and can greatly impact the ways in which the audience perceives and understands the artwork. By considering the context in which the artwork is exhibited and the methods used for mediation, curators can create exhibitions that challenge dominant cultural narratives and present alternative perspectives. In the case of *"Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent,"* the curatorial choices made in the selection and presentation of the artworks can serve to both reinforce and subvert traditional notions of authenticity, particularly in relation to colonialism and the cultural exchange between Africa and the West. It is important to consider how the exhibition space and curatorial practices may affect the interpretation of the artworks, and how these may challenge or reinforce the dominant cultural narratives surrounding Africa and its art.

Through the creation and classification of data blocks in this database, I have positioned myself as a curator. However, I am not dictating the meaning that viewers should derive from the artworks. In crafting and organizing data within this database, I have taken on the role of a curator, yet I do not prescribe the meanings viewers should infer from the artworks. Acknowledging the inherent control I exercise by equipping users with navigational tools, I understand this control is indispensable. Data collection and organization inevitably require intervention. This approach deviates significantly from traditional archival authority, traditionally vested in public institutions as highlighted by Achille Mbembe (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19). Unlike archives, which are grounded in historical and cultural narratives and shaped by institutional mandates, my database project is inherently flexible, not bound by any institutional affiliation or predetermined narrative.

Traditional archives, as Mbembe notes, are deeply interwoven with power dynamics and the representation of history, often selectively preserving materials deemed "worthy" of remembrance. This selective preservation can influence public memory and identity, reinforcing certain narratives over others. In contrast, my database aims to democratize access to art and information, allowing for a multiplicity of interpretations and narratives. It is designed with the present and future in mind, focusing on accessibility and user engagement rather than solely on preservation. This shift from a static, institutionally controlled archive to a dynamic, user-interactive database represents a significant departure from traditional archival practices, offering new possibilities for engagement with and understanding of art and cultural heritage.

As curator of the database, my role is to facilitate the viewer's exploration of the data because the database demands more from the viewer than to merely spectate. It requires them to be an active participant, engaging with the information and creating their own meaning from it through interaction.

By doing so, I enable them to discover patterns and insights that might have been missed otherwise. My goal is to empower viewers to interact with the data in a way that best suits their needs and interests.

Digital Spectatorship

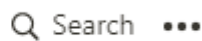
Exhibition spaces are crafted with a minimalist design ethos to ensure artworks stand out, untouched by the temporal elements. This aims to create what O'Doherty (1986) calls a perpetual display, positioning the artwork in a timeless void, independent of spectator presence. Digital exhibition realms, by contrast, break free from physical constraints, offering viewers an enveloping experience. The utilization of technology in curation opens doors to broader exhibition access and artwork interaction. The traditional concept of a collective consciousness fades, giving way to individualized interactions with digital media, allowing audiences to tailor their experiences (Malina, 1990, p. 33).

This freedom comes with its own set of constraints. Despite the expansive possibilities digital platforms offer, they are inherently bounded by the frames and screens through which they are accessed. This limitation shapes the viewer's perception and experience of the art, mediating the relationship between the viewer and the artwork. The digital realm is limited by the selectivity of the materials it makes available. Not all artworks can be digitized with fidelity to their physical counterparts, and the curator's choices in what to include or omit further filter the audience's access and experience. These constraints highlight a balance between the liberating potential of digital exhibitions and the limitations imposed by technology and curatorial decisions. The digital space, while offering new dimensions of interaction and engagement, still navigates within boundaries defined by its nature and the curatorial framework guiding its use.

Exhibitions, bound by the constraints of time and space, risk their meanings fading or being distorted with each subsequent iteration or recollection in their "afterlives." Unrecorded exhibitions linger merely as echoes of the myths surrounding their origins. In stark contrast,

databases and the internet herald an enduring approach to preserving and disseminating information—a trait they share with archives. Digital platforms transcend the physical limitations inherent to conventional exhibition spaces, enabling a richer, engaging experience for viewers. The integration of technology in the curation process opens up broader avenues for access, allowing exhibitions and artworks to be effortlessly shared and distributed online.

However, this notion of permanence is not without its caveats. Questions arise regarding the



The bar at the top of the page enables users to add comments and to search for a particular artist/work/etc

longevity and sustainability of digital platforms: the

ongoing hosting of the website, the entities responsible

for hosting and financing, and the maintenance required to ensure links remain active and content stays current.

These concerns underscore the complexities behind digital exhibitions' apparent permanence, revealing a landscape where accessibility and preservation are continually negotiated by technological, financial, and administrative challenges. While digital exhibitions promise wider access and enduring visibility for artworks, they also introduce a new set of considerations for curators and institutions to address in ensuring their lasting impact and relevance.

While Walter Benjamin emphasizes that the spectator and the artwork should meet in a physical location (Benjamin & Jennings, 2010, p. 17), this cannot happen with a database. Digital media is inherently malleable and flexible (Malina, 1990, p. 33), and discourse can be viewed and recontextualized using a plethora of tools readily available, such as image processing, visualization, simulation, and network communication. While this flexibility can lead to distraction, the primary goal of the database is to make the audience think and contemplate, and the digital medium allows for a different kind of engagement with the artworks. In this way, I am both drawing from and resisting the tension between archive and exhibition. The database is both, but it is also neither.

Benjamin mourns the absence of contemplation in the face of distraction, but distraction can also be a means of forming habits and mastering certain tasks (Benjamin & Jennings, 2010, p. 17-19). This covert form of control can result in the practical value of the artwork receding into the background. In the database, the primary goal is contemplation, and the use of

technology can provide tools for the audience to engage with the artworks in new and meaningful ways.

Limitations

Firstly, I am aware of the limitations and potential biases of research methodologies and approaches. It's always valuable to critically reflect on my own perspective and how it may impact my findings.

One aspect to consider is the potential impact on the authenticity of the artworks. The digital copies of the works may be available and distributed widely, which may alter their original intent and meaning. This may challenge traditional notions of authenticity and value of the artworks, potentially affecting the way in which they are perceived and valued by audiences.

Access to the internet and technology is not evenly distributed, and there are still significant inequalities in terms of who has the ability to participate in these new forms of knowledge production and dissemination (Graham & Mann, 2013). The way information is represented on the internet is still subject to colonial and digital power dynamics, as those who have resources and influence can still shape the way in which information is presented and consumed.

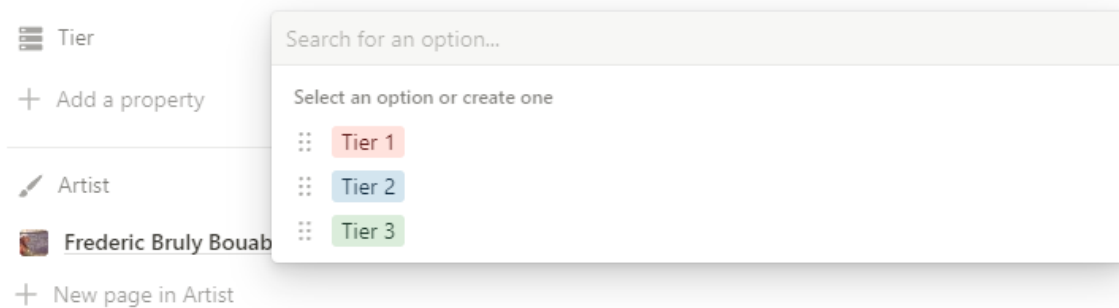
In adapting the measurement scaling system from Evrard & Krebs (2018) for my project, I have introduced a tiered classification to analyze the artworks featured in the exhibition. This system is pivotal in navigating the digital representation of artworks and their relation to the original pieces, addressing the unique challenges posed by digital exhibition spaces. The tiering system categorizes artworks into three distinct groups based on their digital adaptability and viewer experience.

Tier 1 - Authenticity	The digital variation of an artwork cannot compare to the original.
Tier 2 - Substitutability	The digital variation can replace direct contact with the original.
Tier 3 - Complementarity	The digital variation and the original artwork provide different experiences.

(Evrard & Krebs, 2017, p. 353-363)

By employing this tiered system, I aim to critically engage with the digital curation process, reflecting on how artworks transition from physical to digital spaces. This approach allows for a nuanced examination of the digital exhibition's capacity to both represent and transform

the viewer's experience of art. It contrasts with traditional archival authority, which historically has emphasized preservation and the contextual integrity of artworks within defined spatial and temporal parameters. The tiered system serves my project by facilitating a structured yet flexible framework for exploring these dynamics, enabling a more informed and critical dialogue around the digitization of art and its implications for accessibility, interpretation, and the preservation of cultural heritage.



The tiering system

I must revisit Doron Avital and Karolina Dolanska's discussion regarding digital technologies, art forgery and authentication (2023, p. 98). They claim that Van Meegeren asserted that he produced forgeries "not for money but for art's sake", and this underscores a complex interplay between the mastery of imitation and the pursuit of originality (Avital & Dolandka, 2023, p. 98). The ease of reproducing digital works challenges our traditional valuation of originals, questioning whether a perfect digital copy holds the same value as its analog counterpart. This scenario forces us to reconsider what we value in art—is it the physical object, the artist's intent, the skill displayed, or the original idea? (Avital & Dolandka, 2023, p. 99)

Plato (2000, p. 363-365) spoke of imitation as having a dual significance; while it is a means of aspiring towards ideal forms, in the realm of art, it is deemed a lesser form of creation, thrice removed from truth (Avital & Dolandka, 2023, p. 99). However, digital technologies are reshaping our understanding of art and authenticity.

It becomes imperative to develop new frameworks for appreciating and valuing art in the digital era. This includes recognizing the role of digital platforms in creating new forms of art and interactions, expanding the notion of originality beyond the physical to include the digital experience itself (Avital & Dolandka, 2023, p. 99).

This theoretical framework provides a pertinent context for the practical application of the tiering system within my project. By categorizing artworks into tiers based on their digital reproducibility and the ensuing impact on their perceived authenticity and meaning, I am essentially navigating the complex interplay between the original's inherent value and the digital copy's capacity to evoke meaning or alter it. Such an approach does not seek to dilute the essence of the artworks but rather to engage with them in a manner that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of meaning in the digital age.

The tiering system's inquiry—whether an artwork can still evoke meaning in its digital form and whether this meaning undergoes a significant transformation—mirrors the broader questions raised by Avital and Dolanska regarding the essence of art's value in the face of easy replicability. By critically evaluating each artwork's capacity to retain its meaning or offer complementary experiences through digital reproduction, I am not imposing a rigid hierarchy but rather exploring the dynamic spectrum of interaction between the original and its digital iterations. This method acknowledges the digital platform's role in not only preserving but also enhancing the narrative potential of art, pushing the boundaries of originality to encompass the digital experience as an integral component of an artwork's authenticity and Aura.

In this manner, the tiering system serves as a bridge between theoretical exploration and practical application, allowing for a nuanced engagement with artworks in the digital realm. It acknowledges the challenges posed by digital technologies to traditional notions of art valuation while also embracing the opportunities these technologies offer for expanding our understanding of what constitutes originality, authenticity, and the value of art itself.

When tiering the artworks, I asked myself the following questions:

- Can this artwork still evoke meaning in this form?
- Does this meaning change drastically because it is a digital reproduction?

I then tabulated the following (Table G).

		Can this artwork still evoke meaning in this form?	Does this meaning change drastically because it is a digital reproduction?
Tier 1 - Authenticity	The digital variation of an artwork cannot compare to the original.	No	-
Tier 2 - Substitutability	The digital variation can replace direct contact with the original.	Yes	No
Tier 3 - Complementarity	The digital variation and the original artwork provide different experiences.	Yes	Yes

This in mind, I must acknowledge that the "change" in meaning is not intended to imply that there was a single meaning ascribed to an artwork, which was then transformed into something different in a digital space. Rather, it is about the artwork's Aura, and whether or not an artwork can still be engaged with. As such, the majority of the works ranked in Tier 1 are video and/or sound installations, and this is generally due to a lack of photographs and other reference materials I could find online. For most cases, the artworks rank in Tier 3. This is because although they may be "fractured" – in that I could not find a full video or very many images – there is still (and often it is an entirely new aspect) of meaning to read.

Another contradiction is that, in ranking the artworks like this, I am going against my claim that I am not intending to impose any meaning or narrative onto the artwork. In claiming that there are tiers to begin with, it might appear that I am creating a hierarchy and rating the artworks that appeal to me. This is not my intention. Rather, I wish to acknowledge and reiterate that African art cannot be reduced to experience through sight (and, in some cases, sound) alone. In these cases, the art's presence in photos is vastly inferior to its real-life presence, I have noted as such by ranking it in Tier 1.



Frozen Memory, 2003, Amal Kenawy, Video installation. From *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, Kunst Palast.

For example, Amal Kenawy's *Frozen Memory* is a video installation that delves into the themes of political, social, and feminist issues with a focus on Egypt. Through a collaboration with her brother, presented via video, Kenawy's work is emblematic of the broader themes of death, rebirth, and the cyclical nature of human experiences. *Frozen Memory* invites viewers



African Adventure, 1999-2002, Jane Alexander, Installation. From *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, Kunst Palast.

to consider the ways in which personal and collective memories intersect with broader socio-political narratives, offering a poignant commentary on alienation and the search for meaning within the contemporary African experience (Szremski, n.d.). While images of the artwork remain, they do not convey the same poignancy that I would image the original artwork did - I would place this artwork in Tier 1.

Jane Alexander's *African Adventure* is a complex installation that might challenge digital reproduction due to its immersive and spatially dependent nature. When considering its digital representation, it could be categorized under Tier 1 - Authenticity, given that an online version might not replicate the emotional and physical engagement elicited by its in-person viewing. The installation's detailed arrangement and the interplay between the figures and the Bushmanland earth they stand on are intrinsic to its impact, which may not be fully conveyable through digital images or videos. I believe that classifying it in Tier 3 provides a nuanced understanding of how digital environments can transform the visual impact and thematic resonance of artworks. Although the installation's intricate details and the emotional engagement elicited by its in-person viewing are challenging to replicate digitally, the vivid imagery and compelling narrative of the artwork still make it a sight to behold in a digital format.



The Tree of my Grandmother's House - The Dialogue, 2001, Shady El Noshokaty, Video installation. From *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, Kunst Palast.

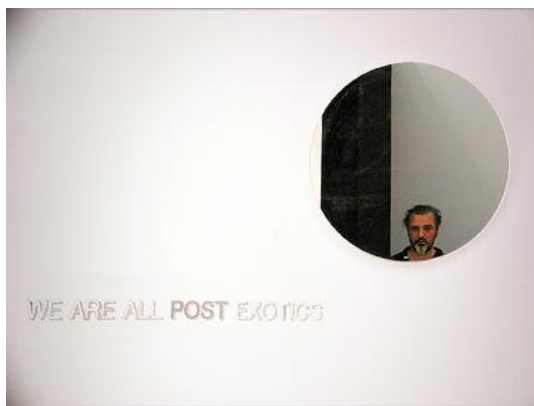
By placing *African Adventure* in Tier 3, I acknowledge that while direct contact with the original is irreplaceable, the digital variation of the installation still holds significant value. This classification emphasizes that images of the installation can effectively communicate the themes of colonialism, identity, democracy, and the effects of apartheid that Alexander explores. The digital images, despite lacking the immersive quality of the physical installation, offer accessibility to a global audience, enabling engagement with Alexander's critical commentary on societal

constructs and human behavior. Shady El Noshokaty's *The Tree of my Grandmother's House - The Dialogue* is a video installation that deeply explores identity, memory, and personal history through multimedia. While finding the video online offers accessibility, it may not fully capture the immersive experience intended by the artist. In the tiering system, this work might fall under Tier 3 - Complementarity, as the digital variation and the original artwork provide different experiences. The emotional resonance and the immersive nature of experiencing the installation in person can significantly differ from viewing it online, highlighting the nuances of digital representation.



Victorian Philanthropist's Parlour, 1996-1997, Yinka Shonibare, Installation. From Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent, Kunst Palast.

Another example is Yinka Shonibare's *Victorian Philanthropist's Parlour* and Fernando Alvim's *We are all Post Exotics*. *Victorian Philanthropist's Parlour* uses African textiles in a Victorian setting to critique the complexities of colonial and post-colonial identities. Photographs of the installation can convey its visual aspects and thematic content but may not fully encapsulate the immersive and reflective experience designed by Shonibare, altering its meaning and impact when viewed digitally.



We are all Post Exotics, 2004, Fernando Alvim, Mirror, pencil on canvas (190x190cm). From Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent, Kunst Palast.

mirror, underscoring the discrepancy between conceived and lived spaces in digital exhibitions (Ford, n.d.).

Fernando Alvim's *We are all Post Exotics*, which incorporates a mirror for viewer interaction, underscores the challenges of translating interactive and participatory artworks into digital formats. In the digital realm, the absence of physical viewer participation changes the artwork's experiential dimension, aligning it with Tier 3 - Complementarity. The work's digital representation cannot replicate the personal and reflective engagement prompted by the physical

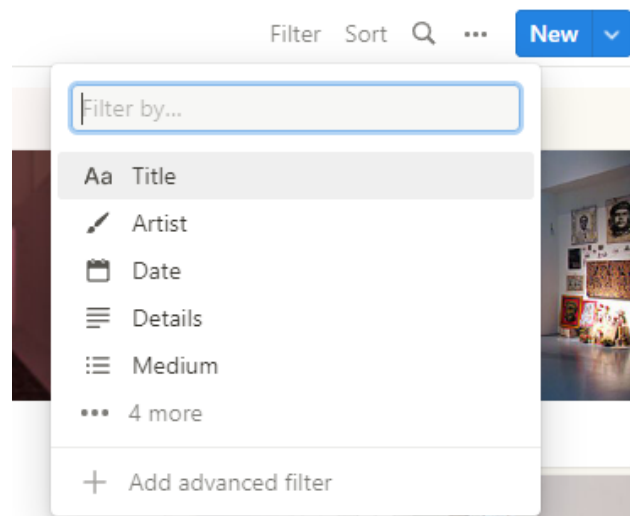
Meanwhile Hicham Benohoud's *La Salle de Classe* series, which captures unique and surreal classroom settings, may be adaptable to online viewing, potentially falling under Tier 2 -

Substitutability. Photographs of these artworks can effectively convey the artist's critical commentary on educational systems and societal structures. However, the physical presence and scale of the original prints might offer an intensified impact that digital copies can't fully replicate, indicating the limits of digital substitutability.

The tiered analysis elucidates the multifaceted implications of digital reproduction for contemporary African artworks. It reveals the spectrum of experiences offered by digital platforms, from substitutable visual content to complementary experiences that diverge from the original intent and impact. This exploration underscores the necessity of developing nuanced frameworks for understanding and engaging with art in the digital era, recognizing the potential for both limitations and new possibilities in how artworks are experienced, interpreted, and valued.

The Creation of the Database

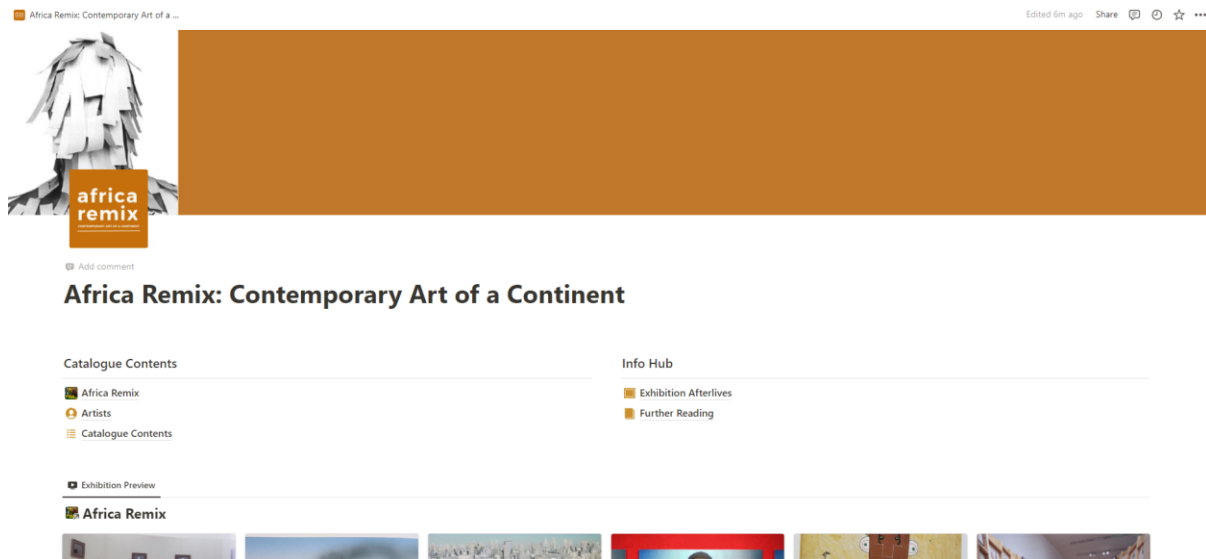
Notion is a basic task management app with CRM functionalities. I created the database by setting up a table, adding empty blocks, populating them with information, and linking them via commonalities. For example, each artwork has a page dedicated to it, as does each artist. The artists are linked to their works. There are multiple relational links between artworks and artists, including location, medium, size, and section. This enables the viewer to filter through the content and browse by their choice of filter.



A screenshot of the filter and sorting functionalities.

I chose [Notion.io](https://www.notion.so) because it is a platform that allows me to publish a page to the internet and share the link for free. Though there are more options available with a paid version, this was not necessary. The limitations of using this platform include limited customization of the UI, but I am able to customize the header and top of the page and add some creativity to the layout. Its benefits, in addition to its capacity as a database as well as sharing a live link, include enabling viewer comments - this helps create dialogue and engagement with the work. It is also a platform that is constantly growing and is API-friendly.

Notion allows for infinite grouping of text blocks, making it a no-code platform. While there are free templates available, I chose to create my own. I took inspiration from the Johannesburg art gallery catalogue, using grayscale and orange colour scheme for the cover photo and artist icons. I ensured that all images were properly credited and linked to their sources, but some images' ownership is unknown, leading to a collective ownership idea.



An early screenshot of the landing page. Note: "Exhibition Afterlives" is a page containing links to all websites I came across that held a digital repository of Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent..

On the landing page, I included a link to the exhibition repositories and a guide to help viewers navigate the site. For the artist icons and pictures of their artworks, I backlinked images and made sure to credit the original sources. For some of the images, I took actual photographs of the catalogue.

For others, I wasn't sure who owned them. In those cases, I included links to the sources and aimed to create a page of links where people could explore the exhibition further.

My goal was to include as much information about the artists as possible, but some artists had little to no online presence, making it difficult to provide much information.



Berry Bickle

Biography

Born in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, Berry Bickle obtained a degree in Fine Art from the Durban University of Technology (DUT) and pursued postgraduate studies with a focus on painting. After spending fifteen years living in Maputo, she has recently returned to Zimbabwe. Bickle has worked with a variety of mediums, including installation, video, ceramics, contemporary dance, and photography. In her work, she explores contemporary histories and archival material, often by working in urban spaces.

Birthplace Zimbabwe

Current Residence Zimbabwe

Image 

Learn more <https://zeitzmocaa.museum/artists/berry-bickle/>

Origin Mozambique

Year of Birth 1959

Status DONE

notes Empty

Africa Remix Swimmer

Links

From the Artist

Berry Bickle Archive
Berry Bickle Archive of prints made at The Artists' Press whilst she studio was at The Bag Factory.
<https://www.artprintsa.com/Berry-Bickle.html>

Articles

Berry Bickle — AWARE Women artists / Femme...
Interested in painting and ceramics, Berry Bickle studied art, first at the Durban Institute of Technology and then...
<https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/berry-bl...>



Owusu-Ankomah

Biography

Owusu-Ankomah, a contemporary Ghanaian artist born in Sekondi-Takoradi in 1956, explores themes of identity and the body in his work, utilizing Adinkra symbolism as a signature motif. After studying at the Ghanatta College of Art in Accra, Ghana from 1971 to 1974, he began traveling to Europe in 1979, establishing connections with European artists and galleries. Owusu-Ankomah has resided in Bremen, Germany since 1986, and his large canvases often incorporate Asanteman adinkra signs as recurring themes that he reinterprets to retain their original meaning while placing them in a gallery context. His exhibitions have been held throughout Germany, as well as in Britain, the USA, Europe, South Africa, South America, and Asia. In his recent paintings, Owusu-Ankomah delves into scientific, technological, metaphysical, and spiritual concepts such as human evolution, consciousness, non-locality of the soul, and eternal progression, drawing on the sacred geometry of ancient civilizations that predated Egypt.

Birthplace Ghana

Current Residence Germany

Image 

Learn more <https://www.owusu-ankomah.de/en/artworks.html>

Origin Ghana

Year of Birth 1956

Status Round2

notes Empty

Africa Remix Mouvement N° 33 | Mouvement N° 39

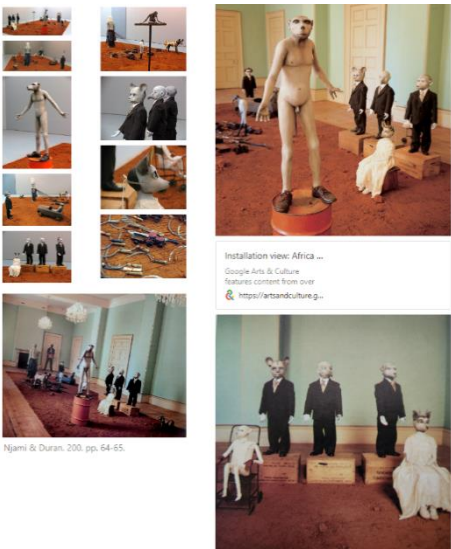
Links

From the Artist

I'm an artist who paints for humankind and who just happens to come from Africa.
Owusu-Ankomah

Early screenshots of two artists' profiles.

My original plan was to create a template for all artworks, but I realized that some artists were credited for multiple works, making a flexible approach necessary. As mentioned, Notion limits the extent to which I can customize the layout of the website. This left the pages looking slightly bland, reminding me of O'Doherty's White Cube. However, I tried to get a bit creative with the layout by using minimal colors and adding boxes in. At first, I wanted to create a template for each artwork, but some artists were credited differently online. Instead, I opted for a flexible layout that would work for all types of artworks.



Working with Jane Alexander's "African Adventure" in its artwork page.

Typically, I could only customize the header and top of the page, and then add some columns so that each artwork was presented cleanly. I also had to accommodate for the quality of images that I had - some were very low resolution, and I did not want those to be stretched. I could decide if I wanted the content to stretch across the entire page, or be isolated to a single column in the middle. This forced me to consider the responsiveness of the site - ie, how it would look on mobile vs on a desktop. In this way, I was a curator - I had the final say in how the images/links/videos were arranged on the screen, and how much information about each artwork was provided.

Reflection

In developing the database, I encountered numerous discrepancies between the print catalog and the various manifestations of the exhibition's "Afterlives." These inconsistencies ranged broadly, including variations in the artworks displayed, the exclusion of artworks/artists on certain platforms, and alterations in the thematic organization and curatorial narratives.

For example, David Goldblatt's *Johnny Basson, Goatherd, Rooipad se Vlakte, Pella, Northern Cape* (2004) was not included in the online iteration on Universe in Universes, and some artworks were placed in different sections.

The challenge of reconciling these inconsistencies compounded when dealing with artists who have minimal or no online presence. For these individuals, the digital trail is sparse, making it difficult to verify details or discover updates about their contributions to the exhibition. This lack of online visibility not only hinders accurately documenting their work within the database but also raises broader questions about digital equity and the representation of artists in the evolving narrative of contemporary art.

I was also prompted, by this, to add a copyright disclaimer to the landing page of the site. It is not my intention to detract/divert attention away from the artists' main platforms. This thought came to me when noticing that some artists did not want to share their work across websites — there were cases in which images were removed

with a notice of copyright. My hope is that because this is a research paper, and because I have back-linked and redirected viewers to the sources of all images (except for those which I could not find online, and instead photographed from the book — in which case I supplemented with additional links to the artists' platforms), I might be able to avoid having images taken down/reported. However, I have no control over that and in the case that images are removed, their having been there so briefly will have etched out enough meaning in the process to supplement their loss.



Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright Disclaimer:

The images used on this website are the property of their respective owners. This website was built solely for academic research purposes and we do not claim ownership of any of the images used. We have credited the owners of the images and have provided all necessary backlinks. We encourage viewers to be curious and follow the links to the artists' websites. If you believe that any content appearing on this website infringes on your copyright, please contact us immediately and we will remove the infringing material.

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Chapter 5 – Curatorial Approach: Reading Africa Through Space

In this section of my thesis, I explore the journey of enhancing my thesis through the creation of a website to showcase the *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* exhibition. This reflective journey reflects my evolving understanding of the complexities inherent in digital and postcolonial spaces, alongside the practical challenges of curating an online exhibition.

Developing the website presented an opportunity to practically apply these theoretical insights. It necessitated a thoughtful curation that not only showcased the artworks but also contextualized them within the broader narrative of African contemporaneity. The website serves as a dynamic space where the digital and physical realms of the exhibition converge, allowing for a re-examination and re-presentation of the artworks.

This process has been instrumental in deepening my understanding of the interplay between theory and practice in the field of digital arts and African studies. It underscores the potential of digital platforms to both preserve and reinterpret cultural narratives, and highlights the importance of critically engaging with the digital as a space for cultural and academic exploration.

I delve into an introspective journey, intertwining theoretical musings with practical considerations of curating the digital exhibition. This journey is framed within Walter Benjamin's reflections on art and audience, where I grapple with the dichotomy of deep engagement versus casual observation, echoing his contemplations on the nature of art.

Further, I confront the challenges of authenticity in the digital representation of artworks, particularly installations. This digital translation raises intricate questions about preserving the essence of 127 diverse artworks, and how to represent their physical experience authentically online.

In categorizing the artworks, I initially considered geographical origins but soon recognized the limitations and complexities of such an approach. To respect the artists and reflect the exhibition's inclusive spirit, I chose thematic groupings – Body and Soul, City and Land, History and Identity.

The website's development was inspired by an AI-inspired Webflow template, leading to an interactive, multi-layered exhibition experience. I created a platform that allowed for varying

degrees of engagement, enhancing the visitor's experience while being mindful of the digital medium's limitations in capturing the artworks' physical Aura.

Contemplating Africa's multifaceted representation, I explored complex historical and contemporary contexts. This included the contentious issue of stolen objects and the concept of virtual restitution, probing its validity as a genuine form of restitution. I considered the impact of new forms of reality construction on perceptions and beliefs.

Henri Lefebvre's concept of space significantly influenced the exhibition's thematic structure, offering a comprehensive lens through which to understand Africa. By aligning with Lefebvre's categories – Perceived Space, Conceived Space, and Lived Space – the exhibition aims to provide a holistic view of African cultures, identities, and spaces. This approach ensures a nuanced exploration of the interplay between physical surroundings, societal constructs, and personal experiences, underlining the continent's diversity and universal themes like space, identity, and community.

Throughout this journey, I faced multifaceted challenges – from practical concerns of grouping and presentation to broader considerations of authenticity, technology, and the evolving nature of art. My goal is to curate an exhibition that truly encapsulates the complexity and diversity of African art, respecting individual voices while inviting varied levels of engagement and understanding.

Introduction to Curatorial Journey

I'd like to briefly summarise my curatorial choices. In the sections to come, I unpack each choice in detail, but first, it is of great significance to clearly articulate my choices, especially in terms of utilizing Webflow for a virtual exhibition and curating it digitally. This realization stemmed from the feedback of external examiners, particularly their queries about the nature of the database I employed. Reflecting on this feedback, I recognized that although my work primarily revolves around the concepts of 'archive' **and** 'exhibition', a database serves as an archival tool. In my case, using Notion was instrumental in categorizing and linking data pertaining to artworks and artists. However, Notion's limitations, particularly its clunky user interface and lack of visual representation due to copyright issues, impeded the translation of my vision to showcase Africa's rich tapestry of cultures, subjectivities, and histories.

My intention was to convey the continent's diversity and complexity through art, a universal language. To achieve this, I explored the concept of interactivity in digital spaces, particularly how to replicate the immersive experience of physical exhibitions. This exploration was informed by my visits to various art spaces like Zeitz MOCAA, JAG, and the Wits Art Museum. While physical exhibitions offer a tangible narrative experience, I found that digital platforms could offer visual and, to some extent, auditory engagement.

To implement this, I chose Webflow for its content management capabilities, allowing me to organize and curate data effectively. Despite my limited experience with Webflow, I balance interactivity without overwhelming the user. The process involved importing data into Webflow CMS, categorizing images, and considering the website's design elements like fonts, colours, and a sitemap. I adapted templates for a coherent visual presentation, ensuring mobile responsiveness to reach a wider audience.

My curatorial approach diverged from the original categorization of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* by Simon Njami. Instead, I focused on portraying Africa's unique stories through different types of spaces, ensuring a balance between textual content and artwork. This was a critical consideration, as I did not want the website to mimic social media platforms but rather to create an engaging and informative experience.

As the project evolved, I envisioned the website as an exhibition, archive and as a community platform. This idea is still in its nascent stage due to time constraints. In parallel, I launched social media accounts for Artspace Africa, engaging with artists from the exhibition and the

broader African art community. This initiative aimed to celebrate African artists, especially emerging ones who primarily use social media as their platform.

While the website has been a significant learning curve, I am mindful of the ethical considerations, particularly in reproducing artworks from the catalogue. Some pieces, like video and sound installations, were challenging to represent online without diminishing their Aura. In cases where artists preferred not to have their work reproduced, I respected their wishes, though I uploaded some images from the catalogue to better represent the artworks digitally.

In summary, my process has been a journey of learning and adapting, aiming to create a digital space that not only showcases African art but also fosters community and appreciation for the continent's diverse artistic expressions.

Conceptual Framework

In exploring the realm of art, I understand that it's impossible to fully capture the complexities and nuances of the world through this medium. Art allows us only to apprehend fragments of the vast tapestry of existence. It is through the introduction of structure and manipulation within these fragments that we, as observers and creators, make sense of our place in the world. This sense-making process fills the gaps in our understanding.

Art, in its essence, serves the purpose of providing an illusion of a structured and coherent reality. This structure often manifests through the elements and narratives present in a work of art. I reflect on the Aristotelian concept of a story having a beginning and an end, yet I recognize that life is not confined within such strict boundaries. Instead, life is an ongoing process composed of individual fragments and moments, constantly transforming.

I see life as a series of transformations, a continuum that art helps us to navigate by creating useful illusions. These illusions guide us through the complexities of existence. In this context, fairy tales, as a narrative form, offer a mirror to reality. Their explicit acknowledgment of their own illusory nature gives us a lens to gain insight into the true nature of reality. This understanding of reality can only be fully grasped through allegory and metaphor.

As I delve deeper into my thesis, I am compelled to explore how these insights apply to the digital representation of African art and the exhibition *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. The digital curation of art, like the structure in fairy tales, could be reimagining the narratives and fragments of African artistic expression. This exploration will also address the feedback from my examiners, focusing on creating a grounded and focused theoretical framework, deeply engaging with the materials and themes at hand.

Art as Universal Language

I have mentioned the idea of art as a “universal language”, but I am yet to unpack it.

Njami profoundly states the following (2007, p. 19): “The secret of a work of art that achieves its aim is that it speaks to us.”

Simon Njami provides a rich insight into the universal language he envisions, deeply intertwined with the essence of African art and its creators, in the essay “Chaos and Metamorphosis” (2007, p. 17). He suggests that the core of this universal language is not found in explicit narratives or concrete articulations but in the nuanced, often intangible expressions of human experience, community, and identity. This universal language transcends the mere visual or aesthetic; it delves into the profound territories of human sensibility and collective consciousness.

Artists drawing from the materials they grew up with signifies more than just a physical or geographical connection. It represents a deep, visceral engagement with one's environment, culture, and heritage. This engagement is not uniform; it is as diverse as the continent itself, with each artist bringing a unique perspective and voice. However, the commonality lies in the pursuit of expressing the “unsayable”—the complex, layered experiences that constitute individual and collective identities.

Njami references the “five senses as the gateways to the soul” and speaks of art as a “sensitive, human and imperfectly completed translation” (2007, p. 17) of these sensory experiences, underscoring the belief that art is fundamentally about connecting with the essence of human experience. It is through this sensory engagement that art becomes a medium for exploring and expressing the self, allowing for a silent but profound dialogue between the artist and the world.

This particular passage is rich with visceral diction to further articulate this point. Njami uses a metaphor of a "silent communion of shisha-smokers" (2007, p. 17) to encapsulate the essence of this universal language. It underscores the importance of shared moments and experiences that, while silent, are deeply communicative and binding. These moments become the fertile ground from which artists draw inspiration, transforming personal and collective memories into metaphors that resonate with broader human themes.

Njami's invocation of Ernst Bloch's "problem of the We in itself" explores the challenge for the artist in navigating and articulating these complex layers of belonging and identity, translating them into works that not only reflect individual perspectives but also speak to the shared human condition.

This universal language is one of connection, reflection, and exploration—a bridge between the personal and the collective, the seen and the unseen, the said and the unsayable. It is a language that celebrates the diversity of experiences and expressions within the African continent and beyond.

This perspective enriches the dialogue surrounding the power and agency embedded in the act of curation. Curation becomes a transformative act of assembling works that each carry a piece of the African narrative. Unlike traditional archiving, which often operates under predefined criteria to decide what is worth preserving, my approach to curation places the power of storytelling back into the hands of the artists themselves.

This subverts the traditional archival process and elevates personal stories and subjective experiences. My curation is, in essence, a strategy to rewrite the "archive," making it inclusive and representative by centering on the lived experiences of African individuals.

Production

Within the realm of spatial dynamics, the creation and exertion of knowledge and authority often manifest through the transformation of landscapes, demarcation of boundaries, and alteration of cultural landmarks. For instance, colonial entities manipulated geographic demarcations, enacted laws, and monopolized natural resources. Such maneuvers established distinct knowledge systems and hierarchical structures, profoundly influencing the colonized

territories. In contrast, post-colonial efforts to rename streets, rejuvenate native landmarks, or conserve traditional customs can be interpreted as the generation of novel or restored knowledge and authority. These initiatives contribute to the notion of authenticity, aiming to realign the area more closely with its original or intended essence. Legitimizing this newly formed or recovered knowledge and authority may involve scholarly research that brings to light forgotten histories, legal adjustments that recognize historical injustices, or sociocultural movements that affirm narratives of those previously on the margins. In a post-colonial framework, the intricate relationship among spatiality, authenticity, and the generation of knowledge and power is marked by mutual influence and continuous reshaping.

In the exploration of space, authenticity, and post-colonialism, a nuanced understanding emerges regarding the production and authentication of knowledge and power. These elements are not merely passive entities but active participants in shaping identities and narratives within a post-colonial framework. The act of renaming streets or restoring indigenous landmarks serves as a reclaiming of physical space and as a profound statement of resistance and self-definition against colonial legacies. It's through such acts that knowledge and power are produced anew, asserting authentic identities that defy the impositions of colonial rule.

Authentication, in this context, is a complex process of validating and legitimizing this newly produced knowledge and power. It involves a multifaceted approach that can range from academic research to legal reforms and social movements, all aimed at constructing an authentic narrative that challenges and counters colonial narratives. This process is crucial in not only acknowledging but also in legitimizing the narratives and identities that emerge from post-colonial actions and discourses.

Incorporating these insights into the study, particularly through the lens of digital platforms like Artspace.Africa, opens up avenues to investigate how digital spaces contribute to or detract from the production and authentication of knowledge and power in post-colonial African contexts. The focus on 'authenticity' becomes a pivotal tool for examining the ways in which these digital platforms either reinforce existing narratives and power structures or act as mediums for challenging and reshaping them. Through this lens, the study seeks to uncover the roles digital platforms play in either perpetuating or contesting the colonial legacies that still influence contemporary African societies.

Art, Audience, and Walter Benjamin's Influence

The dichotomy between immediate comprehension and the richness of deep engagement with art has led me to reflect on Walter Benjamin's insights into art's reception. The distinction he draws between the contemplative spectator and the casual observer has opened a broader discourse on art's essence and how it's defined. Wrestling with the subjective nature of art appreciation, I am navigating the complexities of how art is valued and understood in various contexts, both traditional and digital.

Curatorial Analysis Revisited

The comparison between "Universes in Universe" and "Google Arts and Culture" highlights a significant difference in visual engagement. "Google Arts and Culture" provides a more immersive and engaging experience with larger images and video content, enhancing viewer interaction and understanding. This analysis supports the thesis's focus on the digital reinterpretation of physical exhibitions.

Henri Lefebvre's Concept of Space

The thematic structure of the *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* exhibition is reimagined through Henri Lefebvre's multifaceted concept of space, which includes physical, mental, and social dimensions. This framework is crucial for presenting a comprehensive view of Africa, highlighting its diverse cultures, identities, and spatial dynamics.

Application of Spatial Categories:

1. Perceived Space (City and Land):

- This category highlights the tangible, sensory aspects of African urban and rural landscapes. It encourages an immersive experience, allowing visitors to engage with the environment's physical attributes, fostering a direct connection to the spaces portrayed.

2. Conceived Space (History and Identity):

- Here, the focus is on the ideological and conceptual realms, exploring how historical and social structures shape perceptions of authority and identity. This section delves into the mental constructs that inform and influence personal and collective experiences in Africa.

3. Lived Space (Body and Soul):

- Concentrating on the lived experiences and spirituality, this category explores the fluidity of personal and communal narratives. It invites reflection on how these narratives intersect with societal norms and cultural practices, highlighting the dynamic interplay between the physical and spiritual realms.

Lefebvre's spatial categories provide a nuanced framework for understanding the exhibition, celebrating Africa's cultural diversity while exploring universal themes of space, identity, and community. This approach enriches the exhibition's thematic depth and aligns with the ongoing quest to deepen the theoretical underpinnings of the work.

Rationale for Each Section

1. Physical Space (City and Land):

- This section/space captures the raw, unfiltered reality of African landscapes, emphasizing their intrinsic value and exploring the complex interplay between urban and rural spaces. It also considers the transformations brought about by colonial and post-colonial influences and the varied artistic interpretations these landscapes inspire.

2. Mental Space (History and Identity):

- This section provides a comprehensive examination of African identity and history, addressing the complexities of nationhood and the role of art in reflecting and shaping identity. It discusses the challenges faced by artists in articulating these themes within a global context.

3. Social Space (Body and Soul):

- Focusing on the cultural and communal aspects, this section examines the relationship between the physical and spiritual, highlighting the role of artists as intermediaries. It explores how African traditions blend the carnal and spiritual, creating a unique cultural tapestry.

Spatial Dynamics within "Africa Remix"

The *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* exhibition encapsulates the intricate dynamics between three types of spaces—perceived, conceived, and lived—as they converge to construct and deconstruct notions of Africa. This interplay reveals how daily experiences

and routines within spatial practice (perceived space) intertwine with and are shaped by the abstract frameworks and representations of space (conceived space).

"*Africa Remix*" highlights how spaces—and, by extension, identities—are co-produced through the interplay between their conceptual underpinnings and the everyday lives of African individuals and communities. While architects and planners may design the physical and theoretical layouts of cities and spaces, it is the lived experiences, cultural practices, and social interactions of Africa's people that truly define and give meaning to these spaces. The exhibition invites viewers to consider how contemporary African art reflects and influences the shaping of both urban and rural landscapes across the continent, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the notion of Africa in the global imagination.

The thematic concerns of Myriam Mihindou's *Folle* from the "Body and Soul" (lived space) section and Samuel Fosso's *Tati* series from the "History and Identity" (conceived space) section within *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* illuminate the intricate interplay between conceived and lived spaces. This interplay underscores the exhibition's exploration of African identity, memory, and the post-colonial condition through the lens of contemporary art. By examining the similarities in thematic concerns, we can appreciate how these artworks collectively navigate and blur the distinctions between the conceptual (conceived spaces) and the experiential (lived spaces), offering a nuanced perspective on African realities.

Conceived spaces, as represented by Fosso's *Tati* series, pertain to spaces that are ideated, symbolic, and often tied to histories, narratives, and identities constructed by societal, cultural, and political discourses. Fosso's work critically engages with these narratives by adopting various personas that traverse across cultural and historical lines, challenging the monolithic representations of African identity. Each photograph is a deliberate construction – a conceived space – that Fosso uses to interrogate notions of self and otherness, tradition and modernity, and the complexities of post-colonial identity. The *Tati* series represents a critical reflection on how identities are shaped by historical narratives and the global exchange of cultures.

Lived spaces, as encapsulated by Mihindou's *Folle*, refer to the experiential, bodily, and tangible aspects of space that are directly lived through and experienced by individuals. Mihindou's performance piece delves into the body's role as a site of memory, identity, and

resistance, highlighting the physical and emotional dimensions of navigating post-colonial African identities. Through her use of the body and engagement with organic materials, Mihindou transforms personal and collective experiences into a performative exploration of space, embodying the lived realities of African individuals in the contemporary moment. *Folle* is a manifestation of lived space, where the body itself becomes a canvas for expressing the fluidity and complexity of identity.

The thematic concerns of *Folle* and Tati reveal a profound interplay between conceived and lived spaces, illustrating how contemporary African artists navigate and reconcile the spaces between constructed identities and experiential realities. Both artworks engage with the notion of identity as both a conceptual framework and an embodied experience, showcasing the dynamic processes through which African individuals and communities construct and live out their identities in a globalized world.

By situating these artworks within the broader thematic sections of "Body and Soul" (lived space) and "History and Identity" (conceived space), *Africa Remix* effectively demonstrates the interconnectedness of these spatial dimensions. The exhibition invites viewers to consider how African art not only reflects but also actively participates in the shaping of cultural, historical, and personal spaces, challenging static notions of identity and offering a richer, more complex understanding of African realities.

The exhibition masterfully showcases the interplay between historical narratives and the forces of globalization through Andries Botha's installation and Fatimah Tuggar's Money & Matter series. Botha's work compellingly invites viewers to reevaluate history as a construct shaped by subjective interpretations, while Tuggar explores the intersections between technology, power, and human capital, offering a nuanced critique of contemporary global dynamics.

Andries Botha's installations act as a critical lens through which the conventional narratives of history are deconstructed and reimagined. By presenting history as a subjective construct, Botha's work challenges the viewer to question the authenticity and objectivity of historical narratives, suggesting that history is not a fixed entity but rather a fluid tapestry woven from individual perspectives and experiences. This approach underscores the exhibition's broader thematic exploration of identity and history, highlighting the complex ways in which African artists navigate and contest colonial and post-colonial narratives.

Fatimah Tuggar's *Money & Matter* series delves into the intricacies of globalization and its impact on African societies. Through her critical engagement with technology and its role in shaping human interactions and values, Tuggar articulates a sophisticated commentary on the commodification of culture and the pervasive influence of economic forces on personal and communal identities. Her work exemplifies the conceived space where abstract ideas and global systems intersect with lived experiences, embodying the tensions and contradictions inherent in contemporary African life. Tuggar's series not only reflects on the economic dimensions of globalization but also interrogates the cultural exchanges and transformations that accompany this process, contributing to a redefined understanding of African creativity and its place in the global art world.

The dialogue between Botha's and Tuggar's works within *Africa Remix* highlights the dynamic interplay between conceived and lived spaces. Botha's reevaluation of historical narratives and Tuggar's exploration of the intersections between technology, power, and human capital reveal how African artists are actively engaged in constructing notions of Africa that are grounded in the realities of the contemporary moment. This interplay between the abstract designs of representations of space (conceived space) and the everyday realities of spatial practice (lived space) showcases the exhibition's critical role in challenging conventional understandings of African art and identity.

El Noshokaty, born in 1971 in Damiette, Egypt, is celebrated for his pioneering approach to multimedia, employing animation, digital graphics, and video installation to critique societal and cultural issues. "The Tree of my Grandmother's House - The Dialogue" stands as a pivotal manifestation of his artistic vision, delving into the realms of identity and personal narratives (Universes in Universe, n.d.; African Loxo, n.d.). The contemplative nature of the artwork, suggested by its title, invites viewers into a meditative exploration of heritage and roots, symbolizing the lived space where personal and collective memories converge.

The dialogue between Andries Botha's installation and Fatimah Tuggar's *Money & Matter* series, alongside Noshokaty's work, exemplifies the dynamic relationship between historical narratives, globalization, and the individual's place within these contexts. Botha's installation urges a reevaluation of history as a subjective construct, challenging viewers to question the authenticity of historical narratives and their impact on contemporary identities. Tuggar's exploration of technology, power, and human capital within the *Money & Matter* series critically examines the commodification of culture and the pervasive influence of economic

forces on identity, illustrating the conceived space where abstract ideas intersect with the global exchange of cultures (Njami & Duran, 2007).

Noshokaty's *The Tree of my Grandmother's House - The Dialogue* complements these works by providing a sensory and immersive experience that blurs the boundaries between art forms, inviting reflection on individual relationships with the past and cultural heritage. His work embodies the co-production of space, illustrating how personal histories and cultural narratives coalesce to form a complex understanding of African identity in the contemporary world.

In sum, the inclusion of El Noshokaty's installation within the *Africa Remix* exhibition showcases the intricate dynamics between perceived, conceived, and lived spaces in constructing notions of Africa. Through their artistic practices, Botha, Tuggar, and Noshokaty engage in a critical dialogue with historical narratives and the forces of globalization, offering nuanced perspectives on identity, memory, and the post-colonial condition. Their works collectively highlight the exhibition's role in challenging conventional understandings of African art, showcasing the richness, complexity, and global relevance of contemporary African artistic expressions.

ImplemenTation in a Digital Space

Critique of the White Space

The traditional white cube gallery setting, known for its stark, isolated ambiance, segregates art from the external environment, fostering a unique art-viewing context. In my approach, I have consciously steered clear of this 'white space' ethos. I am an advocate for experiencing art within its relevant context, believing that it enhances the viewer's understanding and appreciation of the artwork.

In this phase of the project, I have revised the table previously presented about the dimensions of space in relation to the archive.

	Space	Place
Shape	A database, unlike a physical archive, exists primarily in a digital realm. It has a virtual address, structured through servers and cloud storage, housing a diverse range of digital documents and media.	The primary purpose of a database is to systematically store, manage, and retrieve information. It serves as a digital repository for data, enabling efficient access and manipulation of stored information for various applications, from academic research to business analytics.
Structure	The database's structure is defined by its digital architecture and the software used for organization. The criteria for what is stored are determined by digital categorization systems and algorithms, rather than traditional archival rituals.	The decision to include data in a database often hinges on its relevance, accuracy, and utility. Data is brought in through processes like data entry, uploads, or automated collection. Factors like the database's intended use, the source's credibility, and the data's completeness play a role in determining its inclusion.
Context	In a database, the context is less about the architectural space and more about the digital environment and interface through which users interact with the content. The way items are categorized and displayed is influenced by the digital design and user interface.	Data in a database is categorized based on predefined schemas or models that dictate the structure of stored information. These conventions include tables, fields, and relationships, which are designed to ensure data is organized logically and efficiently, facilitating easy retrieval and analysis.
Experience	Interaction with a database is less tactile and more visual and cognitive. Users engage through digital interfaces, often prioritizing search functionality and user experience design. The digital format can allow for broader access and diverse ways of engaging with the content.	Data is stored in databases to provide a centralized and structured means of keeping large volumes of information. This centralized storage allows for easy retrieval, analysis, and sharing of data, supporting decision-making processes, record-keeping, and various operational needs across different sectors.

Virtual Exhibition

	Space	Place
Shape	A virtual exhibition exists in a digital realm, defined by its web presence. The spatial aspect is no longer a physical gallery but a virtual interface, crafted by web design elements and digital architecture.	Virtual exhibitions create a spatiotemporal realm within the digital space, where viewers navigate through different temporal moments of art. They evoke emotional responses (affective) and facilitate shared experiences (intersubjective) among global audiences, transcending geographical boundaries.
Structure	In a virtual exhibition, the structure is determined by the website's or platform's layout and design. The decision-making process about what to include in the virtual exhibition is influenced by digital curatorial strategies, audience engagement metrics, and thematic relevance.	Each virtual exhibition is distinct in its thematic focus and design, providing a bounded experience defined by the curated content and the limits of the digital platform.
Context	The context in a virtual exhibition is shaped by the user interface and the digital environment. It includes how artworks are displayed, interactive elements, and the overall narrative flow of the exhibition.	Virtual exhibitions are recognized spaces with specific opportunities for learning and engagement. They often come with guidelines (such as navigation instructions) and expectations (like interactive features), and are conceptually constrained by the curatorial theme and digital format.
Experience	The experience of a virtual exhibition is primarily visual and interactive. It allows for a diverse range of engagements, such as virtual tours, multimedia presentations, and interactive features that provide a different form of cognitive and sensory engagement compared to a physical exhibition.	These exhibitions are inhabited virtually by viewers who interact with the content. They classify and represent human experiences in familiar formats (like virtual tours or galleries), making art accessible and relatable within everyday digital contexts.

Curatorial Approach

Reconsidering space as not solely a physical entity but as a construct shaped by social relations radically shifts our perspective. Reflecting on the nearly two decades since the inaugural *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* exhibition, it's evident that the socio-political landscape has dramatically transformed. The transition of the exhibition into digital realms introduces a complex matrix of accessibility, notably impacted by the digital divide—a critical issue for a project centered on Africa, where internet access is not universal.

Choosing a Virtual Exhibition

The decision to curate the exhibition virtually stemmed from a pivotal reflection, influenced heavily by the external examiner's insights. Their critique about the nature of databases versus archives sparked a reevaluation of my approach, particularly in aligning with the dual concepts of archive and exhibition. This contemplation led me to embrace a virtual format that not only preserved but also amplified the essence of the artworks and the artists represented.

Transitioning to a virtual exhibition space, I faced the challenge of ensuring that each artwork could be represented digitally in a way that retained its significance and impact. This process involved selectively removing works that could not be meaningfully translated into a digital format, a decision taken with the intention of revisiting these pieces for future inclusion. The task of sourcing detailed descriptions for the artworks proved to be a formidable challenge, prompting me to explore innovative solutions while contemplating the ethical implications of utilizing AI-assisted tools like ChatGPT.

Engaging with Henri Lefebvre's "The Production of Space" in the context of virtual art curation aims to contribute to the creation of a new social space. This space is defined not just by the artworks and the digital platform but also by the dynamic interactions between curator, audience, and the broader social context. As I navigate the complexities of this digital curatorial practice, I am mindful of the ethical, technical, and conceptual challenges that shape this evolving landscape, striving to create a meaningful and accessible virtual exhibition that honors the diversity and richness of African art.

In the creation of Artspace.Africa, my curatorial mission is to dismantle the monolithic narrative often associated with Africa. This endeavour is rooted in showcasing the continent's rich tapestry of identities, extending across both the African mainland and its diaspora. Through this platform, I seek to challenge the simplistic narratives that have long defined Africa in the global consciousness.

I considered various options in curating the exhibition. The use of Augmented Reality (AR) and other digital tools presents both opportunities and challenges. Again, I return to the concept of the Aura. Can digital representations maintain, or even enhance, this Aura, or do they distort the original essence of the artworks? This question probes deeper into the role of digital spaces in art curation, exploring whether they can serve as a democratic platform for challenging power dynamics and traditional narratives about African art.

As the curator, I navigate these complexities, striving to balance accessibility with authenticity and respect for the artists' intentions. This endeavor draws on the theoretical frameworks of Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, Stuart Hall, Achilles Mbembe, and Brian O'Doherty, weaving together concepts of space, power, and representation. The ambition is to create a digital exhibition that not only showcases the diversity of African perspectives but also engages deeply with the nuances of digital curation, offering a multifaceted exploration of African identities, histories, and futures.

My digital adaptation of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* strives to embody a confluence of challenges and aspirations. It seeks to transcend the digital divide and navigate the intricacies of representing African art in the digital age, aiming to create a space that is both accessible and nuanced, where the integrity of the artworks is preserved, and new narratives emerge. This project is not just about displaying art; it's about fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Africa's rich cultural landscape in a rapidly evolving digital world.

Integrating Lefebvre's Spatial Theory with Njami's Thematic Categories

To subvert the conventional portrayal of Africa as a singular entity, I have reinterpreted Simon Njami's thematic divisions—Identity & History, Body & Soul, and City & Land—through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's nuanced concept of space. This integration allows for a profound exploration of the interaction between African identities and landscapes, both urban and rural, through the dimensions of physical, planned, and lived spaces.

Lefebvre's discourse on space—encompassing the physical realities of geography, the constructed environments shaped by political and institutional forces, and the personal, subjective experiences of individuals—serves as a foundation for this exhibition. By mapping these dimensions of space onto the thematic structure of Artspace.Africa, the exhibition endeavors to debunk the stereotypes that have historically circumscribed Africa, offering instead a multifaceted understanding of the continent's realities.

The Digital Realm: Authenticity and Colonial Narratives

A pivotal aspect of Artspace.Africa's digital curation involves critically examining the impact of digitalization on the authenticity of African artworks. This scrutiny is aimed at discerning whether digital platforms serve to perpetuate colonial narratives or, conversely, act as mediums through which these narratives can be contested and reimaged, particularly in the context of the African diaspora's contributions to art interpretation.

Addressing the Digital Divide

The choice of an online platform for Artspace.Africa introduces the critical issue of the digital divide. This challenge underscores the paradox of utilizing digital spaces to interrogate African identities—a space that may not be uniformly accessible to all Africans due to disparities in internet connectivity. This limitation highlights the complexities of engaging with African art and identity in the digital age, emphasizing the need for innovative solutions to bridge this divide.

Artspace.Africa is not merely an exhibition but a dynamic platform for critical engagement with African art and identity. By leveraging digital spaces to explore the intricate layers of African spaces—physical, planned, and lived—this curatorial approach aims to illuminate the diverse identities that comprise Africa. In doing so, it aspires to both challenge entrenched stereotypes and navigate the inherent limitations of digital curation, fostering a nuanced and inclusive discourse on African art and its representation in the digital era.

Process

My thesis explores the digital continuation of "*Africa Remix*," translating its thematic depth and artistic vibrancy into an online format. This digital curation is designed to not only showcase but also deepen the dialogue around African art and its digital representations, responding to examiner feedback for a rigorous theoretical grounding and comprehensive engagement with selected artworks and their contexts.

The Digital Archive as a Curatorial Tool

Utilizing Notion as a foundational tool, I created a structured archive that facilitated the linkage of artworks and artists. This digital archive served as a critical component in my curatorial strategy, allowing me to categorize and organize information efficiently. However, the platform's limitations, particularly in terms of user interface and the absence of images, underscored the challenges of conveying the rich tapestry of African art and its diverse subjectivities and cultures solely through this medium.

The Digital Curation Journey

Developing a personal website for my master's project, I embraced the dual roles of process curator and copywriter, adopting a six-phase methodology to encapsulate my academic persona and achievements within a digital platform.

Phase 1: Conceptualisation and Planning

The journey began with introspection, identifying the key objectives and milestones of my academic path. This foundational phase was crucial for setting the direction of the website, ensuring that it would accurately reflect my intellectual and creative aspirations.

Curatorial Strategy for the Digital Exhibition

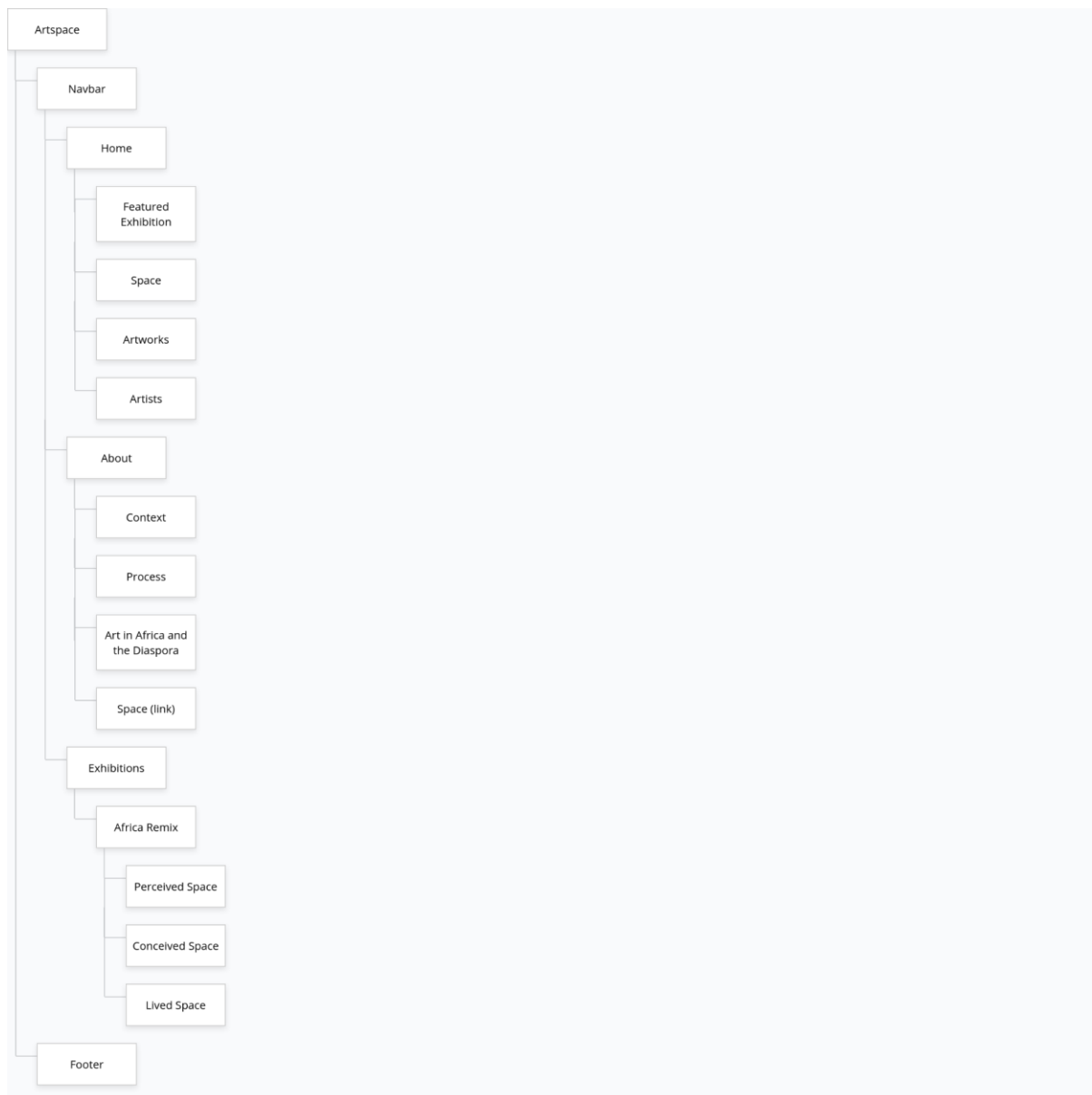
For the digital rendition of "*Africa Remix*," I conceptualized "*Africa Remix; Reposted*." This name was chosen to highlight the digital reinterpretation of the original exhibition. I utilized Webflow, a low-code platform for web development and design, to bring this virtual exhibition to life. This decision was influenced by the platform's ability to foster rich, interactive experiences akin to physical exhibitions, and its Content Management System (CMS) capabilities, which allowed for the efficient organization and presentation of artworks and artists akin to a dynamic digital catalogue.

Webflow's CMS feature was pivotal in transforming my initial concept, initially developed in Notion, into a structured digital exhibition. It enables the creation of "Collections" – groups of items sharing common properties. This functionality facilitated the association between artists and their works, enhancing the exhibition's navigability. Each entry in a collection, representing either an artist or an artwork, could be assigned labels and images, creating a detailed and consistent presentation across the platform. This system ensured uniformity across the exhibition, eliminating the need for individual design efforts for each entry while presenting all pertinent information elegantly.

Conversely, Notion's approach to item categorization is distinct. Ideally, employing its tables to directly input each piece of information into designated columns would have been straightforward. Aiming for a user-friendly initial submission, I opted for a more elaborate structure. I allocated a separate column for each basic detail about the artists or artworks, such as titles, creation dates, mediums, reference links, and images, alongside their association with relevant artists or artworks. This was complemented by detailed descriptions and superior images within each item's page, such as an artist's biography, enhancing the depth and engagement of the digital exhibition experience.

Sitemap

I then created a visual sitemap. A sitemap is a structured list or diagram representing the organization of content on a website, outlining how the website's pages are arranged and linked together. It serves as a navigational guide, illustrating the relationships between different parts of the website, making it an essential tool for website designers, developers, and users.



Sitemap V1

Phase 2: Data Organisation

The vast quantity of data soon redirected my focus towards organization first. Originally envisaging the site as a multifaceted hub capable of hosting numerous exhibitions, my limited experience with Webflow prompted a strategic pivot. For the moment, I have narrowed the scope to meticulously curate *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* within this digital space, a decision stemming from practicality and a desire to ensure quality and depth in my curation.

Dedicating several days to this endeavor underscored the enormity of the task—managing a substantial collection of artworks, each with unique data points such as dates, artists, and

titles. The absence of comprehensive descriptions for some pieces highlighted the challenge of conveying their full context digitally. My efforts to amass information through exhaustive research, including acquiring a second-hand exhibition catalogue personally signed by Simon Njami, emphasized my dedication to authenticity and depth in the digital curation process.

I briefly considered grouping artworks by their artist's origin. This initial idea of categorizing artworks by country of origin evolved as I recognized the complexity of artists' identities and affiliations. Acknowledging the exhibition's intent to represent African voices broadly, I shifted towards thematic groupings—Body and Soul, City and Land, History and Identity.

Data Organization and Project Phasing

Embarking on this project, I encountered the practical necessity of organizing the extensive data at hand. This preparatory step laid the groundwork for a focused curation, specifically of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. By confining the project's scope, I allowed myself to dedicate the necessary attention to creating a meaningful and well-structured digital exhibition. This initial phase has been crucial in establishing a solid foundation, which can be expanded upon as my proficiency with Webflow enhances.

As the curator, my approach was bifurcated into two primary phases:

- 1. Content Management System (CMS) Configuration and Artwork Integration:**

This phase involved intricate decisions on the digital transference of artworks.

Recognizing that not all pieces would translate effectively into a digital medium, I introduced a "shout out" section for those unable to convey their essence online. This decision was guided by my curatorial discretion, ensuring each artwork's presentation remained faithful to its original intention.

- 2. Webflow Customization for an Immersive User Experience:** Understanding the diversity within the exhibition, I categorized artworks by type—such as single images, series, installations, and more—to tailor the digital interface for an engaging user interaction. This methodical categorization facilitated a nuanced digital representation, respecting the unique character of each artwork.

- Enriching the dataset with artwork descriptions to deepen engagement

Although this is an ongoing effort, [Monday.com](https://monday.com) has proven invaluable in identifying incomplete data entries. The subsequent phase involved Webflow, focusing solely on its CMS aspect due to challenges with bulk editing. Unlike direct editing, Webflow requires exporting the collection to a CSV file for bulk modifications (utilizing Google Sheets and [Monday.com](https://monday.com) for edits). The re-import process is crucial as each collection item possesses a unique ID, essential for updating existing entries without duplicates. This aspect of the workflow, while exhaustive, was crucial for maintaining data integrity.

Structuring the Artworks

I have briefly touched upon utilizing Webflow's capability to create individual templates for each artwork. This method worked seamlessly for artworks represented by a single image, as it allowed for a straightforward presentation of each piece. I aspired for the website to transcend a mere collection of images, aiming to offer a holistic and immersive experience. This ambition led me to confront the limitations of a standard template for artworks, each unique in its essence. Here, I delve into the concept of a palimpsest and its relevance to my project.

Palimpsest: A Metaphorical Exploration

A palimpsest traditionally refers to a manuscript or writing material reused or altered with traces of its previous writings still visible. It symbolizes a medium carrying layers of history, each layer contributing to its current state while retaining marks of its past.

In literary and cultural contexts, the term palimpsest serves as a metaphor to describe entities with complex, layered histories where each stratum, although not entirely visible, plays a role in the entity's cumulative meaning. This metaphor aptly applies to the virtual exhibition space, treating it as a canvas where diverse layers—comprising the original artworks, artists' intentions, historical and socio-political contexts, digital interpretations, and my curatorial decisions—coalesce.

The concept of the palimpsest allows for an exploration of the exhibition as a multi-layered narrative, where each "layer" or element enriches the experience without entirely overshadowing its predecessors. It offers a framework to examine the interplay of various

dimensions—artistic, historical, digital, and interpretative—highlighting the dynamic interactions that contribute to the nuanced understanding of the exhibition.

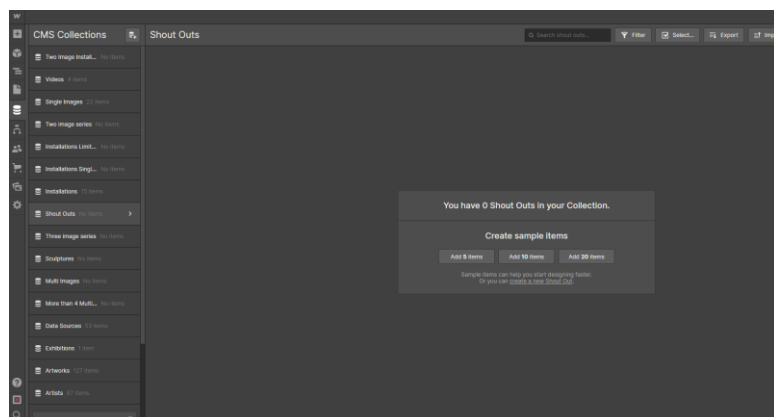
In applying the palimpsest metaphor, I aim to navigate the complexity of my project, acknowledging how different contexts, ideas, and interpretations intertwine. This approach seeks to encapsulate the depth and diversity inherent in the artworks and the exhibition, mirroring broader inquiries into representation, identity, and the spatial dynamics of art.

Insights from a Digital Content Perspective

My experience in a software development agency, primarily engaged in content writing and digital marketing strategies (SEO, SEM), offers a pertinent reflection on contemporary digital consumption habits. The digital realm, much like modern exhibitions, prioritizes brevity and visual appeal to cater to diminishing attention spans and a preference for instantaneous comprehension.

This observation underscores a prevailing trend in digital and visual culture, emphasizing the need for content to be immediately graspable and visually engaging. Such an approach not only aligns with current consumption patterns but also challenges me to integrate these principles into the exhibition design, ensuring that it resonates with today's audiences while preserving the depth and complexity of the artworks and their narratives.

In the realm of curating a virtual exhibition, the contrast between the inherent complexity of artworks and the prevailing trends of digital accessibility presents a nuanced challenge. The artworks and themes I am exploring demand an engaged interaction to be fully understood, juxtaposed against a digital environment that favors simplicity and immediate graspability. This dichotomy forces a contemplation on achieving a delicate equilibrium—how to honor the depth and intricacy of the artworks while also crafting an experience that aligns with the expectations of contemporary digital users.



With this consideration at the forefront, I endeavored to devise a methodical approach to the organization of artworks, aiming to layer them in a manner that reflects their belonging to various series or installations. Initially, the classification was granular, leading to an overly complex system. Acknowledging this, I streamlined the categories to a manageable structure, focusing on:

- Videos
- Series
- Installations
- Shout Outs (Using the tiering system developed when I created the Notion Database, those that could not be accurately re-presented without sacrificing their Aura were placed here)

This refined categorization proved more functional and coherent.

Phase 3: Design and Visualisation

With a clear vision in place, I transitioned into designing the website's visual layout. This involved creating wireframes and prototypes that represented my academic ethos, incorporating feedback from mentors to refine the user experience and design aesthetics.

Embarking on the design phase, my initial attempts with pre-designed templates proved unsatisfactory, prompting a strategic reassessment akin to my professional workflow. This involved setting clear objectives, conducting research, brainstorming logo designs, exploring stylescapes, and developing wireframes. The chosen stylescape incorporated Blanka for titles, lending distinctiveness, and Monserrant for body text, ensuring legibility.



In defiance of the conventional "White Cube" gallery model, I opted for a UI design that minimizes white space, save for text, to emphasize context. A particular grey texture, discovered in one of the themes, provided a subtle backdrop that resonated with me. Complementing this were shades of lighter grey and whitish tones for variety. However, the challenge of color selection was profound. Initially inclined to represent Africa's diverse identities through a multitude of colors, I found this approach detracted from the artworks. A palette of orange, blue, and red was chosen for its harmonious interplay with grey, particularly favoring the combination of orange and grey.

The logo, designed to incorporate meaningful textures and circular forms symbolizing unity and continuity, encountered scalability issues. Despite this, the cream and orange hues became central to the design, encapsulating the exhibition's thematic essence. The logo's future might see further simplification as I continue to refine the exhibition's visual identity.

This journey of balancing artistic integrity with digital clarity underscores the evolving nature of curatorial practice within virtual spaces. It is a testament to the dynamic interplay between preserving the profundity of art and meeting the evolving expectations of a digital audience.

Phase 4: Technical Development

Bringing the design to life, this phase was dedicated to the technical construction of the website. It entailed developing a seamless and intuitive user interface, while curating and writing content that effectively communicated my research and academic reflections.

Envisioning an Interactive Exhibition Experience

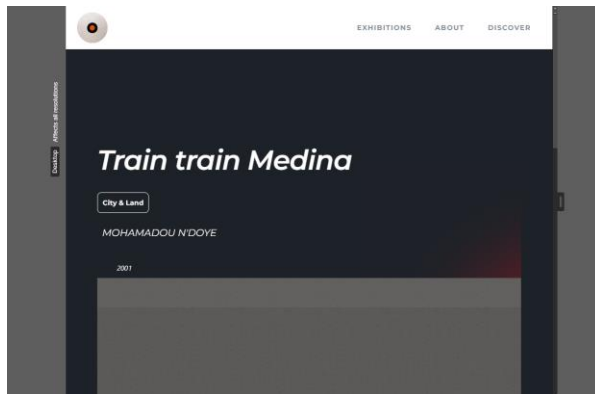
Inspired by a Webflow template, I envisaged an interactive exhibition that accommodates various engagement levels. By allowing users to interact with installations—zooming into details, providing contextual information, and integrating interactive features—I aim to create a dynamic online experience. This approach reflects a commitment to preserving the physical artworks' Aura while embracing the opportunities of digital innovation.

Interactivity and User Engagement

The pursuit of interactivity became a central theme in transitioning the exhibition to a virtual space. Despite initial concerns about replicating the immersive experience of physical exhibitions, I explored various digital avenues to engage viewers. Utilizing Webflow's CMS

allowed for a nuanced categorization and presentation of the artworks, although my lack of development experience necessitated learning and adaptation. The support from my team, along with strategic planning akin to our professional projects, laid the groundwork for a coherent and interactive digital exhibition.

This journey through the digital curation of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*

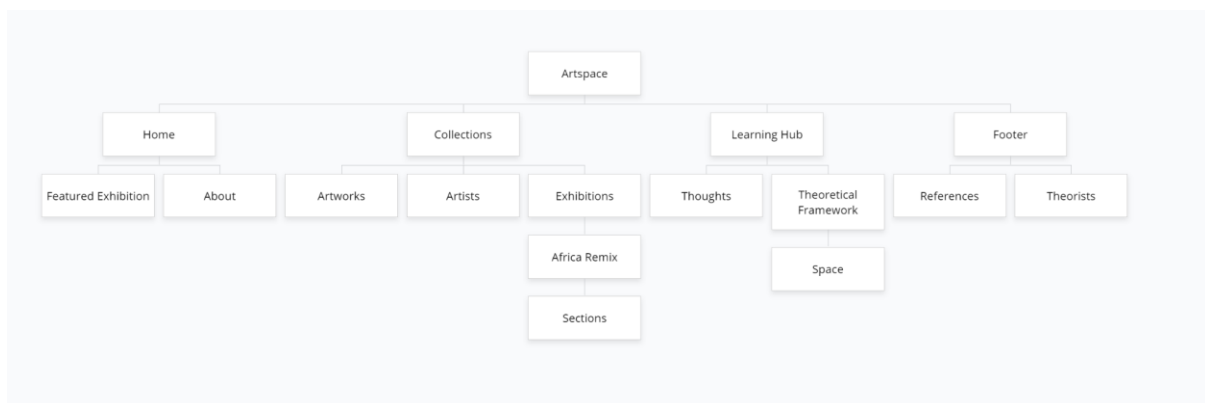


has been both challenging and enlightening. By focusing on a detailed, respectful, and ethically mindful approach to digital exhibition design, I aim to bridge the gap between physical art experiences and their digital counterparts. This project stands as a testament to the potential of digital platforms to enrich and extend the life of traditional exhibitions, ensuring their accessibility and

relevance in the digital age.

Revising the Sitemap

The initial sitemap was proving to be a navigational nightmare. I reconsidered it, keeping in mind the idea of the palimpsest above.



Sitemap V2

Sensory Engagement and MediTation

Analytical Approach to Artwork Descriptions

Incorporating descriptions necessitates a careful blend of technical data and interpretive analysis, ensuring that each artwork is presented with respect to its context, medium, and thematic significance. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the artworks, beyond mere visual aesthetics, by delving into the historical and cultural backgrounds that inform each piece.

Phase 5: Launch and Evaluation

The launch phase was both a culmination and a beginning, involving meticulous final checks and optimizations to ensure the website's readiness. Emphasising cross-platform compatibility and SEO, the launch was planned to ensure the website's accessibility and visibility.

Preparing for Future Reflections

Acknowledging the ongoing nature of this project, I recognize the importance of documenting these challenges and considerations for future reference. This process not only aids in navigating the immediate tasks at hand but also serves as a valuable resource for reflective analysis and academic discourse on the intersection of technology, art curation, and spatial theory.

Reflecting on the Process

The contrast between managing professional projects with precision and navigating personal projects revealed an insightful paradox. Despite this, the structured approach I adopted in creating the website intended to merge technical proficiency with creative expression, demonstrating a commitment to delivering a cohesive and impactful digital presence.

Challenges

I navigated numerous challenges, from practical aspects of grouping and presentation to deeper concerns about authenticity and the evolving nature of art.

Challenges of Authenticity and Online Representation

Translating the authenticity of physical installations into the digital realm poses significant challenges, especially when considering the diverse range of 127 artworks. My concern revolves around striking a balance between facilitating exploration and dictating interpretation, ensuring that the digital representation honors the original's value and essence. This task entails a thoughtful approach to how artworks are presented online, aiming to replicate the physical experience as faithfully as possible.

Ethical Considerations in Digital Representation

In translating the physical exhibition to a digital realm, I employed a three-tiered system to assess each artwork's suitability for online presentation. This framework considered the potential alteration of an artwork's meaning, experience, and value when moved to a digital format. Inspired by Walter Benjamin's contemplation on art reproduction, this methodological approach was integral in maintaining the integrity and authenticity of the artworks. Certain pieces were reserved for potential future inclusion, reflecting a commitment to preserve the artists' original visions and the artworks' intrinsic Aura.

My stance on not altering the Aura of artworks significantly influenced the selection process for the online exhibition. This consideration was particularly pertinent for works that could not be faithfully represented digitally. I envisioned the website transitioning from an archive and exhibition space to a community forum, although feasibility concerns led to the exploration of social media platforms as alternative community-building spaces.

Navigating Digital Challenges

One major hurdle I faced was the unexpected copyright claims on many images I had utilized, prompting a reconsideration of their inclusion. This experience reinforced my commitment to respecting artists' rights and the integrity of their work. Hence, I refrained from re-uploading any claimed images, acknowledging the importance of ethical curation in the digital sphere.

The Challenge of Content and Consent

Curating a virtual exhibition raises complex questions about visibility, representation, and consent, especially for artists who have gained prominence since their participation in *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. Balancing the desire to showcase a broad spectrum

of African art against the need to respect artists' rights and intentions presents challenges surrounding the importance of cautious and respectful curation.

Despite these challenges, digitizing the exhibition offers an unparalleled opportunity to reach a global audience, contrasting with the physical limitations of traditional museum spaces, which, despite their broad reach, can sometimes be perceived as elitist. The digital platform promises a more inclusive approach, though it simultaneously narrows the audience due to access limitations. This dichotomy underscores the central theme of the exhibition: portraying Africa beyond a singular narrative. Simon Njami, in his opening essay, characterizes Africa as "schizophrenic," a term that raises questions about the intended audience of his message. Initially, it appeared the exhibition spoke to an international audience, but its arrival at the Johannesburg Art Gallery suggests a dialogue with an African audience as well.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Contemporaneity

Mr. Njami loves this word. During the AtWork workshop, he asked the group to provide a definition of Contemporaneity. He has this composed, quiet way of speaking where it's not quite a mumble and his accent masks the vowels on the latter part of the word, so I was not sure what he'd even said. We were in a circle. I was near the end. Hearing everyone's answers, I grew more and more confident that I had no idea what the term meant – or even what the question was. So, when it was my turn to answer, I confidently said, "It's a type of prehistoric bird."

According to Mr. Njami, contemporaneity is a multifaceted concept that cannot be restricted to a single, global definition. It is a daily phenomenon that exists across all levels of African societies and is driven by an atavistic need to create. It is innovative in that it challenges established rules and can draw on various sources such as religion, tradition, and daily life. However, it is not necessarily concerned with the international art market or the collective sensibility of the artist's home country. Elective contemporaneity, on the other hand, is a generational phenomenon that is often politicized and individualistic. It keeps its feet on specific ground and is aware of global movements, but also has a nostalgically realistic view of the world. Contemporaneity is a constantly evolving history that prompts us to rethink ourselves as protean beings with multiple, changeable identities. *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* is multi-disciplinary because it recognizes that creativity is multi-dimensional and cannot be confined to specific disciplines or categories. The artists featured in the exhibition share ambitions and doubts that may not be shared by their societies and demonstrate different forms of contemporaneity that co-exist without necessarily echoing each other.

Contemporaneity is a concept that refers to the present moment and the current state of affairs. It is often used in the context of art and literature to describe works that are relevant and engaged with the contemporary world. In this sense, contemporaneity is not only about the time in which a work is created, but also about its engagement with the issues, concerns, and experiences of that time.

Contemporaneity can take on different forms and meanings depending on the context and perspective of the individual or group experiencing it. It is not a fixed or static concept, but rather a dynamic and fluid one that is shaped by the social, cultural, and historical forces at play. As such, it can be difficult to define or classify contemporaneity in a universal or absolute way.

In the context of African art and culture, contemporaneity can be seen as a way of engaging with and responding to the ongoing processes of change and transformation that are taking place on the continent. It is not limited to a particular style or medium, but rather is characterized by a sense of innovation and creativity that transcends traditional boundaries and categories. Contemporaneity in African art can be seen as a way of creating and expressing identity in a rapidly changing and globalized world, and as a means of engaging with and shaping the future.

Contemporaneity is a broad and multifaceted concept that can be understood and experienced in different ways depending on the context and perspective of the individual or group. In the context of African art and culture, contemporaneity can be seen as a way of engaging with and responding to the ongoing processes of change and transformation that are taking place on the continent, and as a means of creating and expressing identity in a rapidly changing and globalized world. It is characterized by a sense of innovation and creativity that transcends traditional boundaries and categories.

A Fire in the Cape

On the 18th of April 2021, a wildfire that began on the slopes of Table Mountain, spread from the vicinity of Philip Kgosana Drive to Rhodes Memorial and reached the University of Cape Town (UCT). The fire destroyed the Jagger Reading Room's roof and galleries, and in the aftermath, officials at the University of Cape Town (UCT) discovered that the basement was also affected by water (Palm, 2022).

The Jagger Reading Room was a part of the UCT Libraries' Special Collections, which includes a wide array of material on African studies and other specialized subjects, as well as manuscripts and personal papers. The building previously served as the university's main library and later as a short-loans center before becoming a reading room for African studies (Davids, 2021). The Jagger Reading Room contained the university's significant African

Studies Collection, which, since its creation in 1953, comprised various books, films, photographs, and records. The fire consumed the archival and published print collections (McGreevy, 2021). UCT immediately began working to recover and digitize the damaged and lost materials, and a temporary roof has been built at the affected area. The digitization of exhibitions like *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* certainly brings up interesting questions about the production of knowledge and the impact of virtual experiences on art appreciation. As mentioned, the loss of the physical space and installations can diminish the full impact of the artworks. There may be limitations in the representation of the artworks online, such as loss of resolution or color accuracy.

It is also important to consider the benefits of online exhibitions. The accessibility of the exhibition has the potential to reach a wider audience and bring attention to the art and artists involved. It also provides the opportunity for individuals who may not have been able to physically attend the exhibition to engage with the content and have a sense of what it was like.

As to whether or not digital media is a neutral space, the answer is not so straightforward. The internet and digital media are not neutral in the sense that they are shaped by the values, biases, and interests of those who create and control them. However, the ability for multiple subjectivities to interact and engage with the content on a digital platform could potentially lead to a more diverse range of perspectives and discussions.

While the digitization of exhibitions like *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* brings up certain limitations, it also opens up new opportunities for accessibility and interaction. It is important to be aware of the potential biases and limitations of digital media, but also to embrace the potential for diverse perspectives and discussions to emerge.

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