**THE TRUE SIZE OF AFRICA**

**Artists and installations**

**Emeka Ogboh, *The Land Remembers*, 2024**

*The Land Remembers* reimagines the traditional German mining hymn, “Steigerlied,” through the broader lens of the colonial and postcolonial relationship between Europe and Africa. “Steigerlied”—a song that traditionally celebrates the camaraderie of German miners and is recognized as cultural heritage in the regions of Ruhr and Saar—is turned into a reflection on the exploitation of African land and people. The reimagined song delves into the violent histories of colonial rule, the scars left on the land, and the resilience of those who stood against oppression. The recording, made especially for THE TRUE SIZE OF AFRICA by an all-male Namibian choir, is installed in a multichannel sound format at the World Heritage Site. The choice of this installation site is symbolic, as the Völklinger Hütte relied on mining resources, including ore sourced from the south of Africa after the Second World War. Furthermore, the German Empire exploited Namibia during the colonial period in the field of mining, when diamonds and copper ores in particular were mined there.

Emeka Ogboh

**Roméo Mivekannin, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2020**

For *The Souls of Black Folk*, Roméo Mivekannin draws inspiration from W. E. B. Du Bois’s seminal 1903 book of the same title, a cornerstone of the early twentieth-century Black rights movement in the United States and a foundational text in global discussions on race and equality. Mivekannin builds on these themes and characters for his installation, creating a compelling visual dialogue between history, activism, and identity. It consists of sixty-eight portraits depicting prominent Black politicians, activists, intellectuals, actors, singers, and writers—with figures such as Josephine Baker, Kamala Harris, Malcolm X, and Wole Soyinka, or Édouard Glissant and Alicia Keys, who have played key roles in the fight for Black rights and against racism. Interspersed among these portraits of individuals from Africa, the African diaspora, or Afrodescendant communities is a silkscreen print of the title page from Du Bois’s book, pointing to the installation’s literary inspiration, which grounds every portrait literally.

**Susana Pilar Delahante Matienzo, *Achievement*, 2024**

In antique wooden dressers, cabinets, and desks, illuminated by bedside and library lamps, Cuban artist Susana Pilar Delahante Matienzo arranges seemingly old, patinated photographs of strong and self-confident Black women. However, these images were created with the help of artificial intelligence.

As a descendant of African and Chinese people who were deported to Cuba, the artist is committed to exploring a past that was stolen from her and many other families. By entering detailed text prompts – instructions to the artificial intelligence – she generates fictional photographs that do not aim to represent verified historical facts, but exist within a realm of possibilities. Visitors to THE TRUE SIZE OF AFRICA exhibition are invited to open drawers and explore the archive of a speculative past.

**Yinka Shonibare, *Woman Moving Up*, 2023**

A Black woman carries her belongings as she ascends an ornate staircase, symbolizing her social and economic rise, as well as her move northward during the Great Migration in the United States. British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare’s work addresses this massive movement, which saw millions of African Americans leave the rural South for cities in the North, Midwest, and West between 1916 and 1970. At the same time, the staircase, reminiscent of English manor houses, alludes to the exploitative British colonialism that profited from the labor of the migrants’ ancestors, generating unprecedented wealth.

Omar Victor Diop, *Diaspora*, 2014**—***Liberty*, 2017**—*A****llegoria*, 2021

Omar Victor Diop’s works selected for THE TRUE SIZE OF AFRICA come from three series that counter the Western view of the world with an African perspective.

The *Diaspora* series references historical portraits of Black individuals who achieved social prominence in their diasporic lives but were largely ignored by traditional histories due to racism. Diop revisits these exceptional life stories, incorporating soccer accessories into the portraits to draw parallels with modern African athletes striving to succeed in Europe.

*Liberty* recounts key figures and moments from the global Black struggle for freedom, such as the eighteenth-century Jamaican icon Queen Nanny or the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012, which sparked the Black Lives Matter movement.

In *Allegoria*, Diop turns his gaze to the future, focusing on the climate crisis and its consequences for the African continent and the entire planet.

Dele Adeyemo, *Wey Dey Move: A Dance of the Mangroves*, 2023

In 1960, on the verge of Nigeria’s independence, the Nobel Prize–winning playwright Wole Soyinka wrote *A Dance of the Forests*—a foreboding warning of the future based on humanity’s propensity to repeat the sins of the past. At this critical juncture in West Africa’s history, as the effects of population explosion, urban expansion, and ecosystem devastations are being exacerbated by the global climate crisis, *Wey Dey Move: A Dance of the Mangroves* asks how we might escape a destiny of repeating past mistakes by learning from the lifeworlds of the mangroves surrounding the megacity of Lagos, Nigeria. Mangrove ecosystems nourish the ecological, social, and spiritual lifeworlds that remain invisible to the coloniality of the developer’s gaze. Taking inspiration from the traditional Yoruba spiritual practice of divination, *Wey Dey Move: A Dance of the Mangroves* opens a portal through the divination board into the lifeworlds of the mangroves of Lagos Lagoon.

Dele Adeyemo

Willliam Kentridge, *Mine*, 1991

William Kentridge makes short animation films from large-scale drawings in charcoal and pastel on paper. The film *Mine* is set in the devastated landscape south of Johannesburg where derelict mines and factories, mine dumps and slime dams have created a terrain of nostalgia and loss. Kentridge's repeated erasure and redrawing, which leave marks without completely transforming the image, together with the jerky movement of the animation, operate in parallel with his depiction of human processes, both physical and political, enacted on the landscape. *Mine* was made from eighteen drawings and is set to Dvorak's Cello Concerto in B minor, Opus 104. In it, Kentridge develops the analogy between landscape and mind. A journey into the mines provides a visual representation of a journey into the conscience of Kentridge's invented character, Soho Eckstein, the White South African property owner who exploits the resources of land and Black human labour which are under his domain.

Géraldine Tobe, *Empty Song*, 2022

Géraldine Tobe’s *Empty Song* juxtaposes seven paintings full of agitation and ambiguity with a single panel of a man sitting solemnly by himself. The spiritual duality of this juxtaposition, and within the larger composition itself, reflects the duality of Tobe’s upbringing between traditional Congolese beliefs and Catholicism, just as the shapes and outlines drawn with smoke emerge from a personal history of a fire that consumed her work. On one side, we see a clash between good and evil, between beings who ruthlessly wield violence and those who dare to intervene, represented here by a celestial intercession. On the other, the sage with a third eye evokes a deeply monotheistic hope: for a supreme being who exists outside our spatial and temporal understanding. Beyond dualities, he has found peace, but he must hold himself tight, as if to stave off his own disintegration. Five African sculptures close by add another layer: a cultural achievement before or apart from colonialism, a collection of figures as permanent conference and dialogue who remain individual in their collectivity.

Roméo Mivekannin, *The Painter in His Studio after Jan Vermeer*, 2023

Roméo Mivekannin’s creative process entails observing a work of art and asking himself: “What does the artist really show?” What is the intention and context behind what is evident to the eye? He then decodes the original imagery, replacing the models’ faces with his own self-portrait in black and white. In *The Painter in His Studio after Jan Vermeer*, he also transforms the body of the model into a naked female in black and white, thus shedding light on subjects previously relegated to the shadows of domination. Mivekannin’s choices are intentional and subversive, aimed at reversing the perspectives of the characters in the paintings and the passersby who observe them. His face gazes directly at the audience, catching their eye, arresting them, and transforming them from passive lookers into active, critical viewers of the scene: A scene deploying wealth, based on colonialism.

Roméo Mivekannin, *Panoramic Image: Man Running with Animals*, 2024

Roméo Mivekannin is a multidisciplinary artist who challenges the boundaries between painting, sculpture, and installation. Informed by both his academic knowledge and his family’s experience with colonization—he is a descendant of Behanzin, the last king of Dahomey (Benin)—Mivekannin creates compositions that confront European iconography, reimagining classical paintings and photographs by replacing the subjects’ faces with his own self-portrait.

In his series *The Walking Man* (2022–2024), Mivekannin draws upon *Human Figure in Motion*, the late nineteenth-century photographic study by British photographer Eadweard Muybridge, who was inspired by the work of Étienne-Jules Marey. Muybridge’s study captured people performing various movements, photographed from multiple angles to create sequential images. Mivekannin reinterprets these images, using sequential self-portraits in motion to explore themes of migration, memory, and time. In *Man Running with Animals*, he offers a contemporary commentary on Africa and the world, portraying humankind as facing the same critical circumstances as animals in the face of climate change and war.

The Singh Twins, *Indiennes: The Extended Triangle* aus der Serie *Slaves of Fashion*, 2018

The title of this work refers to connections between India and the three cyclical stages of the “triangular trade”—in which goods were shipped from Europe to Africa; enslaved people to the Americas; and plantation produce to Europe. The Singh Twins reference Joanna Boyce Wells’s portrait of the Fanny Eaton (1835–1924), a Jamaican-born British model, shown wearing fabric made in India for the eighteenth-century French market. These fabrics, known in France as *Indiennes*, were traded at the port of Nantes in exchange for enslaved Africans. Other goods used as currency in the slave trade, such as guns, beads, and cowrie shells, are also depicted. At the top of the artwork, the badge of the India Natal shipping line is visible, a company that brought forced laborers from India to sugar plantations in South Africa after slavery was abolished. Toussaint Louverture, a former slave and revolutionary who led Haiti to independence but died in French captivity in 1803, is also depicted.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons, *My Mother Told Me I Am Chinese: China Porcelain*, 2008

María Magdalena Campos-Pons’s work coincides with the rise of the New Cuban Art movement which began as a reaction against the repressive aspects of the Cuban state. A large part of this artistic movement was the introduction of Afro-Cuban presence, both as artists and within the art itself. Campos-Pons investigates a felt history, through the intersection of nonspoken narratives and resilient culture, rendering elements of personal history and persona. As a result of the invitation to participate in the 2008 Guangzhou triennial, she investigated her Chinese ancestry and created the installation *My Mother Told Me I Am Chinese: China Porcelain*. The video included shows her in front of a mirror and performing a sort of ritual. She wears a Yoruba mask, which she later removes to paint her face white and cover her head with a veil, like a porcelain doll, suggesting a resemblance between the figures while also revealing a multifaceted and different appearance between Africa and Asia.

Memory Biwa, *Ozerandu*, 2024

“Ozerandu,” a name for the color red in Otjiherero, is the title of the immersive aural and mixed-media installation. The body of work is about the emptying of land and about iron ore extraction from southern Africa (Namibia and South Africa) to the Völklinger Hütte from the 1960s, and evokes material memory buried in the activation of a ruin as a postindustrialist site. Dust clouds raining red between the earth and sky — a recurring scene in the mining towns in the Northern Cape, South Africa, and the skyline of Völklingen — parallel the all-consuming effect of mining on people and the surrounding environment. Evoking the intimacies between people and land, the red dust from rocks and soil envelops all entities it comes into contact with.

The site-specific work, in the belly of the blower hall, recalls memory that is not solely contained there, but is traced through the migration of people and matter, opening up to a multitude of voices, augmented machines, and sonically plotted places. These spatial imaginaries unsettle linear discourses of progress and heritage.

**James Gregory Atkinson, *6 Friedberg-Chicago*, 2021—*Head Held High. Re: STAND UND FALL*, 2023—*Time Capsule: Toxi Lives Differently*, 2024**

German-American artist James Gregory Atkinson combines elements of social and political history with his autobiography to examine the absence of Afro-German experiences within dominant narratives of race, identity, and nationality in Germany.

In *6 Friedberg-Chicago*, draws inspiration from contemporary R&B music videos. The young men featured—captured on a segregated basketball court and in a defunct, blacklit Burger King—are united by their Afro-German experience. Their shared identity is further complicated by their biographical ties to the crumbling Ray Barracks, a former U.S. Army base, where Atkinson’s father was stationed. Now a silent ruin, this decommissioned site becomes an excavation of personal and collective memory, a buried layer where history and identity are unearthed, and the story unfolds through fragments and echoes of a lost past.

*Head Held High. Re: STAND AND FALL* (original German title: *Mit erhobenem Kopf. Re: STAND UND FALL)* James Gregory critically deconstructs the toppled monument of Hermann von Wissmann. The memorial used to show three bronze figures with Wissmann on top, looming over an Askari soldier and a fallen lion at ground level. In this setting the Askari remained nameless and devoid of identity, his story lost to history. This imagery reinforced a clear racial hierarchy that underscored the subjugation faced by colonized peoples, perpetuating a legacy that dehumanized Black identities and emphasized the urgent need to confront and reclaim these histories. Atkinson now focuses on the Askari alone and his upright representation with his head held high, to highlight and infiltrate the complexities of colonial identity and resistance.

*Time Capsule: Toxi Lives Differently*, 2024, (original German title: *Zeitkapsel Toxi lebt anders*), 2024, integrates Emil Doerstling’s 1890 painting Schwarzer preußischer Soldat mit einer weißen Frau, Allegorie auf die preußische Kolonialpolitik Deutsche Historische Museum. His work delves into themes of race, identity, and collective memory, contrasting the painting’s idealized portrayal of intimacy with the harsh realities faced by Black individuals in the German Reich and (post-)Nazi Germany. Starting in 1937, efforts were made to obscure the forced sterilization of children born to French colonial soldiers from North and West Africa and White German women. By 1952 a public debate in the Bundestag vilified these children, treating them as a visible problem for Germany. Films like *Toxi*, released in the same year, sold the reunion of Afro-German children with their African American fathers in the United States as the ideal solution to this historical glitch. *Time Capsule: Toxi Lives Differently* collects archival materials from this period, exposing the so-called brown baby adoption program as a mass deportation initiative. It includes magazines, images from the artist’s family albums, and various ephemera, effectively pointing back to the protagonists of *6 Friedberg-Chicago*.

CATPC, *White Cube Lusanga*, 2020**—***Plantation Master*, 2023**—***Fish Protector*, 2023

The sculptures are made of clay from the remaining old-growth forests around Lusanga, recast in cacao, palm fat, and sugar in Amsterdam. Each marks the passage from a painful and dark past to an ecological tomorrow. CATPC argues that many museums were financed—at least in part—with profits from plantations. CATPC claims these plantations are still being exploited today and that the wealth extracted from them continues to flow to museums through corporate sponsorship. With the profits from their art, CATPC buys back depleted plantation land and restores it as biodiverse food forests for their community.

*White Cube Lusanga* by Jean Kawata and Ced’art Tamasala depicts the museum of Lusanga, crowned by a Pende carving intertwined with other sacred sculptures that were looted during the colonial era and remain confined in other white cube museums in the Global North.

*Plantation Master* by Olele Mulele Labamba underscores the community’s role in plantation life. Someone has been caught by the “Plantation Master” because his feet were clean, unsoiled by dirt. But instead of being punished, he is given the tools to work properly.

In *Fish Protector*, the artist Daniel Mvunzi emphasizes that healing the land is central to postplantation life—as is caring for one another. A mysterious fish protects her offspring, swallowing them whole when danger threatens to keep them safe in her belly.

CATPC stands for Cercle d’Arts des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise. The artists, themselves, work on plantations.

Sammy Baloji, *Aequare: The Future That Never Was*, 2023

Sammy Baloji’s *Aequare: The Future That Never Was* is set in the rainforest around Yangambi in today’s Democratic Republic of the Congo. Seamlessly alternating between past and present, the video juxtaposes excerpts from Belgian documentaries made in 1943 and 1957 with contemporary footage of the same locations. The once-modern residential buildings and laboratories now possess the eerie charm of lost places, starkly exposing the end of colonization efforts to turn Congo into an agricultural asset for Belgium. What remains is the exploitation of the land and the forest. Baloji contrasts picturesque shots of the rainforest and its idyllic soundscape with historical footage of technical equipment, standardized procedures, and the detached tone of the narrators, who praise the exploitation of the territory in a completely matter-of-fact tone as a mark of progress and a civilizing Belgian achievement.

Sokari Douglas Camp, *Europe Supported by Africa and America,* 2015

Drawing from her Kalabari heritage and the history of European art, British-Nigerian sculptor Sokari Douglas Camp creates pieces that address sociopolitical issues and the history of the African diaspora. The sculptural group *Europe Supported by Africa and America* explores the legacies of slavery, issues of power and gender, and the climate crisis. Inspired by William Blake’s abolitionist print of the same title, which depicts three allegorical figures representing the continents in an embrace, Douglas Camp noticed that while Blake intended to present these figures as equals, the armlets of Africa and America, as signifiers of enslavement, emphasize their subjugation. In Douglas Camp’s version, Blake’s graces are transfigured: she dresses them, and they stand united, equal in stature, adornments and attire. She has “Africanized” their clothing with fashionable Nigerian costumes and gèlè head ties, in patterns with styles typical of textiles from each continent and thus also reflective of global trade.

**Kaloki Nyamai, *Dining in Chaos* series, 2022–2024**

Kenyan artist Kaloki Nyamai presents a distinctive fusion of traditional and contemporary perspectives. Through his paintings and installations, he engages in complex visual storytelling that delves into the interpretation of historical narratives within a contemporary context.

In THE TRUE SIZE OF AFRICA, six of Nyamai’s large-scale works form an immersive installation, with pieces from three different phases of his oeuvre. *Ithakwa* was exhibited in the Kenyan Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022. Following this, he created the three paintings *Tusukane nzwee, nietela mumine*, and *Osa Kuoko II* as part of his series *Dining in Chaos* (2023–24), where he embraced chaos as a metaphor for the tumultuous beauty of our times. Additionally, produced especially for THE TRUE SIZE OF AFRICA, the two paintings *Vaa Ni Vala Twa Mbeiye* and *Nikuonete Muno* examine the aftermath of social unrest, exploring the intersection of historical trauma and the hope for regeneration.

Kongo Astronauts, *The All-Vibrant*, 2024

Kongo Astronauts is a Kinshasa-based artist collective founded in 2013. The artists create their astronaut suits from e-waste to draw attention to urgent issues facing their homeland. In Congo, violent conflicts are playing out over coltan, a resource mainly mined in the Great Lakes region that is essential for producing smartphones and space technology—which is then returned to the country as electronic waste. The video triptych and three astronaut suits, created on-site at the Völklinger Hütte specifically for the transmedia project *The All-Vibrant*, point to the transformation of e-waste into art as a reflection on the connection between the capital that powered Europe’s industrialization and the exploitation of people and resources in colonial plantation economies. The artists see this exploitation mirrored in the European mining industry: “These industries relied on the same logic of exploitation that characterized the colonial plantation system, making the extractive practices in the industrial Saar region direct legacies of these intertwined historical processes.”

Sandra Seghir, *Sound of Pacific Revolution*, 2024

Sandra Seghir, a Lebanese-Guinean painter based in Dakar, weaves multiple narratives into her work, questioning the relationship between individual and collective memory. From history to mythology, archival images to current news, she attempts to establish a pictorial language specific to her vision of the world. In *Sound of Pacific Revolution*, Seghir explores the role of art and music in the resistance movements of West African independence. The presence in the painting of Nigerian artist Fela Kuti, a major figure in the Nigerian musical heritage recognized as the inventor of Afrobeats, pays tribute to his musical, spiritual, and political universe. This figure, visible in the top right-hand corner of the work, points his finger at the crowd, like an injunction to revolt through music. All the elements of the canvas seem to respond to an ecstatic burst of movement. Seghir asks herself: What might the sounds of revolution look like in painting? How can we translate the polyrhythm of music through the polychromy of colors?

Sandra Seghir, *I Am a River Whose Source Has Been Forgotten and Whose End Will Never Come*, 2024

Just as rivers wind through valleys to join the ocean, I explore the themes of exile and music through the movement of water, extending beyond the fictional borders of the Earth.

Miriam Makeba appears almost mystically at the center of the work, in the guise of African water deities, the human features of her face merely a reflection of a faint, ethereal form, stripped of flesh. The woman known as Mama Africa no longer has a body—she has become this river that carries all beings, all struggles, all lives.

Several figures can be observed, along with a peacock on the far right of the canvas, whose colors adorn her headdress, symbolizing the rebirth of a fertile multiplicity.

The warmth and vibrancy of the colors used here evoke a bittersweet feeling, arising from the need for light in the darkest periods of human history.

I sought to express the essence of Makeba's being and her achievements, of what remains beyond what we call death.

Sandra Seghir

Zineb Sedira, *Standing Here Wondering Which Way to Go*, 2019

The work takes its title from a song by Marion Williams, an African American gospel singer. It is a reflection on the utopian era of the 1960s, and in particular on Algeria’s role in the liberation movements of African and South American countries following its independence in 1962. The artist’s exploration of the film archives in Algiers, where she discovered numerous militant films of the 1960s, was a primary source of inspiration, as was the collective film by William Klein about the first Pan-African Festival of Algiers in 1969. Zineb Sedira uses archival documents, as well as found footage and objects, to portray and share her personal affinity with the liberation movements of the 1960s, reminding the public of the solidarity that developed throughout the world and was expressed through diverse forms of artistic creativity.

The life-size model of the artist’s living room includes a variety of personal objects and furniture that she herself has carefully collected over several decades. The installation reproduces part of Sedira’s intimate environment, taking the form of a diorama for the exhibition. The artist invites visitors to delve into her collection by reading archival documents and books, viewing a video, and listening to a playlist of soundtracks.

Carrie Mae Weems, *The Push, The Call, The Scream, The Dream*, 2021**—***Went Looking for Africa*, 1992–2012

In *The Push, The Call, The Scream, The Dream*, US artist Carrie Mae Weems combines photographic works, most of them reworked finds from media archives. Among them: photographs of civil rights activist Medgar Evers’s 1963 funeral and Charles Moore’s iconic photos of police violence against students in Birmingham, Alabama, demonstrating for African American rights and freedoms. Enlarging the photographs or sometimes defamiliarizing them with blue or pink filters, she arranges them in various groups across the entire wall.

Weems created the handmade plates from the series *Went Looking for Africa*, printed with texts by the artist, as part of her study of Africa and the histories of slavery and colonialism. Her poetic lines trace her encounters with African heritage, as in the proverbs of McIntosh County, Georgia, or the songs she heard on St. Simons Island—places inseparably linked to slavery and thus to Africa by the history of their cotton plantations.

Kara Walker, *Prince McVeigh and the Turner Blasphemies*, 2021

This twelve-minute animation subverts and reshapes modern American myths. Kara Walker’s silhouettes, inspired by German director Lotte Reiniger’s 1926 film *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, depict some of the most horrific acts of White supremacist violence in recent US history. The video unflinchingly examines how radical figures and ideologies become embedded in the national consciousness and shape public discourse. Lady Midnight’s soundtrack, blending a variety of genres, intensifies this impact. The shifting orchestrations of marching music, ragtime, soul, and rock melodies underscore the driving force of the animation’s stark, drastic scenes.

Arébénor Basséne, *A Deep Sahelian Paradise*, 2024

Arébénor Basséne’s artistic practice imaginary witnesses to the past. He uses various materials such as paper, gum Arabic, ink used for Koranic tablets, fouden (henna), wood residues, and natural pigments from the Dakar region. Inspired by ancient scripts, children’s scribbles, street graffiti, and rock carvings, his works are filled with illegible signs and shapes. Basséne invites viewers to take on the roles of historian, archaeologist, psychoanalyst, and scientist, encouraging them to interpret these visual archives in various ways and transform them into objects of study. His pieces create a spatial and temporal confusion, shifting the viewer’s gaze from one element to another—microscopic views of earthly materials morph into macrolandscapes of geographical zones, relief maps, deltas, desert dunes, and river courses. Incorporating these diverse materials, his monumental canvas, *A Deep Sahelian Paradise*, created especially for THE TRUE SIZE OF AFRICA, comprises a utopian cartography equally spanning the past, present, and future.

Josèfa Ntjam, *Marthe, Matter Gone Wild*, 2023

What does it take to spark a revolt and say no—to demand independence, defy obedience, and resist? French artist Josèfa Ntjam shares the essential ingredients in her five-minute video *Marthe, Matter Gone Wild*. In a performance resembling a ritual, and in sync with sound elements, Ntjam uses hand movements to highlight her words: the ingredients needed for various ways to break free from oppression.

The video’s visual style, combined with Ntjam’s distorted, metallic-sounding voice, places her work squarely within the aesthetic of Afrofuturism. The figure appears to be speaking to us from another world—both a distant past and a far-off future. The video’s themes bring us face to face with the colonial past and Africa’s many liberation movements. Ntjam draws not only from collective memories but also from her own family history, specifically referencing Marthe Moumié, a key figure in Cameroon’s struggle for independence.

Zanele Muholi, *Somnyama Ngonyama (Hail the Dark Lioness)* series, 2014-2019

*Somnyama Ngonyama*, the ongoing self-portraiture series that nonbinary artist Zanele Muholi began in 2012, refuses the exoticizing gaze. Whether using toothpaste mixed with Vaseline as lipstick or an assembly line of clothing pegs to form headpiece, the seriesutilizes elements of performance with the immediacy of both political protest and informal African trade and craft markets. The guerrilla nature with which these images are composed reveals the urgency to document the self. Muholi’s hairstyles, costumes, and sets are entirely self-realized, photographed only with natural light. Nomadic and impromptu, these shoots often take place alone. Muholi calls for new rites of self-expression, sexuality, mothering, and healing that usher in kinder modes of survival. Their artistic work is in part a response to South Africa’s ongoing femicide, the stigmatization of LGBTQI+ communities, and the proliferation of gender-based violence, especially the “curative” or “corrective” rape of Black lesbians.

Géraldine Tobe, *Looking Beyond*, 2024

Africa’s greatness lies in every sacrifice, every stain, every immeasurable and indelible drop of blood. A rich repository, the archives of the Völklingen Ironworks are also a hymn to the memory of countless German and foreign workers who toiled here. This work honors them, those known and those forever faceless, a twisted body surrounded by likenesses from the archive. Marks and shapes, traced in fire and smoke, unearthed from an inner quest, resist oblivion and demand recognition: we all stand in the shadow of others’ histories. Insects scurry across the canvas, recalling a troubled past of forced labor and environmental destruction, while rust with gold lines symbolizes the pride of workers long gone, evoking the Kintsugi philosophy of strength through resilience and restoration. Giving the workers traditional African masks to symbolize ancestral spirits, the artist binds them in a collective memory. Closed in 1986, this UNESCO World Heritage Site now thrives as a cultural landmark. Hands carefully holding fragile beings gesture toward this new chapter of care and rebirth. -Géraldine Tobe

Emeka Ogboh, Chorus of the Abandoned, 2024

*Chorus of the Abandoned* is a sound installation designed to “awaken” the metal carts once used to transport freight for the blast furnaces at Völklinger Hütte. These carts, now abandoned and clustered like dormant relics, are transformed into instruments of sound, producing metallic noises at the stroke of each hour—similar to church bells marking time. The installation explores themes of memory, space, and time, highlighting the site’s historical significance. It serves as an auditory memorial, evoking the history of the ironworks and paying tribute to the many individuals whose labor fueled the industrial age.

By activating the abandoned carts and using the space where they are docked at the Völklinger Hütte, the installation transforms the physical environment into a dynamic soundscape. This reimagining of the space invites visitors to reflect on its industrial past while engaging with its present as a site of culture, history, art, and nature. Emeka Ogboh

John Akomfrah*, Four Nocturnes*, 2019

John Akomfrah’s practice is marked by the use of powerful and arresting images layered with a multiplex of soundscapes of varying depths. The three-channel video installation *Four Nocturnes* explores themes of human migration within the context of an ecologically-at-risk planet. Resonating with its title, the film finds a deeper logic in dramatic composition, journeying through landscapes of dispossession which, were it to reach a finale, might find there one long and continuous night. Arid landscapes, sand and dust storms, heavy clouds, fog, and enchanting underwater echo systems amalgamate to form an evocative ensemble. The film’s chassis is its sonic ⁠language; the pressure of vibration transferring energy into a complex survey of loss, memory, and heritage. Looping sequences of water traveling down a stream, waves gushing, a bird singing, and the roaring trumpet of an elephant are interrupted by a dirge of mournful grandeur. *Four Nocturnes* is a dark hymn to the four elements of fire, water, earth, and air, which unleash their destructive powers in the face of climatic fragility.