UNQUIET OBJECTS

Unquiet Objects foregrounds the naturalized but uneasy separation of cultural objects from human life. The exhibition explores what greater accountability towards cultural objects might look like, highlighting the value of objects as symbolic and material placeholders for subject positions, for cultures and their histories, and for competing conceptions of the world. Works by ten international artists engage with a range of related questions, encompassing the foundational complicity of art’s notion of discrete objects with an imperialist agenda, the agency of objects as portals into alternate worldviews, genders and subjectivities; issues of institutional restitution and reparations, as well as Quantum, metaphysical and supernatural understandings of objects. This reflection is extended by looking to the future of cultural objects in a world saturated by datasets and AI technology.

Lorraine O’Grady’s iconic photographic works from Miscegenated Family Album refuse the disenfranchisement of cultural objects, insisting on the human lineages so-called artifacts embody. Christine Miller fabricates museological displays that draw out the racialized logic of mass-produced household objects from the recent past. Ariella Aisha Azoulay’s film Undocumented: Unlearning Imperialism draws parallels between the forced migration of peoples and plundered objects, pointing to this imperial violence as the ideological basis of contemporary museological and curatorial practices. Itziar Okariz talks back to Modernist sculptures on display in an art museum, whose manifestations of dominant subject positions occlude other possibilities. Collectively these works test continuities between our categorization and treatment of (art) objects and the cultural, racial, and gendered modalities that sustain hierarchies in our social structures and institutions.

Unquiet Objects also seeks to make space for alternate conceptions of objecthood manifesting multiversal, Quantum, and spiritual understandings of being in the world at odds with post-Enlightenment rationalism. Testaments from Noah Angell’s oral history project Ghost Stories of the British Museum suggest that objects might have the power to contest the conditions of their display. Accounts of unnatural occurrences invoke modes of being that exceed the limits of sanctioned knowledge. The supernatural female queer subjectivities of jinn creatures in Morehshin Allahyari’s She Who Sees the Unknown re-figure Middle Eastern myths as a portal to possibilities that exceed Western narratives. Melvin Moti’s film Eigenlicht evokes belief systems that insist on the living nature of the intelligence of matter and its internal systems of organization. Kristen Kennedy’s clay sculptures seem to arrest the return of objects to their fluid material origins.

The exhibition goes on to address the intersection of cultural objects and new technologies. Stephanie Dinkins’ ongoing project Conversations with Bina 48 teases out the artificial intelligence-led racial imaginariness of a “social robot” that claims to conflate subjecthood and objecthood. Morehshin Allahyari’s lecture-performance Digital Colonialism asks whether digital preservation is a conduit to the private ownership of cultural heritage. Aram Lee’s digitalized 3D rendering of an “unknown” object from an ethnographic display seeks to circumnavigate the transhistorical temporality of the object, activating new inscriptions to its body.

Lucy Cotter’s multidisciplinary practice explores aesthetics, politics, and the unknown through curating, art critical and experimental writing, and performance. She was a curator of the Dutch Pavilion, 57th Venice Biennale (2017) with Cinema Olanda: Wende- liens van Oldenborgh, and co-curator of the transnational project Here as the Center of the World (2008–2010) in six cities worldwide. Widely published in journals such as Flash Art, Frieze, Artforum, and Third Text, Cotter’s recent book Reclaiming Artistic Research (2019) foregrounds the singular nature of artistic thinking. She holds a PhD in Cultural Analysis from the University of Amsterdam and has lectured internationally on art and critical theory. She is currently working on an experimental play entitled The Entangled Museum that encompasses questions about restitution, cultural beliefs, and the limits of acceptable knowledge.

Morehshin Allahyari (Persian: مهرهشین عالیه‌یاری; b. 1985) is an Iranian-Kurdish media artist, activist, and writer based in Brooklyn, New York. She uses computer modeling, 3D scanning, and digital fabrication techniques to explore the intersection of art and activism. Her work has been part of exhibitions, festivals, and workshops worldwide, with venues including the New Museum, MoMA, Centre Pompidou, Venice Biennale di Architettura, and Museum für Angewandte Kunst. She is the recipient of The Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant, The Sundance Institute New Frontier Interna- tional Fellowship, and the leading global thinkers award by Foreign Policy magazine. Her 3D Additive Manifesto video is in the collection of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and she has recently been awarded major commissions by The Shed, Rhizome, New Museum, Whitney Museum of Ameri- can Art, Liverpool Biennale, and FACT.

Noah Angell (b. 1980, US, lives in London) works through orally transmitted forms such as storytelling and song. He produces time-based works, including films, oral histories, and lecture-performances that encompass folkloric and working-class forms of knowledge, privileging modes of experience, and continuities that often evade historical records. Recent projects include For the Good Wind at The Polar Museum in Tromsø, Norway, and Ghost Stories of the British Museum, an ongoing project garnering media attention worldwide. His first feature-length documentary film on acapella singer Connie B. Steadman, formerly of the Badgett Sisters, will be released in 2021. Previous exhibitions and performance of his work have taken place at The Freud Museum, London; Camden Art Center, London; CCA, Derry; University of California Riverside, CA.; and Duke University, Durham, NC, among other venues.


Stephanie Dinkins is a transmedia artist and professor at Stony Brook University, where she holds the Kusama Endowed Chair in Art. Dinkins’ art practice employs lens-based practices, emerging technologies, and community engagement to confront questions of bias in AI, data sovereignty and social equity. She exhibits and publicly advocates for inclusive AI at a broad spectrum of venues and is particularly driven to work with communities of color to co-create more equitable, values grounded artificial intelli- gent ecosystems. Dinkins is Artist in Resi- dence at the Stanford Institute for Human-
About the participants

Kristan Kennedy is a curator, artist, and educator. She is currently the Artistic Director/Curator of Visual Art at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA). Recent exhibitions include Flat Fix, Halsey McKay Gallery, New York; Other Colors, Fourteen30 Contemporary, Portland; Eyes, Ditto Projects, OR; Sunday, Crisp-Ellert Art Museum, St. August ine, FL; Kristan Kennedy Meets a Clock, Soloway, New York; Sleeper, OO, Misako & Rosen, Tokyo; and Tomorrow, Tomorrow CANADA, New York. Kennedy is represented by Fourteen30 Contemporary, Portland, OR. She received the 2018 Bonnie Bronson Fellowship and is currently serving on the Board of Trustees for the Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts.

Aram Lee (b. 1986, Seoul) lives and works in Amsterdam. As an artist, her research-driven practice revolves around reinterpreting materials found within institutions, often seeking to relocate their role and purpose through performative events, film and video installations. Her work has been shown and performed at, among other venues, De Appel, Amsterdam; Frame Framed, Amsterdam; Tetterode, Amsterdam; Zuidersee-museum, Eik enk Zuilen; Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin and the Bienal de arte textil contemporáneo, Guimares, Portugal. Recent artists books include From Pluto to Pyeongyang and back and Post Ghost Bust, Charles Noyes Lab (2019) and Landscape with bear (2019). She was an artist in residence at the Van Eyck Academie, NL in 2018-19, and at the Goethe Institute, Marseille in 2019.

Christine Miller (b. 1990, New York, NY) is a conceptual artist and curator currently based in Portland, OR. Her work centers around racial imagery, products, and histories while simultaneously reframing her own cultural identity. In addition to her own work, Christine’s curatorial practice centers on bringing underrepresented contemporary artists to the front of the Portland art community and beyond. Miller holds BA from Hunter College (2013), and an AA in Textile Surface Design from the Fashion Institute of Technology (2016). She has been the recipient of various artist grants along with participating in select artist talks and grant panels. Miller is currently working on her curated magazine Black Playground, which features the work of ten Portland-based artists, and plans to continue expanding her portfolio of art publications.

Dutch artist Melvin Moti (b. 1977) primarily makes 35mm films, often shown in conjunction with photography, objects, and artist books. His work examines neurological, scientific and historic processes in relation to visual culture. Moti’s recent solo exhibitions include Museum De Pont ( Tilburg, The Netherlands), Art Sonje (Seoul), Mori Art Museum (Tokyo), EMPAC (New York), Pavilion (Leeds, UK), Harburger Kunst verein (Germany), CAC Vilnius (Lithuania), Madam (Luxembourg), Wiels (Brussels), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), and MMK, the Museum of Modern Art, Frankfurt. His work has been featured in the Triennale di Milano 2019, the 16th Istanbul Biennial, the Yokohama Triennale 2014, and the 55th Venice Biennale 2013. His first feature film, Dreamlife, premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2020.

Lorraine O’Grady (b. 1934) combines strategies related to humanist studies on gender, the politics of diaspora and identity, and reflections on aesthetics by using a variety of mediums that include performance, installation, mixed media, and photo- montage. A native of Boston, MA and daughter of Caribbean immigrant parents, she served as an intelligence analyst for the US government, a literary and commercial translator, and rock music critic before turning to visual arts in the late 1970s. An active voice in the alternative New York art world, her work addressed feminist concerns and tackled cultural perspectives underrepresented in early feminism. She lives and works in New York, where a major retrospective of her work will take place at Brooklyn Museum in 2021.

Itziar Okariz (b. 1965, San Sebastián, Spain) lives and works in Bilbao. Her work questions the production of signs that define us, including the regulatory functions of language and normative behavior in public space. Perforated By, her two-person exhibition with Sergio Prego, represented Spain at the 58th Venice Biennale 2019. Recent solo exhibitions include Las statues, Fundacion Oteiza, Alzuza (2020), Tabakala, San Sebastian (2018); Kunsthaus Baseland (2017); and CA2M, Madrid (2017). She is currently participating in the 13th Shanghai Biennale 2020, with other recent performances at Art Parcours ArtBasel, at BOZAR in Brussels, as well as such venues as MACBA Museum, Barcelona, and the Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid.

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Works in the exhibition

1. Itziar Okariz
   Las Estatuas / The Statues: Jorge Oteiza’s Head of the Painter Otono (1968)
   Spanish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2019
   HD video with audio, 1’2’3"

2. Itziar Okariz
   Las Estatuas / The Statues: Reliquary
   Metropolitan Museum, New York 2017
   HD video, 2’34’’

Las Estatuas / The Statues (2017–present), consists of a series of recorded dialogues between the artist and artworks in various museums and institutions. The part of the conversation spoken by Okariz can sometimes be heard by the viewer, while the artwork’s “voice” and opinions are always left up to the viewer’s imagination. Through this performative intervention, Okariz’s work foregrounds how artworks convey specific subject positions that we invisibly negotiate as viewers. Challenging the norms of viewing art, it invites us to reflect on whether and how the artworks chosen by “our” institutions include or exclude us.

3. Christine Miller
   RED BLACK GREEN 2021
   Mixed media, dimensions variable

Created in response to the aggressive omnixis-visibility of US flags during the Trump era, Miller’s work engages contemporary variations of the Afro-American/Black Liberation/ Pan-African flag. In this flag the color red stands for blood; black for the people, and green for the natural wealth of the Motherland, Africa. Miller’s work presents a collection of objects whose variations speak to the multiplicity of black experience. Colliding the visual languages of national cultural symbols, abstract art, and contemporary commodities, they trouble and counteract the mass reproduction of black imagery, seeking new agency.

4. Christine Miller
   Picarnimia Freeze in Process 2019
   Vintage memorabilia and fabric swatches, dimensions variable

Miller’s work foregrounds and speaks back to the banal omni-presence and market appeal of daily objects imbued with racist sentiment. The “picarnimia” was a dominant racial caricature of black children for most of US history. Coupling this questionable “artefact” with swatches of fur and leather, the work re-activates its impossible position of dehumanization and objectification, confronting the persistence of racist imaginaries in the present.

5. Lorraine O’Grady
   Miscegenated Family Album (Motherhood), L: Nefertiti; R: Devonia reading to Candace and Edward, Jr 1980/1994

6. Lorraine O’Grady
   Miscegenated Family Album (A Mother’s Kiss), T: Candace and Devonia; B: Nefertiti and daughter 1980/1994

These diptychs contain an image of the ancient Egyptian queen Nefertiti paired with an image of the artist’s sister, Devonia Evangeline, and her children. O’Grady draws attention to physical resemblances that reflect generations of cross-cultural exchange and interracial marriage in both contexts. Recovering the pejorative word “miscegenation,” these images refute strategic dehumanization. Making the historic personal and the personal historic, they seek to overcome artificial psychological and cultural separations and foreground the agency of black female subjectivity. On a personal level, the 16 diptychs in the Family Album seek to resolve the artist’s troubled relationship with her sister by reflecting on Nefertiti and her younger sister Mutnedjem.
7. **Ariella Aïsha Azoulay**  
*Un-Documented – Unlearning Imperial Plunder*  
2020  
Script and director: Ariella Aïsha Azoulay  
Camera: Bona Manga Bell  
Production: Eyal Vexler  
Editing & Graphics: Claudia Yile  
Sound editor: Ziad Fayed  

Un-Documented addresses the strong connection between the plundered objects in European museums and the calls of asylum seekers trying to enter the countries of their former European colonizers. The film highlights their twinned migrations. The first migration is that of the objects, generating professional care, scrupulous documentation and hospitality in museums and archives. The second migration is of people who do not have the documents that would provide access to care and hospitality, allowing them to rebuild their homes and worlds. In the film, plundered objects confined to glass cases and imperial archives await reunion with their people. The rights of the “undocumented” are inscribed in these objects, demanding to be reclaimed and renewed.

8. **Melvin Moti**  
*Eigenlucht*  
2012/2020  
Digitally transferred 35 mm film, 18’, color, silent  

Certain minerals convert absorbed UV light into visible colours of unearthly beauty. Shown in sacred, cosmic silence, Moti’s film evokes non-Western belief systems that have often insisted on the living nature of so-called objects, as well as the findings of Quantum Physics, which affirm the intelligence of matter and its internal systems of organization. *Eigenlucht* (intrinsic light) refers to the visual interference the human eye sees in complete darkness.

9. **Noah Angell**  
*Ghost Stories of the British Museum*  
2016–present  
Mixed media installation with floorplan and multiple audio interviews with museum staff  

Ghost Stories of the British Museum is an ongoing project by interdisciplinary artist Noah Angell, documenting the rich internal folklore of haunted spaces, unquiet objects and inexplicable occurrences that has long circulated privately among staff at the British Museum in London. A floorplan of the museum showing locations of sightings and incidents is accompanied by audio excerpts from the artist’s many interviews with current and former museum staff, and a photograph of orbs around the Nereid monument taken by an auxiliary worker. Raising questions about restitution of cultural and sacred objects and the holding of human remains in museum collections, these accounts suggest that objects and artefacts may contest their own conditions of display.

10. **Photo by DL of orbs around Nereid monument, British Museum**  
2014  

Ghost Stories of the British Museum archives

11. **Melvin Moti**  
*Eigengrau*  
2011/2021  
Digitally transferred 35 mm film, 18’, color, silent.  

Conceived in response to the context-less presentation of objects at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London “as if they came from outer space,” *Eigengrau* offers a subtle critique of museum practices. At the same time the film is suggestive of the ways that objects have their own agency, bearing within them both the material properties of their making, as well as containing their own haptic intelligence.
Works in the exhibition continued

12. Morehshin Allahyari
She Who Sees The Unknown: Huma 2016
HD digital video Duration: 6’06” Courtesy of the artist and Sapar Contemporary.
The Ya’jooj Ma’jooj and Huma video works form part of She Who Sees The Unknown
(2016-present), a research project re-creating the forms and storytelling associated with jinn,
monstrous female/queer figures of Middle Eastern origin. “Re-figuring” and activating
these myths, it re-imagines forgotten or misrepresented aspects of the past to evoke alternate futures. The power of Huma, traditionally responsible for fever, is re-appropriated to respond to climate change and environmental degradation. Ya’jooj Ma’jooj, a jinn embodying chaos, is refuged to narrate the story of those considered to be ‘the other’ or ‘monstrous’ and walled out of society in an us/them cycle.

13. Morehshin Allahyari
She Who Sees The Unknown: Ya’jooj Ma’jooj 2017
Duration: 9’48”. Courtesy of the artist and Sapar Contemporary.

14. Kristan Kennedy
M 2014
Clay, enamel 8 1/2 × 2 1/4 × 2 7/8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and the Miller Meigs Collection.
Conceived as “punctuations” or “stand-ins for sculpture,” M and O are from a series of works that suspend the state between materiality and objecthood. Intentionally raw and bearing imprints of the human hand in their forms, they freeze the gestural process of making and evoke the inner life of objects, seeking to return to their material origins.

15. Kristan Kennedy
O 2014

16. Morehshin Allahyari
Material Speculation: ISIS – Priest with Eagle 2015
12 × 4 × 3.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sapar Contemporary.

17. Morehshin Allahyari
Material Speculation: ISIS – King Uthal 2015
12 × 4 × 3.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sapar Contemporary.

18. Morehshin Allahyari
Material Speculation: ISIS – Ehu 2015

19. Morehshin Allahyari
Digital Colonialism – Physical Tactics for Digital Colonialism 2016-2019
Performance documentation, video, duration: 30’4’’. Courtesy of the artist and Sapar Contemporary.
The concept of “digital colonialism” characterizes the tendency for information technologies to be used in ways that reproduce colonial power relations. Physical Tactics for Digital Colonialism is a performance that reframes 3D scanning – widely used by archaeologists to capture detailed data about physical artifacts – as a performative, embodied act with open-ended political potential. First performed at the New Museum, New York in 2019.

20. Morehshin Allahyari
Flashdrive material (sample). Courtesy of the artist and Sapar Contemporary.

Prints of a selection of the extensive information contained in the flash drive housed by the King Uthal sculpture are on display in gallery 3. This archive includes images, maps, PDF files, and videos gathered by the artist on the subject of King Uthal. The original statue was destroyed by ISIS in 2015.

21. Aram Lee
On a possible passing from the inscription to the body 2020
HD video
The digitized and 3D-rendered object in Lee’s work is a bundle of human hair from Korea. Labeled as unknown by the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, it is uncertain whose hair it is, and how and why it became part of the collection. Through intimately combining the hair and presenting it to us in a transformed state, Lee seeks to activate new inscriptions to its body and engage our reciprocal involvement in its fate.

22. Stephanie Dinkins
Conversations with Bina48: Fragments 2, 6, 5, 2 2018
Digital video installation, duration 4’
In this ongoing project (2014– ), artist Stephanie Dinkins engages in conversations with Bina48, the world’s most advanced social robot, said to be capable of independent thought and emotion. Dinkins explores the possibility of a long-term relationship between a person and an autonomous robot that is based on emotional interaction. Among other topics, they have discussed family, racism, faith, robot civil rights, loneliness and knowledge. Bina48 (Breakthrough Intelligence via Neural Architecture, 48 exaflops per second) is an intelligent computer built by Terasem Movement Foundation.

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Disjecta Contemporary Art Center would like to recognize that our programming is being held on the traditional lands of the Chinook, Cowitz, and many other Nations. We take this opportunity to offer respectful recognition to the Native communities in our region.