



Is it why I  
look down?

NEUE GALERIE INNSBRUCK

05.11.2021 – 15.01.2022

## ARCHIVES OF RESISTANCE AND REPAIR

Shiraz Bayjoo  
Maeve Brennan  
Onyeka Igwe



**TIROLER KÜNSTLER:INNENSCHAFT**  
TYROLEAN ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION  
NEUE GALERIE INNSBRUCK

© Onyeka Igwe (2018)

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## DANCING AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

*My imagination makes me human and makes me a fool;  
it gives me all the world and exiles me from it.* Ursula K. Le Guin 3

The program of the Kunstpavillon and Neue Galerie Innsbruck 2021/22 is entitled **Dancing at the Edge of the World**, alluding to the eponymous essay collection by Ursula K. Le Guin. In this, the science-fiction author outlines alternative social and societal realms of possibility that are not anchored in a colonial, patriarchal, and xenophobic narrative structure.

In a present shaped by a pandemic, virulent socio-political issues and the big question of how we live together seem to have fallen by the wayside. The nation state assumes the role of a crisis manager, while visions of a backward-looking future solidify and historical amnesia sweeps across broad sections of society. But surely, isn't this very moment one with the inherent potential to accentuate speculative utopias and counter-narratives, to renegotiate ways of living together and empathy in a local and global context? And to look for ways to integrate diversity on our planet into everyday considerations? How can our relationship with the environment be shaped responsibly? What ways of living together have proved/or could prove to be beneficial? And how can a conscious approach towards the past and its vivid heritage succeed?

The beginning is marked by two exhibitions: **OPTIONS** (Riccardo Giacconi, Kunstpavillon) and **ARCHIVES OF RESISTANCE AND REPAIR** (Shiraz Bayjoo, Maeve Brennan & Onyeka Igwe, Neue Galerie Innsbruck). The artistic works in both exhibitions question prevalent knowledge regimes and recount stories that are hardly considered in the powerful canons of history-making: While Riccardo Giacconi develops references between the South Tyrolean resettlement implemented by Mussolini and Hitler and the current political climate in Europe; Shiraz Bayjoo, Maeve Brennan & Onyeka Igwe look for possible ways of re-evaluating historical materials from a decolonial, anti-imperialist perspective.

For 2022 a collaboration with Ursula Beiler, Enar de Dios Rodríguez, Hannelore Nanning, Elsa Salonen, Innsbruck International: Biennial of the Arts amongst others are in the making.

**Dancing at the Edge of the World** forms the first program cycle under the artistic direction of Petra Poelzl.

**OPEN CALL JURY 2021/22 | 319 Applications**

Margarethe Drexel (artist, Innsbruck/Los Angeles)

Luigi Fassi (artistic director, MAN Contemporary Art Museum/Italy)

Petra Poelzl (artistic & managing director Kunstpavillon & Neue Galerie Innsbruck)

**ARCHIVES OF RESISTANCE AND REPAIR**

Presenting recent works of moving-image and installation art, **ARCHIVES OF RESISTANCE AND REPAIR** explores artistic engagements with historical records from a decolonial, anti-imperialist perspective. The work of Shiraz Bayjoo, Maeve Brennan, and Onyeka Igwe deconstructs dominant knowledge regimes by confronting documentary materials with new critical methodologies that foreground intimacy and embodied experience. For each artist, the archive serves as a starting point, a site where personal and public histories converge. They hone in on disparate regions, from Mauritius to Nigeria to the potentially innumerable places implicated in the illicit antiquities trade. Prioritising emotion, memory, and physicality in their encounters with the archive and its holdings, the artists recover marginalised histories and reimagine familiar narratives.

The exhibition illustrates that archives are not neutral sources of information, but bodies of knowledge carefully shaped by individuals and institutions with ideological objectives. The unequal hoarding of information and resources has shaped how history is told and meaning is made. To document and collect information as if it is an inalienable right is a colonial perspective that presumes authority over the privacy of others. Intervening in these repositories and reclaiming the materials they possess, Bayjoo, Brennan, and Igwe create alternative archives based on affinity and care. By exposing the power dynamics that govern control of documents and material history, the three artists reveal tensions between 'official' and 'unofficial' histories. Their work questions: who and what has been left out, suppressed,

6 forgotten? Through research-informed practices, the artists demonstrate that the archive is not a static storehouse of material, but a resource for the ongoing production of meaning. Their bodies of work remind us that the future can only be negotiated through reconciliation with our past and its lingering material remnants.

**SHIRAZ BAYJOO** brings archival materials together with painting, photography, and film to engage with legacies of colonialism and post-colonialism in the Indian Ocean region. Bayjoo's multidisciplinary practice questions why and how certain stories are left untold. The narratives of those who were historically in power are still often prioritised over those whose marginalisation was enforced. His work makes clear that globalisation is not necessarily a marker of progress but is instead the result of long histories of systematic oppression.

At the entrance of the exhibition, Bayjoo's film **UN APPEL** (2016) features excerpts from talks by three leaders, spanning almost three decades. Each deals with themes of occupation and resistance. The first comes from Charles de Gaulle's famous speech *L'Appel du 18 juin*, delivered in 1940 after the Battle of France. The call to arms was broadcast to France's colonies as de Gaulle made the case that France was not alone, that France had behind her a vast empire. The second excerpt is from a 1959 interview with Philibert Tsiranana, Madagascar's first President and the country's 'father of independence'. Tsiranana's approach may seem contradictory to a contemporary audience — while he speaks of sovereignty for Madagascar, he also advocates for maintaining a common community with France. The third excerpt comes from a 1968 speech delivered by the

7 first Prime Minister of Mauritius, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the day after the island gained independence from the United Kingdom. These three sound clips play over video footage of Madagascar's landscape, recorded by Bayjoo. The landscape is devoid of any people yet carries heavy connotations of the history of colonisation through imagery of artillery and architecture. The words of the three leaders seem to echo through these landscapes. As each of the leaders makes their *appel* — their appeal — we are faced with images of the real places that are impacted by their decisions.

In her ongoing multi-disciplinary project **THE GOODS** (2018-present), **MAEVE BRENNAN** engages with a trove of archaeological remnants stolen from southern Italy and hidden in the Geneva Freeport until their discovery by the Carabinieri in 2014. The tens of thousands of objects, which were illegally held by British art dealer Robin Symes, represent only a fraction of the total number of antiquities currently circulating on the black market. Working closely with researchers at Aarhus University, including forensic archaeologist Dr Christos Tsirogiannis, Brennan explores how these looted objects function as sites where disparate people, places, and timescales intersect.

**THE GOODS (BOX SERIES)** (2021) focusses particular attention on Polaroid photos that were found taped to crates. Because they are produced instantaneously with no need for development in a lab, Polaroids are a useful form of record keeping in the illicit antiquities trade. To perform a sustained analysis of this photographic evidence, Brennan created an image-processing algorithm that conducts an endless examination of the Polaroids. With its forensic, non-hierar-

chical gaze, the algorithm continuously scans the images, highlighting new details and producing infinite combinations and affinities.

8 As it zooms in on anonymous hands holding up pottery fragments, boundaries between fleshy palms and ceramic shards begin to blur. Archaeological, geological, and human timescales converge through the material remnants, the hands that touch them, and the machines that register them as images. In the pursuit to identify trafficked antiquities, data processing becomes a form of care, a means to repair and restitution. Together with the other works in the exhibition, Brennan's installation challenges the process whereby the culture and histories of some are converted into consumable products stockpiled by others with greater financial resources.

**SHIRAZ BAYJOO's** installation in the middle of the exhibition includes a range of materials that foreground connections between past and present. Painted maps such as **MA COEUR 2** (2017), collages of archival materials in the **FAIRE DUA series** (2018), and contemporary photographs taken inside and around a private home from the series **MY OLD PLACE** (ongoing) reveal the layered ways that places and histories are interlinked. Together they consider how the local informs the global in the sense of *archipelagic thought*, a concept developed by the Martinican postcolonial theorist Édouard Glissant.<sup>1</sup> For Glissant, the archipelago represents a model for alternative ways of thinking that prioritises decentralisation and plurality. The whole (the global) is the sum of its parts (each local place), which are linked to each other in various ways. This is quite literally reflected in the archipelago's

<sup>1</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997 [1990]).

geography, where water draws together seemingly disparate lands, as Bayjoo highlights by focussing on the neighbouring islands of Madagascar, Mauritius, and La Réunion alongside islands that are further from each other such as Wednesday Island in Antarctica and Aldabra in the Seychelles.

The backdrop of the installation, a black and white photograph of a wave crashing against a rocky shoreline, **EXTRAORDINARY QUARANTINES No. 38** (2014), reinforces this notion that water connects lands to each other. At the same time, the sea's ability to connect has been historically exploited by the colonial project to transport individuals and goods across oceans. Objects ended up in Western museums, often illegally or extralegally, without context. Bayjoo reclaims the museum vitrine to show the crisscrossing paths between Mauritius, Madagascar, La Réunion, France, India, and beyond.

**ONYEKA IGWE's** video **SPECIALISED TECHNIQUE** (2018) appropriates material produced by the British Colonial Film Unit (CFU), which created propagandistic ethnographic films from 1939-1955. The third and final part of a film series that recuperates Black dance from colonial spectacle, *Specialised Technique* deconstructs the original film footage through post-production techniques such as slow motion, zooming in, and reformatting film frames. Igwe argues that while ethnographic films document the practical application of colonial ideology, they fail to capture the individuals who were subjected to colonisation. She thus endeavours to recentre the dancers through a critical dialogue between herself and the film subjects. What develops is a conversation between text and image that subverts the strict cinematic language enforced by the CFU.

Through her scholarly and artistic practice, Igwe has developed a new methodological approach for decolonising archives, which she calls 'critical proximity', borrowing the term from philosopher Bruno Latour.<sup>2</sup> An inversion of the Western scientific model of 'critical distance', Igwe's 'critical proximity' acknowledges a multiplicity of knowledge frameworks operating side by side. Her affective encounters with the archive are characterised by intimacy, gesture, and bodily presence. She strives to 'stain' the archive, contesting the dominant knowledge systems it silently enforces. In this installation of *Specialised Technique*, we see how Igwe transforms theory into practice through a series of journal entries she wrote while working in the archives. The texts present the artist's internal conflict with using archival imagery, which in turn provokes the viewer to confront their own consumption of the colonial archive. Exhibited together, the texts and video reveal the affinities between the bodies of the dancers on film and the artist in the archive, situating both as sites of history-making.



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<sup>2</sup> Onyeka Igwe, 'being close to, with or amongst', *Feminist Review* 125 (July 2020): 44-53.



**ENTRANCE****SHIRAZ BAYOO** | Un Appel (2016)

video, 16:9, 7:06 min

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Courtesy of Ed Cross Fine Art and the artist

**ROOM A****MAEVE BRENNAN** | The Goods, Box Series (2021)

Box 3; Box 16\_01; Box 26\_01 (2021), algorithm, 3 monitors, metal monitor stands

The Goods, Box 7\_01 (2021), C-print, 61.2 x 65.35 cm

The Goods, Box 21\_01 (2021), C-print, 49.65 x 58.35 cm

The Goods, Box 29\_01 (2021), C-print, 70.25 x 76.7 cm

Courtesy of the artist

**ROOM B****SHIRAZ BAYJOO**

Faire Dua 4 (2018), collage, 14 x 20.5 cm

Faire Dua 5 (2018), collage, 10.5 x 28.5 cm

Faire Dua 6 (2018), collage, 10.5 x 28.5 cm

Aldabra No.2 (2016), acrylic, resin, wood, 17 x 22.5 cm

Fig. 7 (2016), acrylic, resin, wood, 17 x 12 cm

Hova woman (2018), painting, 10.5 x 14.5 x 1.3 cm

Wednesday (2018), acrylic on board, resin, metal, 12 x 8.3 x 1.6cm

Diver (2018), acrylic on board, resin, metal, 12 x 8.3 x 1.6 cm

Statue (2018), acrylic on board, resin, metal, 12 x 8.3 x 1.6 cm

Ma Coeur 2 (2017), acrylic on board, resin, metal, 16.5 x 10.5 cm

Madagascar (2017), acrylic on board, resin, metal, 24 x 17 cm,

The Walking Bird and Arecaceae (2018), decal and glaze on earthenware, 15.5 x 9 x 1.5 cm

The Company (2018), decal and glaze on earthenware, 13 x 22.5 x 1 cm

Ile de France, series 2, My Old Place (2014), giclee print, photo rag paper, 50 x 34.15 cm

Ile de France, series 2, My Old Place (2014), giclee print, photo rag paper, 50 x 34.15 cm

Extraordinary Quarantines No. 38 (black and white) (2014), wallpaper/vinyl, 810 x 241 cm

selected ephemera and natural objects (various dates)

Courtesy of Ed Cross Fine Art and the artist

**ROOM C****ONYEKA IGWE**

Specialised Technique (2018)

black &amp; white, stereo, HD-video, 4:3, 6:57min

Specialised Technique [diary entries] (2018)

A5 (14.8 x 21.0 cm)

Courtesy of the artist and BFI National Archive

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**LEXINGTON DAVIS** is writer, curator, and art historian based between Amsterdam and Edinburgh. She is currently completing a PhD at the University of St Andrews, funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council. Her research explores feminist art from an intersectional perspective, focusing on care, labour, value, and collectivity. She has previously held curatorial and research positions at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Recently, she has organised exhibitions at the Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Center, Budapest and the Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki. She lectures at Leiden University and regularly presents work at conferences in Europe and North America. Her writing has appeared in publications including *Espace art actuel* (forthcoming), *Flash Art*, and *Metropolis M*. She earned a BA from Bard College in New York and an MA from the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, where she was a Fulbright fellow.

**JULIA DEFABO** is the Social Media Manager at Art UK and a Trustee at the Leach Pottery. Her research is centered on cross-cultural exchange and post-colonialism, with a particular focus on the islands of the southwestern Indian Ocean. She holds an MA from SOAS University of London and a BA from Bard College, where her research was awarded the Social Studies Departmental Prize. She has worked with galleries in the US and the UK and has contributed to projects, publications, and exhibitions with organizations such as the Smithsonian Institution, the Dak'Art Biennale, and the Rencontres d'Arles.

**SHIRAZ BAYJOO** is a contemporary multi-disciplinary artist who works with film, painting, photography, performance, and installation. His research-based practice focuses on personal and public archives addressing cultural memory and postcolonial nationhood in a manner that challenges dominant cultural narratives. Bayjoo has exhibited with the Institute of International Visual Arts, London; New Art Exchange, Nottingham; 5th Edition Dhaka Art Summit; 14th Biennale of Sharjah; 13th Biennale of Dakar; and 21st Biennale of Sydney. Bayjoo is a recipient of the Gasworks Fellowship and the Arts Council of England. He is an artist in residence at the Delfina Foundation and has recently been awarded the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship.

**MAEVE BRENNAN** is an artist and filmmaker based in London. She is the current Stanley Picker Fine Art Fellow (2019-22) and is participating in British Art Show 9. Solo exhibitions include Chisenhale Gallery, London; The Whitworth, University of Manchester; Spike Island, Bristol; Mother's Tankstation, Dublin; Wäinö Aaltonen Museum of Art in Turku, Finland; Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria, and OUTPOST, Norwich. Her films have been screened internationally at festivals including International Film Festival Rotterdam, Sheffield Doc Fest, and FILMADRID (Official Competition 2018). Brennan was a fellow of Home Workspace Program, Ashkal Alwan, Beirut (2013 -14), and was the recipient of the Jerwood/FVU Award 2018 and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award 2021.

18 **ONYEKA IGWE** is an artist and researcher working between cinema and installation, born and based in London. Through her work, Onyeka is animated by the question — how do we live together? — with particular interest in the ways the sensorial, spatial and non-canonical ways of knowing can provide answers to this question. She uses embodiment, archives, narration, and text to create structural 'figure-of-eights', a form that exposes a multiplicity of narratives. The work comprises untying strands and threads, anchored by a rhythmic editing style, as well as close attention to the dissonance, reflection, and amplification that occurs between image and sound. Her works have been shown in the UK and internationally at film festivals and galleries. She was awarded the New Cinema Award at Berwick Film and Media Arts Festival 2019 and the 2020 Arts Foundation Fellowship Award for Experimental Film.

**Artistic Director:** Petra Poelzl

**Curators:** Lexington Davis & Julia DeFabo

**Production Management:** Cornelia Reinisch-Hofmann

**Exhibition Technique:** Paul Irmann & Luis Navarro

**Exhibition Booklet:** Johanna Böhm

#### TEXTE

**Einleitung Dancing at the edge of the world:** Petra Poelzl

**Besucher:innentext:** Lexington Davis & Julia DeFabo

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Neue Galerie: Mittwoch – Freitag 12.00 – 17.00 & Samstag 11.00 – 15.00

Künstlerhaus Büchsenhausen: Auf Anfrage

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