

UNDERMINING THE IMMEDIACY



TOWER^{MMK}

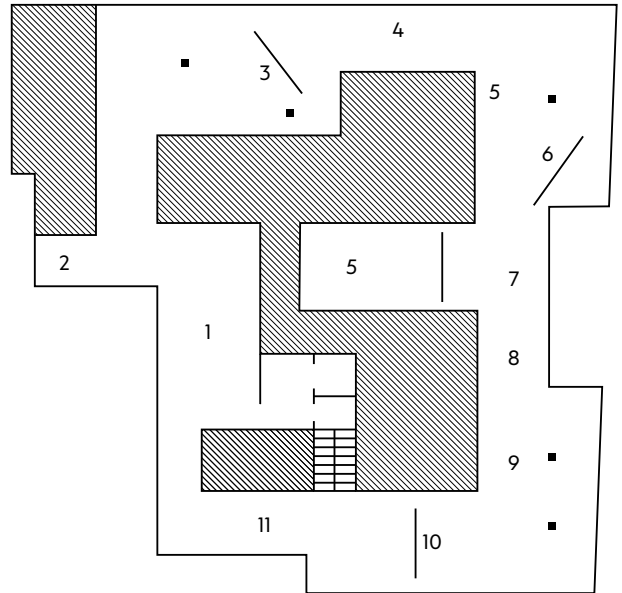
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Elom 20ce
Eline Benjaminsen
Musquiqui Chihying
Taína Cruz
Hamishi Farah
Olia Fedorova
Gregor Kasper
Alexandre Khondji
Atiéna R. Kilfa
Elias Kimaiyo
Jason Loeb
Shaun Motsi
Christelle Oyiri
Coumba Samba

When the present seems to have abandoned the future, we need to observe the here and now more closely. These artists' works are clear and detached, analytically precise and calm to present the state of affairs right now in all its complexity. In doing so, they undermine and refuse to comply with an omnipresent immediacy that manifests itself in the form of accelerated availability, speed, consumability, and instant legibility. Defying powerlessness and paralysis, the works address contemporary wars and their economic and political implications, dealing with climate change and socioeconomic power structures in various societies. Yet they invariably retain an awareness not only of our planetary present being permanently and repeatedly reconfigured from assorted constructions of the Real but also of the extent to which we are part of it all.

Floor Plan



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| 1. Olia Fedorova | 7. Christelle Oyiri |
| 2. Hamishi Farah | 8. Taína Cruz |
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1. Olia Fedorova

You are now leaving II, 2025

In many European countries, a struck-through place name signifies that a boundary has been crossed—you are leaving one territorial unit and entering another. In Olia Fedorova's work *You are now leaving II*, which is the second version of the artwork she made in 2022 for the Changwon Sculpture Biennale in South Korea, the artist (b. 1994) transforms this everyday symbol into a haunting image for taking flight, for loss, and for the pain of bidding farewell to her Ukrainian homeland. Like many displaced people, she too left her native country without any idea of if and when she will be able to see it again.

The absence of place names on the metal signs, leaving only a diagonal line in place, refers to the danger of entire places and towns being extinguished by the Russian war of aggression, but it also denotes memories fading gradually. The installation's spatial arrangement echoes the cross typically found on graves in Ukrainian graveyards. This turns the erected signs into silent memorials not only to the places whose existence was wiped out by wartime violence but also to the many victims of war. At the same time, eradicating the place names indicates that destroying locations is also an attempt to attack and eliminate collective identity and history—by assaulting historically significant buildings as well as archives and printing facilities.

Yet, *You are now leaving II* also functions as a space where other people's histories and universally shared experiences of displacement and war can resonate. For many of those who have been forced to flee or been expelled, the places of their homeland remain only within their memories. Fedorova's work shows the immeasurable pain of this parting and bears witness to resistance against forgetting.

2. Hamishi Farah

Pawn, 2023, 11 works

Hamishi Farah's work shows portraits of an army; whether in action or repose is not clear. In number they are replete like asymmetric warfare or like something that hasn't happened yet.

Something that has already happened, asymmetrically: Black portraiture has been through an intense though not unprecedented reevaluation in recent years, something like how coltan was an innocent rock before the rise of cellphones put it to work. Frenzied attempts to grasp recent history, aka the fluctuating symbolic fortunes of Blackness and its relation to money and death, are the art-world equivalent of tantalum capacitors.

Hamishi Farah (b. 1991) represents the aesthetic and political impasse presented by the hyper-object of Black representation by painting Black people exclusively given iconicity by world fame, for example a recent painting of Beyoncé and Jay-Z in the sea and, now, these eleven well-known figures. The simplicity of the gesture—we face the black pieces as the white side—contains a complicated wager about representation and play.

The art world is rife with belief in rules and stratagems: an elaborate social game of recognition, hierarchy, and wealth. It is, like chess, an abstract game of tactics with only an extrinsic element of chance. To make this observation would perhaps only be to align Farah with some of the more arch and angry white conceptualists, but there are important differences of commitment. In Farah's work, sadism is not a defensive subversion of a too-sincere belief in aesthetics but the basic problem of our era. Categories of law/rules of the game are a cover for an all-pervasive sadism, the sadism of capital.

The circulation of Blackness makes clear that the matrix of the market is white supremacy in action. Yet the point of Farah's work is not to reveal its self-evidently difficult predicament but instead to make a somewhat tongue-in-cheek promise, the promise of a game: that conflict could be fun, funny and/or not that big of a deal. Sadism not reified but disarmed, dethroned. In this trickster-god guise, Farah's work is a crypto-utopian comedy forged from the materials of dystopia.

In chess, White always has an advantage because they are given the first move, and Black is left striving towards

something a little bit humiliating like equality. But thankfully from the point of view of the chessboard, black and white is just a famous binary right up there with one and zero. Like binary code it's a metaphor with real effects. These little guys are constrained to move according to their "nature." That some shared accidents in the realm of the hereditary have turned us into living signs of captivity or freedom might be approximately the same mirror-stage process. Against Blackness as a trap and for it as a breath-taking play with world history, Farah's anti-representational representation energetically refutes the widespread myth that painting can make an image of a person.

These paintings present Farah's side, the Black side. Visitors to the exhibition face the paintings as the white pieces face the black pieces on a board. The possible moves, playing as white: love, hate, leave, buy. It's extremely serious and it's just for fun.

To figure an audience as antagonistic pieces on an abstract board reminds of Farah's previous playful provocations: What if Rachel Dolezal were a readymade? What if the body of Roberto Cavalli could be declared a nation state? Farah is the funniest artist working now, and therefore, of course, the most serious. Horror of one kind or another is reconfigured as absurdity, via the psychopathic mechanisms of the law. Living nightmares reappear as humorous dreams. Play is a way to live. But you cannot win.

3. Atiéna R. Kilfa

Rotor Vector, 2024

Sitting behind a heavy wooden table, an archetypal patriarch is looking at us with an unbroken gaze. Reproducing the image of the *éminence grise* is an integral element of the narrative vocabulary of film history. Atiéna R. Kilfa (b. 1990) uses the aesthetic of film noir to conjure up its dystopian underworlds. The seated figure is reminiscent of the fictional character Dr. Mabuse, created by Norbert Jacques for several of his novels. Fritz Lang's two-part film of *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922) was a box-office hit. Using hypnosis and manipulation to achieve his ends, the criminal mastermind Dr. Mabuse symbolizes control and greed in an era of societal division. Lang's sequel *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933) presented an allegory of the Nazi takeover. After the film was banned in Germany, Lang emigrated to the United States.

Referencing the rise of fascism in the 1920s and a central autocratic figure, Kilfa's work links the past and the present. The camera's meticulous gaze and the dramatic arrangement of the objects on the desk entice the viewer to immerse themselves fully in the atmosphere. In Lang's films, Dr. Mabuse's ingenious manipulation allows him to pursue his machinations and scheming beyond his own death.

Kilfa follows on from this by presenting the mechanisms that cause our perception to be deceived, as the enormous potency of her figure is abruptly undone by this glimpse behind the scenes: The gray eminence does not exist, for the supposed puppet master is swiftly exposed as a one-dimensional projection screen.

Today, visual and narrative instances of manipulation have experienced a renaissance through conspiracy theories and fake news, and are increasingly serving autocratic forces. Kilfa shows that the reality can only really be experienced via a complex process of perception and by critically questioning one's own perspective.

4. Jason Loebis

In the Raw, 2022

hole-and-corner, 2022

germ Silo, 2022

Sacked, 2022

Sedition, 2022

grit scale, 2022

Granular Subject, 2022

The decline began with storage. In American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins' classic 1972 work *Stone Age Economics*, he establishes that one of the major differences between stateless nomadic societies and those that have become settled and are hence in the process of forming a state is that settled people start storing foodstuffs. And among the first goods to be stored were the kernels of cultivated grain.

Jason Loebis' (b. 1981) "grain pictures" from 2022 tap into the mentalities surrounding the practice of becoming settled, which changed the way people feel and think more radically than any other process in human history. The artist goes one step further than Sahlins in alluding to the direct consequences of the stored grain. Trading stored goods necessitated something that would serve as an equivalent, because the grain itself could not be brought to the marketplace. This was how money developed as an easily transported equivalent, which then led to a system of taxation that would guarantee basic income streams for states. A new order for the way humans interact developed around the stored and traded grain, resulting in the emergence of entirely new categories of individual such as a sovereign who set and collected taxes.

Jason Loebis views artists who install and exhibit their art in a gallery space for the art market as essentially mimicking the sovereign imposing taxes. Here he also employs the material that triggered the most fundamental change ever in the course of humankind—namely grain—as a simple reminder to himself: grain is at the root of his hubris, too.

5. Shaun Motsi

NGO, 2020

Masters (Prompt), 2023

Masters (Part 1), 2023

Masters (Part 1) is a fictional film about Mr. Clarke, a retired Black independent filmmaker invited to teach a course on filmmaking for a high-profile online edutainment platform's Black Masters initiative. His young assistant, Aria, challenges the ethical implications of his participation, questioning whether the platform's agenda is genuinely about expanding knowledge or simply capitalizing on Black expertise. Through this interplay, Shaun Motsi (b. 1989) explores the uneasy relationship between institutional recognition, visibility, and cultural agency.

At its core, *Masters (Part 1)* reflects on an ongoing dialogue between older and younger generations as Mr. Clarke and Aria embody distinct perspectives on history, authority, and the evolving politics of representation highlighting the tensions, contradictions, and shared aspirations that shape intergenerational discourse. Through his sharp critique of the contemporary edutainment industry, Motsi questions who is granted authority as a "master" and how the institutions of knowledge continue to mediate racialized discourse. *Masters (Part 1)* operates as both a fictional narrative and a theoretical inquiry, prompting viewers to consider the ideological frameworks embedded in cultural production.

By engaging with Race Film aesthetics (an African-American film genre, from around 1910) and the didactic traditions of cinematic pedagogy, *Masters (Part 1)* situates itself within a broader historiographical critique of how Black knowledge has historically been disseminated and coopted. Motsi's film extends the discourse on Black cultural labor, asking how structures of expertise are racialized and what it means to perform authority in spaces that both invite and delimit participation. The work foregrounds a crisis of legitimacy within contemporary digital knowledge economies, where visibility often stands in for structural change, and where access to institutional platforms does not necessarily equate to agency or authorship.

Water running into Black hands, as in the painting *NGO*, is one of those iconic images that non-governmental charitable organizations use to draw attention to their work and solicit donations. Water, especially fresh water, has

undergone a radical change in meaning in recent years. It is no longer primarily the thirst-quenching and fertility-bringing power for the soil. The consequences of an extreme shortage of water during drought and an extreme surplus during heavy rainfall are just as serious: Drought dries out the soil and heavy rain washes the last fertile minerals from the upper layers into the depths, destroying the soil just as drought does. Motsi's picture is also a reminder of how important regulated water use is for the basic supply of every population.

6. Elom 20ce, Musquiqui Chihying, and Gregor Kasper

The Currency—Sensing 1 Agboglobloshie, 2023

The Currency—Sensing 1 Agboglobloshie is the first part of a transcontinental long-term research project by three artists; Elom 20ce (b. 1982), Musquiqui Chihying (b. 1985), and Gregor Kasper (b. 1986). The film engages with the material and environmental consequences of global digital economies within one of the world's largest e-waste sites—Agboglobloshie in Accra, Ghana. Agboglobloshie has become emblematic of the uneven geographies of technological waste, a place where devices designed for obsolescence in the Global North find new, often hazardous, afterlives. The film investigates how human labor and technological debris intersect, shaping new forms of value, survival, and adaptation.

At the heart of the work is the notion of “sensing”—a reference both to technological sensors and the lived, embodied experience of those working within Agboglobloshie's toxic landscapes. In the film we notice Elom 20ce listening to the sounds created by this waste. The sound component, composed of field recordings and processed frequencies, amplifies the sonic textures of Agboglobloshie's environment.

Agboglobloshie is not merely a site of waste accumulation but a locus of contested material histories, where the epistemologies of labor, sound, and ecological degradation coalesce. The film resists the reductive framing of Agboglobloshie as a dystopian periphery of the digital age and instead positions it as a dynamic node within a planetary network of extraction and redistribution. In doing so, it foregrounds the entanglement of sensory perception and material knowledge, asking how acts of listening and sensing within this environment might constitute forms of counter-archiving—modes of understanding the global circuits of e-waste beyond economic and ecological catastrophe.

7. Christelle Oyiri

CHOOSE YOUR FIGHTER (EMO), 2025
CHOOSE YOUR FIGHTER (GOTH), 2025
CHOOSE YOUR FIGHTER (PUNK), 2025
CHOOSE YOUR FIGHTER (RASTA), 2025
CHOOSE YOUR FIGHTER (RAVE), 2025
CHOOSE YOUR FIGHTER (SKATE), 2025

Gothic, punk, rave, hip-hop, skater, emo – found footage, glitches, and double exposures spliced with personal images. Applied to ordinary plastic furniture reminiscent of cafeteria tables, as seen in countless coming-of-age films, they convey a sense of nostalgia for a past adolescence: its nostalgia, immanence, and subversions. Often a form of opposition, a means of togetherness that resists the mainstream, subcultures deviate from the normative. It is a chance for a generation of young people to create a sense of community that fosters connections and enables resistance.

Their gradual erosion—or even institutionalization—is closely tied to the velocity of digital identities. The opacity of remaining underground, of swiveling away from the main pack and finding one's own, is what often attracts young people to a subculture. Data flow and image dissemination has reached such a vehemence in today's internet culture that transposed the entire subculture system online, radically changing how subcultural behavior is performed and demarcated. In an era of endless circulation, in which meanings dissolve into aesthetics and rebellion is packaged ready for consumption, subcultures become hollow relics.

The work *CHOOSE YOUR FIGHTER* by Christelle Oyiri (b. 1992) does not simply dissolve in mourning the loss of a subcultural past, but attempts to sketch out its future. Subcultural structures, which persist in fragments and wait for new forms of solidarity to emerge, are reconfigured and come to life in an ever-evolving digital economy: an economy of commodities and values.

8. Taína Cruz

Tyra in the Middle, 2023

Time Out Clone, 2023

Look'ere I picked this up on 125th, 2023

I'm from the Bronx, 2023

Night out, 2023

El Bronx nunca Duerme, 2024

Taína Cruz (b. 1998) is a multifaceted artist whose work spans painting, sculpture, and video. Her distinctive visual language emerges through the manipulation of digital imagery, a process that involves altering photographs and visual material from her expansive digital archive.

In her paintings, Cruz often begins by digitally manipulating images, creating compositions that she later translates onto canvas or wood. This method allows her to engage with contemporary themes such as the proliferation of deepfakes, social media's role in shaping self-image, and the commodification of the body. *Tyra in the Middle* depicts an altered selfie that resembles Tyra Banks whose TV show *America's Next Top Model* unwittingly shaped beauty standards in the last decade. The painting, like most of Cruz's work, has a ghostly quality to it which explores the complexities of self-representation in the digital age.

Cruz says of her work, "I grew up with the internet as this voice of community and opinions, so it's always necessary for me to tackle new age cybernetics in combination with ancestral wisdom and ideas. Combining those two creates solutions for the future. It also creates an inner peace for myself. I really like to play on the past, present, and future in my work, and technology is the future regardless of what anyone says. The artifacts are my way of confirming that I will have a place in the future."

Cruz's practice can be read as an excavation of the digital unconscious, where the spectral residues of media saturation coalesce into new forms of subjectivity. Her paintings occupy a liminal space between image and artifact, reconfiguring the semiotics of Black representation within an era of hypervisibility and algorithmic determinism. By layering digital distortion with painterly intervention, she constructs a dialectic between the hyperreal and the mythopoetic, foregrounding the body as a site of both technological inscriptions. In this way, Cruz's work not merely depicts the mediated self—it interrogates the

ontological conditions under which the self is rendered, asking whether the act of seeing, in an age of infinite circulation, is ever truly neutral.

9. Alexandre Khondji

Reservoir, 2025

Alexandre Khondji's (b. 1993) work *Reservoir* consists of a flexible water tank, an industrially manufactured product. It can be used in various locations, such as a domestic garden, under the fruit trees in a commercial orchard, between construction site containers, and even in a sufficiently large basement. This collapsible water storage tank stands for the scarcity of an element that was once held to be infinite: water.

The ancient Greek philosophers believed water was as infinite and immortal as air, earth, and fire—the other components of their four-element theory. And the portion of humankind that regarded itself as civilized followed this principle for millennia, until the mid-nineteenth century when French historian Jules Michelet declared that at least the oceans were finite and mortal like any other living organism. Today, water makes entire swathes of land uninhabitable through its absence in horrendous droughts or the no less terrifying torrents in periods of heavy rain. It has become a precious asset but also a very expensive one, and it makes sense that people should store it privately too, provided it can be kept reasonably fresh.

10. Eline Benjaminsen and Elias Kimaiyo

Footprints in the Valley, 2024

Footprints in the Valley is part of a project that Norwegian artist Eline Benjaminsen (b. 1992) is pursuing with Indigenous land rights activist Elias Kimaiyo (b. 1980): Lush vegetation in green and gray hues features in pictures of a hilly landscape, whose trees are characteristically bent over from the constant wind. The tree trunks and larger branches, weakened by the gusts, are often overgrown with dense moss and ferns, the primal plants that first enabled life on land when they moved from water to *terra firma* by transferring oxygen production from water into the air.

A male voice resounds over the images of this strangely reduced landscape, starting with the statement that when he heard the air would be sold, he wondered how air could possibly be traded. The narrator first imagined long pipes connecting Europe with his African homeland, through which the air would be forced. Having swiftly realized his error, he immediately corrected himself and now understands that Europeans trading air are not literally talking about the air; instead, it's all about the African land—in the sense of property—that provides a home and sustenance to millions of Africans.

This is a conflict that Elias Kimaiyo faces daily, as a member of the Indigenous Sengwer community in the Embobut Forest in Kenya. Rather than formally owning the title to their land in the Western legal sense, small-scale African farmers simply live with, on, and from their piece of earth. This means that international finance consortiums can treat their land as wasteland and appropriate it against their interests. The film's female voice tells us that this conflict takes us into new territory because the financial market has no memory. And so this work presents the convergence of Eline Benjaminsen's subject matter and methods—as someone who uses artistic, journalistic, and activist techniques to observe the financial markets, under the heading of "Follow the money"—and Kimaiyo's daily battle for the right to use the environment he inhabits.

Old antagonisms clash in this skirmish, such as the struggle between the forces of life and the potency of money. For even if air is the primal substance, as the pre-Socratic philosopher of air Anaximenes assumed, it has to be produced. As a mixture containing oxygen, as something that

literally exists in our world, it is dependent on algae and plants not only for its production in the first place, but also on their reproduction.

And having arisen from a long history, this life process is visualized in the film as a very real “footprint,” through pioneering plants such as moss and ferns. They are posited opposite a substance that, in the form of money, has become a general equivalent for everything and everyone, but it has one big flaw: Money regularly forgets the reason for the payment that preceded it, as sociologist Niklas Luhmann described in his 1997 study *Art as a Social System*. Money always lives without remembrance, which makes it ignorant to the forces that have enabled life and allowed it to flourish—and this is the emphatic message of *Footprints in the Valley*.

11. Coumba Samba

Radiator, 2024, 8 works

The price of gas, at least in Germany, has been in flux following Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, at one point reaching a record high of almost 74 percent increase. Coumba Samba’s (b. 2000) works, a series of painted radiators, foreground this reality while highlighting a long history of transnational capitalism: how it ripples into international relations, how it slashes through global politics.

The seemingly innocuous solid colors of the radiators reference an image of Vladimir Putin and Macky Sall, former president of Senegal, where the artist grew up, taken at the 2023 Russia–Africa Summit in St. Petersburg. In some way the radiators are an abstract reconstruction of this image and simultaneously a disassemblage of both flags, seen in the background of the two presidents shaking hands. Among sub-Saharan countries, Senegal ranks first in trade with Russia. Interestingly, while petroleum is Russia’s biggest export to Senegal, paintings are Senegal’s biggest exports to Russia. At the moment, Senegal’s application to join BRICS+, the intergovernmental organization formed in Russia in 2009 as a counterpart and alternative to the G7, is still under consideration.

The radiators function not merely as representations but as material witnesses to the circulation of power. Samba’s works gesture toward what remains obscured in economic discourse: the affective charge of commodities, the ideological inscriptions on everyday materials, and the uneven entanglements of postcolonial economies within the architectures of energy dependence. If the export of paintings from Senegal to Russia signals an ironic equivalence—art for oil—the works intervene in this circuit, refusing to let such exchanges remain neutral.

Imprint

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Hamishi Farah, *Pawn*, 2023,
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BACK COVER

Atiéna R. Kilfa, *Rotor Vector*, 2024,
film still, © the artist

INSIDE COVER PAGES

Shaun Motsi, *NGO*, 2020, © the artist

IMAGE PAGES

Coumba Samba, *Radiator*, 2024,
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Eline Benjaminsen and Elias Kimaiyo,
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