

SCHOLARLY CONFERENCE
DECEMBER 14-16
2023



the city soaks up like a sponge and expands

COLORFUL THREADS: THE INTERWOVEN WORLDS OF ART AND CULTURE IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN

SHARJAH, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

THEAFRICAINSTITUTE.ORG

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Cover Image

*The City Soaks Up Like a Sponge
and Expands* (2011) Ink and Watercolor
on Arches by Naiza Khan
Photo: Mehmood Ali



FOREWORD

The Africa Institute presents its third symposium, part of the four-part season titled '**Colorful Threads: The Interwoven Worlds of Art and Culture in the Western Indian Ocean**,' taking place between December 14-16, 2023, in Sharjah.

This symposium is co-organized by Prita Meier, Associate Professor of Art History at New York University, and Laura Fair, Professor of African History in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies at Columbia University.

Colorful Threads: The Interwoven Worlds of Art and Culture in the Western Indian Ocean aims to revolve around the Islands of the Western Indian Ocean region, stretching from the Eastern African coasts of Kenya, Mozambique, Somalia, South Africa, and Tanzania to Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Mayotte, and Reunion, brim with historical, socio-cultural, and economic significances. The circuitous toing and froing across the sea that brought people from the Indian Ocean's vast expanse had spawned momentous cultural interactions and microeconomies of exchange. Of the various forms of anthropological knowledge about independent invention, innovation, diffusion, and cultural brokerage, we come to understand that these Islands were/are not only creolized entities but also important sites of creativity and imagination as evidenced in both symbolic and material cultures such as those expressed in the diversity of languages, ethnicities, rites, performances among other artistic forms of human expressions.

Nowhere have the influences of the Indian Ocean circularities been more powerfully pronounced than in the aesthetic realms of art and cultural production. The predictable monsoon winds that molded the very character of social life in the African Islands of the Indian Ocean were both ethnographically and historically significant for the communities in question. A plethora of patterns and processes through which artistic and cultural knowledge traveling from the various shores of the ocean's rim had come to be shared, practiced, and revered, reveals a fecund cosmological imagination and inventiveness. Taking notice of the impressive artistic genius

and cultural vibrancy of the people of the Western Indian Ocean, galleries and curators throughout North America, Australia, and Europe brought some of the most notable traditions to the broader public as had some museums of archaeology and anthropology. The exhibitions of Madagascar's stunning *akotifahana* colorful textiles, which were once worn by the local elites and offered to dignitaries as gifts were put on full display in the Royal Ontario Museum. Similar exhibitions that differed in scope and scale have analogously imparted considerable knowledge on the numerous cultural objects' provenances and histories abound. The series arranged by the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) exhibit Arts of the Monsoon is one example that drew attention to the Island's opulent artistic resources.

From the vast array of the rich artistic traditions of music, photography, theatre, dance, ritual life, and spirit possession performances to mention a few, this symposium's angle on art and cultural production will pivot around key subjects of critical importance to scholars in the humanities and the social sciences. By deciphering the fine print of this intricately interwoven oceanic tapestry, we examine the ways in which this artistry has shaped the Islanders' subjectivities both cosmologically and culturally. Our focus on aesthetic sensibilities and cultural logic is an effort to broaden the scope of the archipelagic identities and the patterns of self-fashioning brought about by the systematic human convergences on the Islands. Our interpretive frames of such patterns will be contextualized within larger epistemological questions of the conditions under which such fusions occurred. This by necessity will engage questions of power, representation, production, consumption, and the systems of signification emerging from a panoply of cultural forms and consciousnesses.

This theme, *Colorful Threads: The Interwoven Worlds of Art and Culture in the Western Indian Ocean* thus strives to examine such currents by taking a closer look at the multitude of styles, meanings, experiences, and performances in an ocean that Julia and Markus Verne have aptly called an "aesthetic space."

This forum brings scholars from various academic disciplines and geographical locations to ponder what Pierre Bourdieu made clear in his distinctions as both symbolic and cultural capital. Our focus on rethinking the archipelago will improve our understanding of the fine-grained nuances of human relations. The vantage points of anthropology, history, art, architecture, museum studies, ethnographies of rituals, music, and dance as conceived within disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge and practice will be engaged fully in presentations, symposia, and publications.

The season is part of its annual Country-focused Season themed, *Thinking the Archipelago: Africa's Indian Ocean Islands* convened by The Africa Institute in collaboration with leading scholars namely Jeremy Prestholdt, Professor of History at the University of California, San Diego; Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, Professor of Anthropology, Georgetown University in Qatar; and Uday Chandra, Assistant Professor of Government, Georgetown University in Qatar.



PARTICIPANTS

Colorful Threads: The Interwoven Worlds of Art and Culture in the Western Indian Ocean

This symposium includes four thought-provoking panels weaving scholarly research through 13 paper presentations.

Participants include:

Surafel Wondimu Abebe

The Africa Institute, U.A.E

Uday Chandra

Georgetown University, Qatar

Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf

Georgetown University, Qatar

Gaurav Desai

University of Michigan, U.S.A

Meg Arenberg

The Africa Institute, U.A.E

Hoor Al Qasimi

The Africa Institute, U.A.E

Natasha Bissonauth

York University, Canada

Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann

The Africa Institute, U.A.E

James Burns

Clemson University, U.S.A

Franziska Fay

Johannes Gutenberg-University
Mainz, Germany

Dwight Carey

Amherst College, U.S.A

Laura Fair

Columbia University, U.S.A

R. Benedito Ferrão

William & Mary, Virginia, USA

Elizabeth W. Giorgis

The Africa Institute, U.A.E

Pamila Gupta

University of the Free State,
South Africa

Kinaya Hassane

New York University, U.S.A

Salah M. Hassan

The Africa Institute, U.A.E

Neelima Jeychandran

Virginia Commonwealth
University, Qatar

Nidhi Mahajan

University of California, Santa
Cruz, U.S.A

Jodie Marshall

Michigan State University, U.S.A

Prita Meier

New York University, U.S.A

Bindu Menon

Azim Premji University, India

Debashree Mukherjee

Columbia University, U.S.A

Jeremy Prestholdt

University of California, San
Diego, U.S.A



CONFERENCE PROGRAM

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Colorful Threads: The Interwoven Worlds of Art and Culture in the Western Indian Ocean

THURSDAY DECEMBER 14

-
- 10:00 am **Welcoming Remarks**
Hoor Al Qasimi - President, The Africa Institute and Sharjah Art Foundation, U.A.E
Salah M. Hassan - Director, The Africa Institute, U.A.E; Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences, Cornell University, U.S.A
-
- 10:15 am **Introductory Remarks**
Prita Meier - Associate Professor of Art History, New York University, U.S.A
Laura Fair - Professor of African History, Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies, Columbia University, U.S.A
-

-
- 10:30 am Panel 1
WOMEN, FEMINISM, AND THE INDIAN OCEAN
Discussant
Elizabeth W. Giorgis - Associate Professor of Art History, Theory and Criticism, The Africa Institute, U.A.E
Panelists
Archival Entropy: Tracing the Photographic Representations of Djoumbé Fatima
Kinaya Hassane - Ph.D. Candidate, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, U.S.A
Women and the Creation of Omani-Swahili Identity
Jodie Marshall - Historian of Africa in the Indian Ocean, Michigan State University, U.S.A
The Indian Ocean as Feminist Aesthetic Space: Thinking with Lubaina Himid's Contemporary Practice
Franziska Fay - Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz, Germany
-
- 12:30 pm **Lunch**
Location: The Africa Institute Courtyard
-

THURSDAY DECEMBER 14

2:00 pm

Panel 2

MATERIAL CONNECTIONS AND RUPTURES

Discussant

Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann - Associate Professor of Archaeology and Anthropology, The Africa Institute, U.A.E

Panelists

The Commonality of Labor: The History and Legacy of Building Construction in Modern Mauritius

Dwight Carey - Assistant Professor of Art and the History of Art, Amherst College, U.S.A

From Swamp to Sea: Mangrove Poles and the Making of Space in the Western Indian Ocean

Nidhi Mahajan - Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz, U.S.A

Escape Artist: Vamona Navelcar's Flight Across Continents

R. Benedito Ferrão - Assistant Professor of English & Asian and Pacific Islander American Studies, William and Mary, U.S.A

4:00 pm

Coffee Break

Location: The Africa Institute Courtyard

5:00 pm

Exhibition Tour

Gavin Jantjes: To Be Free! A Retrospective 1970-2023

Location: Gallery 4, 5 & 6, Al Mureijah Square, Sharjah Art Foundation

Curated by Salah M. Hassan - Director, The Africa Institute, U.A.E

FRIDAY DECEMBER 15

10:00 am Panel 3
CINEMA AND PLACEMAKING
 Discussant
 Surafel Wondimu Abebe – Assistant Professor of Performance Studies and Theory, The Africa Institute, U.A.E
 Panelists
Cinema as an Archipelago of Desires: Mauritian Film Culture in the 1930s
 Debashree Mukherjee – Assistant Professor of Film and Media, Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies, Columbia University, U.S.A
Movie-mad Island: Cinema and Public Leisure in Colonial Mauritius
 James Burns – Professor and Director of the Humanities Hub, Clemson University, U.S.A
Imaging the Peripheral: Island Making in Postcolonial India
 Bindu Menon – Associate Professor of Media Studies, Azim Premji University, India

12:00 pm **Lunch**
 Location: The Africa Institute Courtyard

1:30 pm Panel 4
REPRESENTATIONS AND IMAGINARIES
 Discussant
 Meg Arenberg – Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature, Department of Humanities and the African Languages and Translation Program, The Africa Institute, U.A.E
 Panelists
Arrivals and Departures, Desertions and Betrayals: Fraught Intimacies in Zanzibar and the East African Coast
 Gaurav Desai – Professor and Chair of the English Department, University of Michigan, U.S.A
Imaging the Dodo Bird, Imagining Extinction (Mauritius)
 Pamela Gupta – Research Professor, Centre for Gender and Africa Studies, University of the Free State, South Africa
Black, Brown, and Blue: Fabulatory Aesthetics in the Work of Shiraz Bayjoo and Kama La Mackerel
 Natasha Bissonauth – Assistant Professor, Visual Art and Art History, York University, Canada
Distributed Objects, Distributed Personhood: Interwoven Relations between the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean Worlds
 Neelima Jeychandran – Assistant Professor of African Visual Culture, Department of Art History, Virginia Commonwealth University, Qatar

FRIDAY DECEMBER 15

4:00 pm Exhibition Tours
Location: Sharjah Art Museum
Parallel Histories: Barjeel Art Foundation
Lasting Impressions: Samia Halaby

SATURDAY DECEMBER 16

10:00 am Guided Tour
Location: Al Qasimiyah School, Sharjah
Sharjah Architecture Triennial,
**The Beauty of Impermanence:
An Architecture of Adaptability**
Curated by Tosin Oshinowo, Nigerian architect
and designer

Panel 1

WOMEN, FEMINISM, AND THE INDIAN OCEAN**Discussant:**

Elizabeth W. Giorgis - Associate Professor of Art History, Theory and Criticism, The Africa Institute, U.A.E

Archival Entropy: Tracing the Photographic Representations of Djoumbé Fatima

Kinaya Hassane - Ph.D. Candidate, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, U.S.A

This paper will trace the many representations of Djoumbé Fatima, the queen of the Comorian island of Mwali (Mohéli) in the years leading up to French colonization. In 1868, Djoumbé Fatima traveled to France to petition the French government for aid in a dispute with a French businessman, to whom she had ceded much of Mwali's arable land. The visit precipitated the creation of several commissioned studio portraits of the sovereign, as well as a slew of racialized and sexualized portrayals of her in the French printed press. Rather than attempting to excavate these images in search of a fixed truth of who Djoumbé Fatima was, this paper aims to sit in the interstices of these many, disorienting representations to understand how women in the African Indian Ocean participated in the everyday practice of constructing a self, all while being caught in the crosshairs of global forces.

Women and the Creation of Omani-Swahili Identity

Jodie Marshall - Historian of Africa in the Indian Ocean, Michigan State University, U.S.A

This article frames women as essential contributors to the shaping of Western Indian Ocean cultures. Based on interviews in Unguja, Pemba, and greater Muscat, it explores women's critical roles in Arab-Swahili cultural development. It draws examples from the past century of Omani-Zanzibari history to counter the prevailing male-focused narrative. This includes the discussion of how wives and mothers in pre-Zanzibar Revolution East Africa facilitated male migration and

raising Swahili-Arab children. While there were also examples of women being mobile in their own right during this period, women did not just contribute to this transoceanic culture by breaking gender roles rather the traditional female role was also crucial to this history. In the post-revolution era, women's constrained mobility compared to men's fostered enduring cultural connections to Zanzibar for diasporic Zanzibari communities. More contemporarily, this article showcases women's indispensable function as social connectors. In highlighting the role of women in creating transoceanic connections, this article argues that we need to expand outwards from the nostalgic image presented by male interviewers, writers, and digital curators to an expanded understanding of what creating Omani-Zanzibari culture means that encompasses the more actively social connection building exemplified by the women interviewed for this article.

The Indian Ocean as Feminist Aesthetic Space: Thinking with Lubaina Himid's Contemporary Practice

Franziska Fay - Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz, Germany

If "oceans challenge and change feminist research" (Heathcote, Gedalof and Hoare 2022: 1), a feminist reading of the Indian Ocean may also help reconsider the sites and practices of knowledge production through which this space has come to be imagined over the years. In this contribution, the author proposes to build on and expand understanding of this oceanic realm as an "aesthetic space" (Verne and Verne 2017) by suggesting to think of the Indian Ocean, more explicitly, as a feminist aesthetic space. In support of calls to push for "an epistemic shift in thinking and writing about Indian Ocean worlds" (Srinivas, Ng'weno, and Jeychandran 2020: 13), this paper argues that reconsidering the Indian Ocean as a feminist subject and by way of thinking with the gendered, aesthetic, embodied and affective relations in contemporary artistic practice such as Lubaina Himid's, may help to engage underrepresented units of analysis and socio-political entanglements in the broader field of Indian Ocean Studies.

Panel 2

MATERIAL CONNECTIONS AND RUPTURES

Discussant:

Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann - Associate Professor of Archaeology and Anthropology, The Africa Institute, U.A.E

The Commonality of Labor: The History and Legacy of Building Construction in Modern Mauritius

Dwight Carey - Assistant Professor of Art and the History of Art, Amherst College, U.S.A

In 1838, 139 Indian masons from Bombay landed in Mauritius after spending weeks at sea. Having signed contracts before leaving the subcontinent weeks earlier, they expediently headed to their state-owned tents, which stood beside their intended workspace—the mountaintop clearing above the capital of Port Louis where authorities had ordered the construction of a massive citadel. Towering over the city, this fortress eventually grew to become the first major Mauritian construction site where Indian contract laborers, rather than the enslaved, predominated within the workforce. More than 1,000 masons from Bombay and Madras would join them as slavery officially ended in 1839 and indenture, a system that relied heavily on the exploitation of Indian workers, became the dominant labor regime. The workers who landed in Mauritius to build the fort toiled alongside a minority of newly emancipated people, and in the process, both groups shared their knowledge of stone while bridging the gap between the eras of slavery and indenture. This paper chronicles the struggles of the formerly enslaved and newly indentured laborers who risked their lives to erect a fortress that still stands today. It also argues that the construction history of this citadel reveals the link between slavery and indenture. Shared cultural and material knowledge brought the enslaved and the indentured together at this moment in Mauritian history. The author makes this point while recognizing that contemporary Mauritius is a place where descendants of indentured laborers and descendants of the enslaved often live in tension with one another. This paper considers how an architectural history of building labor can address contemporary

concerns and in turn, provide a model for countering the social divisions of modern Mauritius and the broader Indian Ocean world.

From Swamp to Sea: Mangrove Poles and the Making of Space in the Western Indian Ocean

Nidhi Mahajan - Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz, U.S.A

This paper focuses on a quotidian commodity that has been central to aesthetic production in the western Indian Ocean and yet has been understudied - the mangrove pole. Mangrove poles from the Lamu archipelago and elsewhere in East Africa have been used to build merchant homes across the Indian Ocean (including in the Arabian Gulf) for centuries. Offering a life history of this commodity as an artifact, object, and material, this paper analyzes how the mangrove pole has been central to the making of aesthetic space across the Indian Ocean. Focusing on the trade in mangrove poles from Lamu, the paper analyzes how this trade has been and continues to be a flashpoint for the making of space in the Indian Ocean – inbuilt environment, natural and cultural preservation, and infrastructure projects. In the Lamu archipelago, the trade in mangrove poles has been shadowed by rumors, mysteries, and political intrigue. Although the export of mangrove poles from Kenya was banned in the 1980s, the trade once again became a flashpoint for contestations between residents of Lamu and the Kenyan state even as it seeks to build a large mega port in Lamu. By focusing on a seemingly everyday building material that has long crossed the seas, the author draws attention to lesser-known material histories of Indian Ocean connectivity that offer an archipelagic glimpse into questions of connection, identity, infrastructure, and political economy.

Escape Artist: Vamona Navelcar's Flight Across Continents

R. Benedito Ferrão - Assistant Professor of English & Asian and Pacific Islander American Studies, William & Mary, Virginia, U.S.A

In 1976, the Goan artist Vamona Navelcar departed the newly independent Mozambique after having been incarcerated there by FRELIMO. He was bound for Portugal, where he had previously been an art student in his youth; even though then-dictator Salazar had awarded him a scholarship for this purpose, state patronage did not save Navelcar from being forced into exile in Portuguese Africa following the end of Portuguese colonialism in Goa in 1961. Though Navelcar made it back to Portugal from Mozambique, his suitcase did not. In it were over a thousand pieces of art that were never to be recovered. Unable to sustain his career in post-Carnation Revolution Portugal, Navelcar returned to his native Goa in the early 1980s. Navelcar's transits between the Indian Oceanic regions of Goa and Mozambique were influenced by Portuguese colonialism, but he simultaneously carried the histories of those colonies to the Atlantic metropole. As my presentation will contend, it is the politics of nationalism at the three continental sites that constitute Navelcar's life-cartography that have defined this artist's trajectory and also obscured his oeuvre, one inflected by his exilic and carceral experiences.

Panel 3

CINEMA AND PLACEMAKING**Discussant:**

Surafel Wondimu Abebe - Assistant Professor of Performance Studies and Theory, The Africa Institute, U.A.E

Cinema as an Archipelago of Desires: Mauritian Film Culture in the 1930s

Debashree Mukherjee - Assistant Professor of Film and Media, Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies, Columbia University, U.S.A

When excavating the history of cinema in a postcolonial nation, the impulse is always to trace a history of local filmmaking. Which was the first truly Indian or Bangladeshi film, we ask. Tracking these firsts helps a nascent nation build a cultural canon that in turn serves to bolster national identity. However, we also know that exercises to ascertain firsts, pioneers, and origins are fundamentally fraught. This paper traces a history of cinema in Mauritius by focusing on film exhibition rather than film production. Rather than deem a national context cinematically "backward" for not manufacturing films as per the timeline of Euro-American technological modernity, it might be more appropriate to consider its film culture, i.e., the life of cinema in that context. This paper argues that if cinema is a vehicle for making meaning in the world, then cinematic meaning is made anywhere that a film is watched and discussed.

Implicit here is a theory of aesthetic production that acknowledges the ephemeral, fragile, and tentative nature of cultural meaning. The central artifacts of my exploration are three films that were screened at the Theatre Municipal de Port Louis in 1937: *Hatam Tai* (Prafulla Ghosh, 1929), *Highways* (Sun Yu, 1934), and *Charlie Chan in Paris* (Seiler & MacFadden, 1935). These films, whether screened without comment or screened on special occasions such as Eid-ul-Duha, Chinese New Year, and Makar Sankranti, index the coerced and voluntary migrations that brought multilingual, multiethnic audiences into a Mauritian movie theatre. These films were not made by displaced and diasporic peoples, but they gesture towards an *archipelagic becoming* across Asia, Europe, and Africa, one that predates the nation-state and was made up of a desire for cinema.

Movie-Mad Island: Cinema and Public Leisure in Colonial Mauritius

James Burns - Professor and Director of the Humanities Hub, Clemson University, U.S.A

Cinema was the most popular form of public leisure in the Western Indian Ocean Island of Mauritius during most of the 20th century. In its heyday, the nation's per capita movie attendance rivaled that of industrial nations in Europe and the Americas. The tastes of these

cinema fans were unique in all forms of the world. Though it was a British colony until 1968, audiences on the island far preferred films from France and India to English language productions coming from London or Hollywood. This presentation looks at the emergence of cinema in the western Indian Ocean throughout the 20th century. Its focus is on the agency of audiences and local entrepreneurs, and their role in creating a cultural zone of spectatorship that radiated across the Indian Ocean to the neighboring islands of Reunion, Madagascar, and Zanzibar, and onto the African continent. It also explores the relationship of the cinema to other forms of public leisure, which found themselves competing with upstart technology during the first decades of the 20th century. It includes a demonstration of a geographic information system, *ArcGIS* mapping project that geolocates dozens of cinemas across the Western Indian Ocean. The paper is based on archival research in Mauritius, London, and South Africa, as well as interviews with informants who helped build and maintain these media networks across the region.

Imaging the Peripheral: Island Making in Postcolonial India

Bindu Menon - Associate Professor of Media Studies, Azim Premji University, India

The Lakshadweep islands, situated at the edge of mainland India, have been a site of textual construction through the medium of film and television since the 1970s. This paper is anchored on the medial methods of island-making through the various agencies of the Indian state, such as the Films Division of India, the Sangeet Natak Academy, Doordarshan (state-owned Television), and narrative films in the mainstream Malayalam language film industry. The author is expressly concerned with the visual and linguistic techniques through which the Lakshadweep islands are created in the mediatic realm. This paper explores the different histories embedded in these narratives in different genres of filmmaking, including stories of myths, folklore, unique customs, rituals, and kinship systems and through tropes of a yet-to-be-civilized paradise. They resonate with many colonial binaries of civilized/uncivilized, human/non-human, and nature/culture and gesture towards entangled histories of trade, migration, religion, and community formation. Through a close reading of this small yet

significant body of media on the archipelago, this paper aims to explore how intermedial image-making enables contemporary discourses on the Lakshadweep archipelago.

Panel 4

REPRESENTATIONS AND IMAGINARIES

Discussant:

Meg Arenberg - Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature, Department of Humanities and the African Languages and Translation Program, The Africa Institute, U.A.E

Arrivals and Departures, Desertions and Betrayals: Fraught Intimacies in Zanzibar and the East African Coast

Gaurav Desai - Professor and Chair of the English Department, University of Michigan, U.S.A

While the Indian Ocean has long been a space of traversals both material and conceptual, it is only over the last three decades that the region has gained increasing currency in both academic as well as policy circles. In part, this is, no doubt, due to the decentering of global politics away from the binarism of the Cold War, but it is also the result of changes in epistemological and conceptual tastes – away from the solidities and reifications of earlier formulations of the social world to more fluid, transient and migratory imaginings of it. In East Africa, in particular, the immediate nationalist and postcolonial response of an inwardly oriented methodology has given way to one more open to looking across the Indian Ocean and imagining the continent as a site of inter-continental exchange. Literary texts have played no small part in opening this imaginative space and Abdulrazak Gurnah's work, in particular, has been seminal to such re-imagining. The paper focuses on the theme of desertions and betrayals – both individual and societal -- that haunts Gurnah's work (and specifically the novel *Desertion*) and connects his novel to the real-life betrayals faced by an earlier historical figure, the princess Sayyida Salme, as expressed in her published memoir.

Imaging the Dodo Bird, Imagining Extinction (Mauritius)

Pamila Gupta - Research Professor, Centre for Gender and Africa Studies, University of the Free State, South Africa

In this paper, the author approaches the famed flightless figure of the dodo bird from the Indian Ocean Island of Mauritius that went extinct in the year 1681 due to human intervention. The paper treats this pigeon-type bird (*Raphus cucullatus*) as an aesthetic, literary, and environmental object. The author's colorful archive of images and imaginings weaves together several different threads: material and forensic remains of the dodo bird, including a set of bones (University College London) and soft tissue (Oxford) found in British museum spaces; historic discussions and drawings in science and literature—including Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865); contemporary art (sculpture, paintings and drawings) on the dodo bird, including a thriving children's literature on the dodo bird; and lastly, a flourishing of dodo bird images on localized Mauritian consumer goods—t-shirts, beer, logos for restaurants and airlines, etc. that the author saw when she travelled to Mauritius in April 2022. Surrounded by dodo birds everywhere; seduced by them visually, as both tragedy and comedy, the author was struck by the odd bird's representations: as a long extinct species (often labelled dumb, unattractive, and tasteless) in the face of a white settler colonial and Indian indentured labor migration to an island that had no indigenous population. The paper contemplates what the dodo bird stands for, precisely during a time of multispecies thinking and tied to islands specifically (following Quammen 1996; Van Dooren 2014; Pugh and Chandler 2021)? Perhaps representing a past (missing) indigeneity on the island (animal supplementing humans)? As gesturing to the future of the human species as on the brink of extinction due to the Anthropogenic climate crisis, a lesson to be learned from? As forging an impulse to reconnect with and conserve our vanishing natural world? In other words, the author finds it compelling that we reproduce multiple versions of the dodo bird in a range of genres, as a way, to cope with our increasingly vulnerable island future tenses, and which return us to cultural narratives of extinction as 'stor[ies] about the loss of stories' (Heise 2016:45).

Black, Brown, and Blue: Fabulatory Aesthetics in the Work of Shiraz Bayjoo and Kama La Mackerel

Natasha Bissonauth - Assistant Professor, Visual Art and Art History, York University, Canada

Artists from the Mauritian diaspora, whether in the fields of visual culture or literature, mobilize the fabulatory as an aesthetic encounter with the plantation island's layered histories. This paper examines the artistic practices of London-based visual artist Shiraz Bayjoo (he/him) and Montreal-based poet Kama La Mackerel (they/them) to think through the oceanic in aesthetic practice as a capacious, speculative space that threads multiple obscured origins. The analysis draws on Coolitude poetics for *kala pani* – the 'dark waters' and traumatic migratory journey across oceans that give rise to the indentured condition – alongside interlocutors like Saidiya Hartman's critical fabulation, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's queer meditations on the Middle Passage treating the ocean as archive, and Gaiutra Bahadur's speculative history of indenture in the Caribbean. As Bayjoo reckons with colonial footage buried in Mauritius' histories, Black and Brown cleavages across the Indian Ocean in the ages of enslavement and indenture emerge. More specifically, Bayjoo's video and sound montage in *Sea Shanty* (2013) and bricolage in his *Port Hole* series (2017) envision fabulatory seams across seascape epistemologies. The paper connects his work to La Mackerel's book of poems *ZOM-FAM* (2020) which the author reads as a fabulatory queer transfemme genealogy anchored in creole archival practices and island metamorphosis. Ultimately, the paper centers the poetics of aesthetic analysis in order to give fabulatory form to aqua pelagic fragments of enslavement and indenture in Mauritius. Embracing a fabulatory line of inquiry, what would it mean to approach the island not as one of many migratory nodes but as one that reorders, disorders even, diasporic logic altogether? In this way, these artists encounter the site as a portal.

Distributed Objects, Distributed Personhood: Interwoven Relations between the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean Worlds

Neelima Jeychandran - Assistant Professor of African Visual Culture, Department of Art History, Virginia Commonwealth University, Qatar

Maritime networks of the Indian Ocean have connected the littoral spaces of Africa, Arabia, and Asia through centuries-long circulations of material goods and movements of people, both free and forced. This talk extends the spatial and epistemological limits of the Indian Ocean by looking at two divergent cases that link African and Asian worlds through artistry, distributed objects and personhood, and fluid ontologies. The paper looks at the arrival of an African female mystic to Gujarat in premodern times and her entangled connection with pre-colonial empires and the Indian Ocean commodity exchange. Trade items and ritual objects associated with the saint and her kins connect to terrains of exchange in Misr (Egypt), Al Habash (Ethiopia), and Nubia (Sudan) regions, all important nodes of trans-Saharan trade routes. It then examines how contemporary Ghanaian artists like Bernard Akoi-Jackson use textiles and trade objects to make legible unwritten histories of transcontinental connectivity between the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds in order to refashion polyvalent narratives of African pasts. These case studies are spatiotemporally distinct, and the objects and arts explored are materially different, yet these examples chart the scope of inquiry necessary to map minor Indian Ocean transnational exchanges that are gathered by the author under the productive concept of “transit.” The central objective is to consider the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean worlds as relational spaces interwoven through material pastiches and embodied cartographies to study African expressive cultures.

Exhibitions

Gavin Jantjes: To Be Free! A Retrospective 1970–2023

Exhibition curated by Salah M. Hassan, Director of The Africa Institute, U.A.E

To Be Free! chronicles the diverse odyssey of Gavin Jantjes, a transformative force navigating the realms of painting, printmaking, writing, curation, and activism. Driven by his formative years in Cape Town, which coincided with the early years of South African apartheid (1948–1994), Jantjes embodies a quest for artistic emancipation, with freedom not bound by the Eurocentric gaze or expectations of Black creativity. It explores his engagement with anti-apartheid activism in the 1970s to mid-1980s, his transformative role at art institutions in the UK, Germany, and Norway, and his compelling figurative portrayals of the global Black struggle for freedom as well as his recent transition to non-figurative painting. This retrospective, spanning from 1970 to the present, unveils Jantjes curatorial endeavors, written contributions, and broader advocacy, showcasing his profound influence on African and diasporic art and the global contemporary art scene. Over five decades, Jantjes work transcends temporal and geographical boundaries, affirming the enduring relevance of African art in global cultural dialogues. Organized in collaboration with The Africa Institute in Sharjah, the exhibition is curated by Salah M. Hassan, Director of The Africa Institute and Distinguished Professor at Cornell University.

Parallel Histories | Barjeel Art Foundation

Drawn from the collection of the Barjeel Art Foundation, artworks in the exhibition reflect the manifold ways in which artists in the Arab world have responded to socio-political events and the human condition across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While the multiple histories and experiences encapsulated by works on display were often separated by geography, political climate, national borders, personal circumstance, and various conditions of life, they—like parallels—ran alongside one another, replacing each other with time,

and forming a kaleidoscopic fabric of both synchronous and changing events. In offering a broad look at the region's highly varied artistic milieu, this exhibition brings together a plurality of art schools, movements, and figures whose histories have, and continue to coexist side by side. It also calls attention to subjects that remain pertinent for artists in the present-day, mirroring concerns of their peers in the early to mid-twentieth century, including reinterpretations of regional craft, questions of identity, experiences of migrant communities, labour concerns, and changing political structures. In presenting a multiplicity of voices and praxis that emerged from the region and its diasporas in a shared space, the display offers an opportunity to explore the heterogeneity of regional art and invites visitors to (re)consider the reading of the Arab world's past and present.

Lasting Impressions: Samia Halaby

As a Palestinian-American artist, Samia Halaby presents her own philosophy about image-making and painting as an independent artist, separate from her artistic practice committed to presenting the Palestinian narrative in some of her documentary productions.

She produced this immense body of work with seriousness as a researcher who is never without a spirit of humor and playfulness.

The exhibition is part of the *Lasting Impressions* series, held annually at the Sharjah Art Museum. The aim is to focus on prominent Arab artists who had a prolific career and left a lasting impression on the development and evolution of modern art in the Arab world.

The exhibition will present a framework of her art and practice, highlighting works from her journey as an artist and a scholar, starting with the earlier works from the 60s, to the latest computer-based art work.

The exhibition will include 180 works of various sizes and mediums. The aim of the exhibition is to present to the audience an overview of the artist and take them through a journey of six decades of her work. Giving them insight and details of each time period and style. As well

as bringing to light certain historical events that shaped the artist's life and defined her practice.

The exhibition presents an accumulation of works by the artist Samia Halaby. Her work spans over a period of six decades of dedicated painting and exploring the possibilities surrounding image making. In a rich accumulation of works, the exhibition presents contemplative areas with different analytical angles of visual reality and ways of simulating it. Samia Halaby presents her intellectual, visual, and technical approach by employing the elements found in reality and their interaction with vision, perception, and the illusion that creates depth and movement in flat spaces, deviating from perspectival representation. Her significant and concentrated contribution is positioned within the global artistic contributions that expand and develop the concepts of image-making and abstraction. Samia Halaby is a unique and pioneering figure in her generation as an artist who employs both traditional and digital media in presenting her works to the public. In her overall body of work, she presents a dynamic dialogue of visual and perceptual meaning regarding her concept of abstraction, making the exhibition intense and vibrant formulations.

'The Beauty of Impermanence: An Architecture of Adaptability' Sharjah Architecture Triennial 2023

Curated by Tosin Oshinowo, the second edition of the Sharjah Architecture Triennial is themed 'The Beauty of Impermanence: An Architecture of Adaptability' and celebrates resilience amid scarcity, conflict, and degradation. Sharjah Architecture Triennial participates in international conversations about architecture that have a resonance at local and regional levels and reflects on the Gulf's shared social, economic, and cultural ties with a wider region extending from West Asia to South Asia and the African continent.

Sharjah Architecture Triennial 2023 is open until 10 March 2024 at various locations across Sharjah.



BIOGRAPHIES

Surafel Wondimu Abebe

Abebe studied Literature (BA) and Cultural Studies (MA) at Addis Ababa University (AAU) in 2010. He served as a lecturer, researcher, and Deputy Dean of Humanities at AAU. After completing his Ph.D. in Performance Historiography at the University of Minnesota in 2018, he continued working with AAU as an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Center for African Studies, and College of Performing and Visual Arts. Abebe uses academia, performance, and media as sites of cultural politics from which to interrogate representational practices. Abebe engages with sedimented embodied historiographies to understand what it means to be human in the here and now. Additionally, he is a board member of AGITATE, a multi-genre online journal at the University of Minnesota. Currently, he holds the position of Assistant Professor of Performance Studies and Theory at The Africa Institute, Sharjah.

Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf

Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf is a Sudanese ethnographer and Professor of Anthropology at Georgetown University in Qatar. She was a recipient of Postdoctoral and Senior fellowships at Durham University in the U.K., Brown, and Harvard. Her work was supported by Guggenheim Foundation, the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Sir William Luce Memorial Fellowship, Andrew Mellon and MIT Center for International Studies, and Rockefeller Bellagio Study Center. She writes on culture and politics, anthropology of gender, human rights, migration, and diaspora issues in Sudan, the Gulf, Oman and Zanzibar, and the Indian Ocean. She is the author of *Darfur Allegory, Transforming Displaced Women in Sudan: Politics and the Body in a Squatter Settlement and Wanderings*, both published by the University of Chicago Press; *Oceanic Circularities* coedited with Uday Chandra, Irene Promodh, and Maurice Jackson and published by Georgetown University Press. She is the editor of the 2010 special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* (Duke University Press) and *Female Circumcision: Multicultural Perspectives* (Ed.) (University of Pennsylvania Press 2006). She is the co-editor with Dale Eickelman of *Africa and the Gulf: Blurred Boundaries Shifting Ties and Higher Education in the Gulf* both from Gerlach Press in 2014 and 2015 respectively. In addition to numerous book chapters and essays, some of her articles appeared in the *Sciences*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Differences*, *Anthropology and Humanism*, *History and Anthropology*, *Oriental Anthropology*, *International Migration*, *Radical Philosophy Review*, *Anthropology News*, *Transition: International Review*, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* and *Black Renaissance*. Abusharaf is also the co-editor of *Monsoon: Journal of the Indian Ocean Rim* (Duke University Press and The Africa Institute, 2023).

Hoor Al Qasimi

Hoor Al Qasimi has been spearheading the establishment of The Africa Institute into a major international institution, building upon the rich legacy of Afro-Arab cultural and scholarly interchange in Sharjah, including the landmark 1976 “Symposium on African and Arab Relations” that envisioned a future nexus for learning and collaboration between the two regions. Working in partnership with The Africa Institute’s Director Dr. Salah M. Hassan, she continues to shape its programming and future endeavors.

A practicing artist and curator, Al Qasimi is also President and founding Director of Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF) which was established in 2009 as a catalyst and advocate for the role of art in Sharjah, the UAE, regionally, and internationally. With a passion for supporting experimentation and innovation in the arts, Al Qasimi has continuously

expanded the scope of the Foundation over its 10-year history to include major exhibitions that have toured internationally; artist and curator residencies in visual art, film, and music; commissions and production grants for emerging artists; and a wide range of educational programming for children and adults in Sharjah. As Biennial Director, Al Qasimi co-curated Sharjah Biennial 6 (2003) and Sharjah Biennial 15: *Thinking Historically in the Present* (2023). Under her leadership, the Sharjah Biennial has become an internationally recognized platform for contemporary artists, curators, and cultural producers. Her leadership in the field led to her election as President of the International Biennial Association (IBA) in 2017, an appointment that transferred IBA’s headquarters to Sharjah.

In addition to her role at The Africa Institute and Sharjah Art Foundation, Al Qasimi also serves as President and Director of the Sharjah Architecture Triennial (SAT).

Al Qasimi holds an MA in curating contemporary art from the Royal College of Art, London (2008). She earned a diploma in painting from the Royal Academy of Arts, London (2005), and received a BFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London (2002).

Meg Arenberg

Meg Arenberg (Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, Indiana University Bloomington) is a scholar of 20th and 21st-century African literatures and a literary translator from Kiswahili to English. Her primary research interests focus on the intertextual relationships between Europhone and Afrophone African texts, Kiswahili poetics, and digital media. Her work has been published in PMLA, *Research in African Literatures*, *East African Literary and Cultural Studies*, *Postcolonial Text*, and *Words Without Borders* and has won recognition from the American Comparative Literature Association and the American Literary Translators Association. She has held postdoctoral research positions in the Department of African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Languages and Literatures (AMESALL) at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, and the African Humanities Colloquium at Princeton University. Currently, Arenberg is an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature in the Department of Humanities and the African Languages and Translation Program at the Africa Institute, Sharjah.

Natasha Bissonauth

Natasha Bissonauth (Ph.D. in Art History, Cornell University) is an Assistant Professor of Visual Art and Art History at York University in Toronto. Her research centers queer, trans, and feminist contemporary art practices with expertise in South Asia and its diasporas. Recent interests expand upon indenture studies, archival work, and material culture. She is currently working on a book project that investigates how aesthetic encounters with archival fragments generates seams across histories of immigration and indenture. By threading ‘areas’ like South Asia, the Caribbean, and Mauritius, Black and Brown cleavages within the discipline emerge. Select publications include “Sunil Gupta’s Sun City: An Exercise in Camping Orientalism” (*Art Journal*; 2019), “The Future of Museological Display: Chitra Ganesh’s Speculative Encounters” (book chapter in *Museums, Sexuality, and Gender Activism*, 2020), and “The Dissent of Play: Lotahs in the Museum” (*South Asia Journal*, 2020). Recent articles examine indenture aesthetics in Kama La Mackere’s poetry and Renluka Maharaj’s visual practice. She has also published several exhibition catalog essays, and select artist interviews, exhibition reviews, and book reviews appear in publications such as *Art Asia Pacific*, *Art India, C*

Magazine, and *Women + Performance*. She is the current Reviews Editor for the peer-reviewed journal ADVA (*Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas*).

James Burns

James Burns is a Professor of African History at Clemson University. He is the author of several publications on the history of media, including *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Ohio University Press, 2003), and *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940* (Palgrave, 2013). He is also the co-author of *The Cambridge History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge 2009, 2013).

Dwight Carey

Dwight Carey is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art and the History of Art at Amherst College. He is an architectural historian who works on issues of slavery, colonialism, and empire worldwide. Currently, he is completing a book manuscript titled, *"The Island of Bound Masters: Slavery and Construction Labor in Mauritius."* This text follows the diverse group of enslaved building laborers whose environmental knowledge of the once uninhabited Indian Ocean Island of Mauritius made life and settlement possible in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He lives in the town of Northampton, in the northeastern United States.

Uday Chandra

Uday Chandra is an Assistant Professor of Government, at Georgetown University, Qatar. He received his B.A. in economics from Grinnell College and his Ph.D. in political science from Yale University. He received the 2013 Sardar Patel Award for writing the best dissertation in a US university on any aspect of modern South Asia. Before coming to Doha, he held a prestigious research fellowship at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Goettingen, Germany. Chandra's research lies at the intersection between critical agrarian studies, political anthropology, postcolonial theory, and South Asian studies. He is interested in state-society relations, power and resistance, political violence, agrarian change, rural-urban migration, popular religion, and the philosophy of the social sciences. Chandra's work has been published or will appear shortly in the *Law & Society Review*, *Social Movement Studies*, *New Political Science*, *Critical Sociology*, *The Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *Contemporary South Asia*, the *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, and *Modern Asian Studies*. He has co-edited volumes and journal issues on self-making in modern South Asia, subaltern politics and the state in modern India, caste relations in eastern India, and social movements across rural India today. His book, *Oceanic Circularities* coedited with Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, Irene Promodh, and Maurice Jackson is published by Georgetown University Press. With regard to his upcoming projects, he is working on volumes on the comparative politics of "populism" and transnational circularities in the Indian Ocean. His first monograph *Negotiating Leviathan: Making Tribes and States in Modern India* will be published by Stanford University Press. Chandra is also working on a second book project on Hindu nationalism and democracy in postcolonial India.

Gaurav Desai

Gaurav Desai is Professor and Chair of the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He is the author of *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-fashioning and the Colonial Library* (Duke University Press, 2001) and editor of a number of books and special issues of journals. Among these

are *Teaching the African Novel* (MLA, 2009) and *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism* (Rutgers University Press, 2005) which he co-edited with Supriya Nair. Recipient of a residential fellowship at the National Humanities Center in 2001, Desai has also been awarded a Rockefeller Foundation award for a residency at the Bellagio Center in Italy, a visiting fellowship at Cambridge University, and an American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Burkhardt Fellowship for his research. His monograph on narratives of Indian Ocean connections between Africa and India, *Commerce with the Universe: Africa, India and the Afrasian Imagination* (Columbia University Press, 2013) received the 2014 Rene Wellek Prize from the American Comparative Literature Association and was a finalist for the Bethwell Ogot Prize from the African Studies Association as well as the Asia-Africa Book Prize awarded by the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden. Most recently he has co-edited a volume on *Critical Terms for the Study of Africa* (University of Chicago Press, 2018) and *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Amitav Ghosh* (MLA, 2018).

Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann

Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann is an Associate Professor of Archaeology and Anthropology at The Africa Institute, Sharjah. As a critical heritage scholar and a direct descendant of slave traders, her research interests cover material culture, West African Islam, the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and decolonizing heritage practices. She is also the Director of the Christiansborg Archaeological Heritage Project, involved in excavations at Ghana's UNESCO World Heritage site, Christiansborg Castle. Her research focuses on material culture, West African Islam, transatlantic slave trade and slavery, colonialism, critical heritage studies, and archaeological ethnography. Engmann has received multiple interdisciplinary fellowships, grants, and prizes from the United States, European and African countries, including governmental, international foundations, and research institutes. She currently serves on the African scholars' advisory board for UNESCO's African World Heritage Sites, Brepol's *Studies in the Archaeology of the Islamic World*, and *100 Histories of 100 Worlds*. She has also worked on many heritage and development projects in Ghana and other African countries, including for UNESCO (Paris & Accra).

She has a BA, two MA's, and a Ph.D. from Columbia and Stanford Universities respectively. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Brown University. She also has a certificate from Stanford University Business School's Innovation and Social Enterprise Program, using archaeology and heritage for African education and development.

Laura Fair

Laura Fair, Professor of African History in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies at Columbia University, is a distinguished historian renowned for her research on twentieth-century urban East Africa. Her work focuses on gendered social and economic changes and urban popular culture among Swahili-speaking communities, resulting in several award-winning books. *"Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945,"* her debut book, is celebrated for its exploration of how former slaves harnessed cultural tools to assert freedom and challenge colonial norms. Her book *"Reel Pleasures: Cinema Audiences and Entrepreneurs in 20th Century Urban Tanzania"* won the Bethwell A. Ogot Prize and her recent research delves into Swahili coast foodways and their implications. Before joining Columbia University, she managed an integrated, sustainable organic farm, emphasizing self-sufficiency.

Franziska Fay

Franziska Fay is an Assistant Professor of Political Anthropology at the Institute of Anthropology and African Studies (IFEAS) at Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz. Her research interests include childhood and protection, politics and gender, translation and artistic practices, feminist theories, and visual ethnography in Swahili-speaking East Africa/ Indian Ocean contexts. Her book *“Disputing Discipline: Child Protection, Punishment, and Piety in Zanzibar Schools”* was published by Rutgers University Press in 2021. She obtained her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, United Kingdom.

R. Benedito Ferrão

Ferrão is an Assistant Professor of English and Asian & Pacific Islander American Studies at William & Mary, U.S.A. He has been the recipient of fellowships from the Fulbright, Mellon, Endeavour, and Rotary programs, the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies, and the American Institute of Indian Studies. Curator of the 2017-18 exhibition Goa, *Portugal, Mozambique: The Many Lives of Vamona Navelcar*, he edited a book of the same title (Fundação Oriente 2017) to accompany this retrospective of the artist's work.

Elizabeth W. Giorgis

Elizabeth W. Giorgis is an Associate Professor of Art History, Theory, and Criticism at The Africa Institute in Sharjah. She holds a Ph.D. in the History of Art and Visual Studies from Cornell University (2010) and a Masters in Museum Studies from New York University (2004). Giorgis has held various academic positions, including serving as the director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and as the Dean of the College of Performing and Visual Art at Addis Ababa University he is the author of several publications and a member of the editorial board for Transition Magazine, Northeast African Studies Journal (NEAS), ARTmargins and Critical African Studies, and the Ethiopian Journal of Social Science and Humanities (EJOSSAH). Her advisory roles include positions on the editorial boards of the Journal for Critical African Studies (JCAS) and Callaloo Art, along with being a contributing editor for Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (CSSAAME). Giorgis has received prestigious fellowships, such as The Ali Mazrui Senior Fellowship for Global African Studies, The Africa Institute, and has held notable positions as Distinguished Visiting Scholar at Brown University and Visiting Professor at the Academy of Fine Art in Vienna. Her award-winning book *“Modernist Art in Ethiopia”* (2019, Ohio University Press) is a study of Ethiopian visual modernism. As a curator, Giorgis has organized exhibitions at the Modern Art Museum: Gebre Kristos Desta Center, including a showcase of works by Danish Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson. Currently, she is working on an exhibition with the Sharjah Art Foundation, *“Henok Melkamzer: Telsem Symbols and Imagery,”* exploring Ethiopian art forms and scheduled for February 2024 at the Sharjah Art Museum.

Pamila Gupta

Pamila Gupta is a Research Professor at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, affiliated with the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies (CGAS). She was formerly a Full Professor based at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) at the University of the Witwatersrand (2008-2022). She holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Columbia University. Her research and writing interests include Portuguese colonial and Jesuit missionary history in India;

diasporas, islands, tourism, heritage, and design in the Indian Ocean; photography, tailoring, and visual cultures in East Africa; and architecture, infrastructure, and effect in South Africa. She is the co-editor of *Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean* (with Isabel Hofmeyr and Michael Pearson, UNISA 2010) and author of three monographs: *The Relic State: St. Francis Xavier and the Politics of Ritual in Portuguese India* (Manchester UP, 2014); *Portuguese Decolonization in the Indian Ocean World: History and Ethnography* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); and *Heritage and Design: Ten Portraits from Goa (India)* (Cambridge UP, 2022). She has a forthcoming edited volume with Sarah Nuttall, Esther Peeren, and Hanneke Stuit entitled *Planetary Hinterlands: Abandonment, Extraction, and Care* that will be published with Palgrave's Series on 'Globalization, Culture and Society' (2023).

Kinaya Hassane

Kinaya Hassane is a third-year Ph.D. student at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. Her research focuses on the history of photography on the African Indian Ocean islands during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Her scholarship is particularly concerned with the ways that the medium has intersected with the region's histories of migration, slavery, and gender.

Samia Halaby

Samia Halaby is one of the pioneer abstract artists in the Arab world. With a career spanning over six decades, she became pivotal in studying and executing the concept of abstraction as well as deconstructing geometry and form. Born in Jerusalem, Palestine in 1936, her distinct style has made her a leading figure in Arab art history.

Salah M. Hassan

Salah M. Hassan is the Director of The Africa Institute, Sharjah, UAE, and a Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences at Cornell University. He worked as the director of the Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM), and Professor of Art History and Visual Culture in the Africana Studies and Research Center, and the Department of History of Art and Visual Studies, Cornell University. Salah M. Hassan. Hassan is an art historian, art critic and curator, and editor and co-founder of *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* (Duke University Press). He currently serves as a member of the editorial advisory board of *Atlantica*, *Journal of Curatorial Studies* and *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. He authored, edited and co-edited several books including *Ahmed Morsi: A Dialogic Imagination* (2021); *Ibrahim El Salahi: A Visionary Modernist* (2012); *Darfur and the Crisis of Governance: A Critical Reader* (2009), and *Diaspora, Memory, Place* (2008); *Unpacking Europe* (2001); *Authentic/Ex-Centric* (2001); and *Art and Islamic Literacy among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria* (1992). He also edited and introduced, *Ibrahim El-Salahi: Prison Notebook* (New York and Sharjah, MoMA and SAF Publications, 2018, and guest-edited a special issue of SAQ: *South Atlantic Quarterly*, titled African Modernism (2010). Hassan has contributed essays to journals, anthologies, and exhibition catalogues of contemporary art. He has curated several international exhibitions such as *Ibrahim El Salahi: A Visionary Modernist*, exhibited at The Tate Modern in London (July-October, 2013) after premiering at the Sharjah Art Museum (in March 2012) in Sharjah, UAE; *Authentic/Ex-Centric* (49th Venice Biennale, 2001), *Unpacking Europe* (Rotterdam, 2001-02), and 3x3: *Three Artists/Three: David Hammons, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z* (Dak'Art, 2004). He also curated several exhibitions for the Sharjah Art Foundation including *The Khartoum School: The Making of the Modern Art Movement in Sudan, 1945-2016*

(2016-2017), and *When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938-1965)* (2016) in collaboration with Hoor Al Qasimi. He served as the Madeleine Haas Russell Professor, Departments of African and Afro-American Studies and Fine Arts, Brandeis University (2016-2018). He is the recipient of several grants and fellowships, such as the J. Paul Getty Postdoctoral Fellowship, Sharjah Art Foundation, Ford, Rockefeller, Andy Warhol and Prince Claus Fund foundations. Hassan has been honored as the 2021 Distinguished Professor by the College Art Association (CAA).

Gavin Jantjes

Jantjes, born in Cape Town, South Africa during the apartheid era, is a multifaceted artist, activist, and curator with a global impact. His journey, marked by exile and a nomadic life across Europe, reflects his diverse roles in the arts, spanning artistic direction, curation, education, and historical exploration in countries like England, Germany, Norway, and South Africa. Renowned as one of South Africa's foremost artists, his international exhibitions and art have become touchstones in discussions surrounding apartheid, cultural exchange, and artistic freedom. His work is enshrined in prestigious collections worldwide, while his influence extends to shaping the cultural diversity policy of the United Kingdom during his tenure with the Arts Council of Great Britain. With a legacy of curating over thirty contemporary exhibitions and contributions as an author and advocate for cultural diversity, Gavin Jantjes remains a vital force in the art world, poised to make a significant impact with his upcoming retrospective exhibition in 2023.

Neelima Jeychandran

Neelima Jeychandran is an ethnographer, editor, and scholar who works on oceanic crossovers and material histories of West and East Africa and Western India. She is co-editor of the book, *Reimagining Indian Ocean Worlds* (Routledge, 2020), and the co-editor of the *Verge* journal issue on *Indian Ocean Studies, African-Asian Affinities* (2022), and the series co-editor of the Routledge Indian Ocean and Trans-Asia book series. Jeychandran is currently finishing her book, *Textured Pasts: Material Heritage and African Indian Exchanges in the Oceanic South*, in which she brings together the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean worlds into relational consideration by looking at the material and immaterial circuits of exchanges. She will join Virginia Commonwealth University, Qatar, in Fall 2023 as an Assistant Professor of African Visual Culture in the Department of Art History. During her tenure at Penn State, she co-convened the research initiative *Indian Oceanologies* with funding from the Humanities Institute at Penn State and the Humanities Without Walls (HWW) consortium.

Nidhi Mahajan

Mahajan's research focuses on the intersection between political economy, sovereignty, and mobility in the Indian Ocean. She is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of California-Santa Cruz. She has also developed multi-media exhibitions in Kenya, India, and the UAE. Her work has been funded by the Wenner-Gren, SSRC, ACLS/Mellon, and a fellowship at The Africa Institute, Sharjah. Publications include work in journals such as *Monsoon*; *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*; *Island Studies Journal*, and edited volumes such as *Reimagining Indian Ocean Worlds* and *World on the Horizon*.

Jodie Marshall

Jodie Marshall, a postdoctoral scholar at Washington State's Roots of Contemporary Issues program, specializes in East Africa's history within the wider Western Indian Ocean context. Her current book project, *"(Im)mobility in a Sea of Migration: Race, Movements, and Transnational Families between Zanzibar and Oman (1850-2019),"* uses oral history to examine rural, working-class migration between Oman and Zanzibar. This work draws from extensive interviews conducted in Tanzania and Oman during her dissertation research, spotlighting the hidden experiences of immobile actors in Zanzibar's rural working class. Recurring themes in her research include immobility, gender and women, and the internal cleavages of the Arab community within East Africa.

Prita Meier

Prita Meier, a tenured Associate Professor of Africanist art history with a Ph.D. from Harvard University, specializes in the arts and architectures of East African port cities, transcontinental exchange, and conflict history. She is the author of *Swahili Port Cities: The Architecture of Elsewhere* (Indiana University Press, 2016). She has several publications in the *Art Bulletin*, *Art History*, *African Arts*, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, *Artforum*, and *Arab Studies Journal*, as well as contributions in several exhibition catalogs and edited books. Meier's current research extends to the study of materials and image cultures in travel and transportation, with a focus on the pre-colonial era, as well as her involvement in the interdisciplinary project *"Highway Africa"* analyzing postcolonial engineering megaprojects in coastal Kenya. Meier is the co-principal Investigator of the Getty-funded *"Indian Ocean Exchanges"* program, amplifying scholarship from the Global South and fostering collaboration and mentorship among a diverse cohort of scholars. She co-organized an exhibition and co-edited *World on the Horizon: Swahili Arts Across the Indian Ocean* (Washington University Press, 2018). She has held fellowships at CASVA at the National Gallery of Art (2017-2018), Clark Art Institute (2014-2015), Cornell University's Society for the Humanities (2009-2010), and Johns Hopkins University (2007-2009).

Bindu Menon

Bindu Menon is an Associate Professor of Media Studies at Azim Premji University, Bangalore. Her work lies at the intersection of Media History and Film Theory. Her essays in these areas of research have appeared in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes. She is the co-editor of *Film Studies: An Introduction* (WorldView Books, 2022) and the co-author of *Morality Tales: Malabar Home Films: Transnational Islamic Home Films of Southwest Asia* (Forthcoming, Routledge 2024).

Debashree Mukherjee

Debashree Mukherjee is an Associate Professor of film and media in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies (MESAAS) at Columbia University. She is the author of *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City* (2020), which approaches film history as an ecology of material practices and practitioners. Her second book project, *Media at the Dawn of Planetary Extraction*, develops a media history of South Asian indentured migration and plantation capitalism. Mukherjee edits the peer-reviewed journal *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* and has published in journals such as *Film History*, *Feminist Media Histories*, and *Representations*. Her latest publication is the edited anthology, *Bombay Talkies: An Unseen History of Indian Cinema*, based on an unprecedented photographic archive collated by a German

cinematographer who emigrated to India in the 1930s (Ed. Mukherjee, Mapin & Alkazi Foundation, 2023).

Tosin Oshinowo

Tosin Oshinowo, the curator of the Sharjah Architecture Triennial's second edition, is a Lagos-based Nigerian architect and designer, and the principal and founder of Oshinowo Studio, established in 2013. She has worked on a number of civic, commercial, and residential projects throughout Nigeria, and she is renowned for her socially responsive approach to architecture, design, and urbanism. Oshinowo's key designs include a project with the United Nations Development Programme to build an entirely new community in northern Nigeria for a village displaced by Boko Haram, and the Maryland Mall in Lagos. Her work demonstrates a strong interest in architectural history while embodying a contemporary perspective on African design, innovation, and afro-minimalism. She partnered with Lexus on conceptual design exploration for Design Miami/ 2020 and co-curated the second Lagos Biennial in 2019. Oshinowo is a registered architect in the Federal Republic of Nigeria and a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Before founding Oshinowo Studio, she worked in the offices of Skidmore Owings & Merrill in London and the Office of Metropolitan Architecture in Rotterdam, where she was part of the team that designed the 4th Mainland Bridge proposal in 2008. Upon returning to Lagos, she practised at James Cubitt Architects and led notable projects, including the corporate head office building for Nigeria LNG in Port Harcourt. She has a BA in Architecture from Kingston University London, an MSc in Development and Planning: Building and Urban Design in Development from the University College London, an AA Diploma from the Architecture Association London, and a Master's in Business for Architecture and Design from IE University Madrid.

Jeremy Prestholdt

Jeremy Prestholdt is a Professor of History at the University of California, San Diego. He specializes in African, Indian Ocean, and global history, emphasizing on consumer culture and politics in East Africa. His work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Rockefeller Foundation, Woodrow Wilson Foundation, Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, Social Science Research Council, and the Fulbright Foundation, among other agencies. He has been a visiting fellow at Ritsumeikan University, the University of Warwick, the University of Basel, and the University of Bergen. His articles have appeared in journals such as the *American Historical Review*, the *Journal of African History*, *Public Culture*, the *Journal of Global History*, the *Journal of World History*, and the *Journal of Eastern African Studies* as well as many edited volumes. He is the author of *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (2008) and *Icons of Dissent: The Global Resonance of Che, Marley, Tupac, and Bin Laden* (2019). Prestholdt is the co-editor of *Monsoon: Journal of the Indian Ocean Rim* (Duke University Press and The Africa Institute, 2023). He is also a co-editor of the Brill monograph series *African Social*

Sharjah Museums Authority

As directed by His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, the Sharjah Museums Authority – SMA was established in 2006 as an autonomous government authority. SMA links and oversees 16 museums across Sharjah that cover widely varied fields, including Islamic art and culture, archaeology, heritage, science, marine life, as well as the history of Sharjah and the region. Our vision is to be a cultural beacon that enhances Sharjah's identity locally and internationally and contributes to nurturing a community aware of museums' importance as a cultural, educational, and enjoyable destination. Our mission is to deliver the highest museum standards to preserve collections & enhance an appreciation of culture and learning through our exhibitions, and educational and community programs. Studies.

Barjeel Art Foundation

Barjeel Art Foundation is an independent, UAE-based initiative established to manage, preserve and exhibit an extensive collection of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art. The foundation's guiding principle is to contribute to the intellectual development of the art scene in the Arab region by building a prominent, publicly accessible art collection in the UAE. In 2018, Barjeel signed a contract with the Sharjah Museums Authority to open a long-term exhibition at the Sharjah Art Museum, which features a selection of key modernist paintings, sculptures and mixed media artworks from the Barjeel Art Foundation collection.

Sharjah Art Foundation

Located in Sharjah's historic Art and Heritage Areas, Sharjah Art Foundation activities and events take place throughout the year and include exhibitions featuring the work of Arab and international artists, performances, music, film screenings and artist talks as well as extensive art education programmes for children, adults and families. The Foundation hosts the annual March Meeting and every two years presents the Sharjah Biennial.

Sharjah Architecture Triennial (SAT)

Sharjah Architecture Triennial (SAT) is a platform for architecture and urbanism in a region that extends from West Asia to South Asia and the African continent. Physically anchored in Sharjah and the United Arab Emirates, SAT aims to engage diverse audiences and stakeholders in a collective conversation on architecture at the neighborhood, city, and regional levels. Institutional research and programming support ongoing critical reflection through exhibitions, publications, and public programs in tandem with international editions. SAT is committed to pursuing a multi-disciplinary approach that fosters an understanding of the broader role of architecture, including its relation to social and environmental issues.



**THE AFRICA
INSTITUTE**

Mission and Goals

The Africa Institute, Global Studies University (GSU) is an interdisciplinary academic research institute dedicated to the study, research, and documentation of Africa and the African diaspora. As the only institution of its kind located in the Gulf—the historical nexus of African-Arab cultural exchange—**The Africa Institute** is uniquely positioned to expand understanding of African and African diaspora studies as a global enterprise. The Africa Institute's curriculum of postgraduate studies is designed to train the next generation of critical thinkers in African and African diaspora studies, and through its program of international symposia and conferences, visual art exhibitions and artist commissions, film and performance series, and community classes and outreach events, The Institute is expanding public understanding of Arab and African exchange within not only the scholarly community but also the local Sharjah community, the region, and around the globe. **The Africa Institute** aims to be a model center of excellence in research, teaching, and documentation that is hoped to match in quality and breadth of coverage, existing peer of African and African Diaspora Studies in Africa, Europe, and North America.

The conception of **The Africa Institute** emanates from a basic premise that African Studies is a global enterprise, rather than one narrowly constrained by geography or territorial boundaries. The fact on the ground is that the Arab Gulf region is one of mixed populations, in which cultural exchanges manifested in an impressive variety of processes and patterns pertaining to borrowing and assimilation, forced and voluntary migrations, and adaptive strategies, none of which can be fully understood without incorporating Africa into the analysis.

The Africa Institute is uniquely positioned to further analysis of these linkages by illuminating larger African and Gulf ties, like those powerfully demonstrated in the historiography of the Indian Ocean Rim. At once, the Institute envisions larger global processes and knowledge circuits in relation to Africa and its diaspora.

In particular, the last two decades have also witnessed rising scholarly interests in the study of new frontiers of African Diaspora studies. These include lesser-explored aspects of the African Diaspora in the Spanish speaking Caribbean (such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Mexico), Latin America including Brazil, in addition to the Black British experience and recent African migrations and diasporas in Europe and the Middle East. These developments will certainly play a part in reconfiguring and revisiting the field and expanding its scope, and by extension, the scholarly focuses and curricula of the new Africa Institute. **The Africa Institute** hopes to both engage with as well as shape these new paradigms of thought in ways that will ensure its place at the forefront of African studies for years to come.

Africa Hall

The original **Africa Hall** building was inaugurated on the same day as the Municipality's building in 1976, but the original buildings of both were first built in the early 1970s as part of a wave of modernist government buildings. The building was inaugurated as "Africa Hall," and its first cultural and political event was the Arab-African Symposium. **The new Africa Hall**, which was rebuilt on the site of the original building - demolished in 2015 - is part of the future complex of buildings for **The Africa Institute**.

Africa Hall serves as a knowledge center and platform for conferences, symposia, and lectures, film screenings and staged plays related to the activities of **The Africa Institute** and also serves as part of The Institute's outreach to the larger community of Sharjah, UAE and beyond.

The Africa Institute, Sharjah

Situated in Al Manakh, the Khalid bin Mohammed School (KBMS) was established in the mid-1970s as a boys school, forming part of a series of nearly identical schools constructed across the UAE. Its distinctive soft orange colored design has been replicated 28 times across Sharjah City and the three port-towns of Dibba Al-Hosn,

Khor Fakkan, and Kalba, making it the most widely used school typology in the region. The school model, which emerged as the first primary and secondary school typology after the UAE's union, boasts a modular precast structure designed with shaded external circulation and passively ventilated classrooms. Its eye-catching features encompass repetitive flat vaulted bays, tall arcs with long corridors, and covered walkways encircling courtyard spaces, granting the schools an iconic and unmistakable presence that enhances neighborhoods across the country. These architectural wonders were designed by the architecture studio, Khatib & Alami, under the patronage of the Ministry of Education.

Over time, the doors of Khalid bin Mohammed School eventually closed, but its story did not end there. Recognizing the potential of this historical structure, the Sharjah Art Foundation acquired it from the government and architect, Mona El Mousfy, led the renovation, not only preserving Sharjah's modern heritage but also showcasing a brilliant example of adaptive reuse, breathing new life into the existing framework.

Today, the once-abandoned school has metamorphosed into the vibrant nucleus of **The Africa Institute**—an interdisciplinary academic research institution dedicated to the study, research, and documentation of Africa and the African diaspora. Within its walls, one can find an auditorium, workshop spaces, modular classrooms, a library, and a bookshop, all catering to the Institute's mission of fostering knowledge and engaging with the broader community of Sharjah, the UAE, and beyond.

The remarkable transformation of Khalid bin Mohammed School not only serves as a testament to a proud era of national investment in education and civic projects across the United Arab Emirates but also exemplifies Sharjah's unwavering commitment to knowledge, culture, and progress.

