

Curatorial statement

Re:assemblages

Re:assemblages is a roaming body and programme initiated by G.A.S. Foundation in Lagos that explores the Picton Collection and Archive as a site of exchange. It will foster new publishing actions on African art through artistic interventions, residencies, experimental printing, and convenings developed in the framework of the African Art Libraries (AAL) Lab. The new network will bring together a constellation of African arts libraries, artists, publishers, and international partners holding African art collections. Building on the archaeological concept of the assemblage, Re:assemblages activates the Picton Collection and Archive, with emphasis on its rare constellation of African published journals, magazines, and manuscripts, to pose new critical questions focused on the preservation and creative potential of African art libraries.

In 2024, multi-year programme Re:assemblages opens with the project *Annotations*. In this first iteration, Naima Hassan, archivist of the Picton Collection and Archive and writer Maryam Kazeem, curate a publishing-oriented programme focused on pan-African cultural festival archives (FESMAN, Panafest, Zaire 74, FESTAC '77). Each festival revealed “competing visions of global Blackness and Africanity pertaining to ideologies of race, citizenship, and revolutionary struggle.”¹ Each nation also had a different procedure for how the events were to be documented and archived. In light of this, *Annotations* asks, if archives are determined by an inventory of traces, what do the interweaving narratives of FESMAN, Panafest, Zaire 74 to FESTAC'77 reveal? Aiming to amplify the interwoven histories of the festivals, Re:assemblages will be expressed in varied publications, residencies, and public programmes over an 18-month period.

Annotations

Annotations explores the complex archives of FESTAC'77 as simultaneous event and archive, which provide a lens into pivotal postcolonial pan-African debates, and the significance of culture and self-making for postcolonial nations. Influenced by African-American writer and poet, John Keene, the programme takes its name from the author's avant-garde first novel, *Annotations*, in which Keene writes, “the longer one spends in libraries, the more one understands the power of an annotation, what a single footnote can reveal or bury. Better to do it yourself than allow it to be done to you.” Through the “condition” of annotations, whereby citational practices and their interminable nature concurrently challenge and encourage alternative historiographies, the programme considers the archival afterlife of FESTAC'77, as a focal point to explore the legacy of twentieth-century pan-African festivals and the connections between them.

The transversal programme explores the pluriversal potential of annotations and their capacity for challenging epistemological production and assembly, whereby we become active readers of FESTAC'77. *Annotations* undertakes how speculative archival practices, which Sameer Farooq refers to as “archiving against the archive”², complicate and reveal new possibilities for the collective memory keeping and engagement of pan-Africanism within the continent and the diaspora. In consideration of the archives of the twentieth century festivals and their relationship to imperial rule, post-colonial desires, and potential futures, by assuming a “reassembly” of pan-African festivals rather than a linear view, we aim to explore alternative taxonomies and inventive record-keeping practices, which critique hegemonic library classification systems and vocabulary³, through their reenactment and reproduction.

Through a social practice residency, public programme, and publication, *Annotations* explodes the capacity of the annotation as minutia and marginalia through a collaborative and subjective approach to knowledge production. Each element of the programme considers alternative practices for archival investigation and co-production through collective engagement. The Lagos-based residency will support artists to make interventions within the context of FESTAC'77 archives and sites through collaboration and public participation. Through the dynamic condition of annotations, the resulting publication will activate a participatory and variegated approach to collective archival engagement.

In continuation of Chimurenga's jazz-like approach to the re-creation of the FESTAC'77 archive and their homonymous publication, alongside Marilyn Nance's *Last Day in Lagos*, *Annotations* further investigates the relationship between the archives of these festivals as source and as subject, and how contemporary activations of these events underscore a dynamic between history and collective memory, in which the act of collective memory keeping creates a path towards reckoning with archival absence. Through the practice of creating multifarious marginalia to the pan-African festivals archives, *Annotations* also contemplates these alternative taxonomies and record keeping practices among pan-African library networks within the continent and the diaspora. With a beginning in Lagos, the programme will create an opening

¹ Andrew Apter, “FESTAC 77: A Black World's Fair.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, August 2021.

² Sameer Farooq, *Speculative Archives: An Index*, 2014

³ Drabinski, Emily, “Queering the Catalogue, Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction.” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, vol. 83, no. 2, 2013, pp. 94–111.

for satellite residency programmes in other African cities which house the archives of these twentieth century festivals (Dakar, Algiers, Kinshasa).

Working Group and Publication

Annotations Working Group is convened by Naima Hassan, Maryam Kazeem, and Billy Fowo. The working group structure tests the potential of circulatory working models, and will invite multiple guests to contribute work-in-progress ideas, testimonies, visual, sonic and textual research on the subject theme. This structure plays with “publishing acts: experimenting with publishing in terms of material, spatiality, and its publics,” an offering from Maryam Kazeem’s speculative collective writing activity FESTAC 2077 informed by Rebekka Kiesewetter’s “From Exclusion to Autonomy: Publishing as a Spatializing Act.”

The publication will feature offerings from the *Annotations* public programme and residency. Concluding the first year of the Working Group, the publication will be launched during the *Annotations* public programme. Expanding the notion of publishing beyond the material realm, the publication will be launched with a Study Day held at G.A.S. Foundation in November 2024, and draws on Christian Nyampeta’s concept of the scriptorium, a gathering place for writing and translation, as conceptualised in *École du soir* (2019–). Concluding the first year of the Working Group, the contributors to the publication will contribute a panel to Re:assemblages Symposium.

Residency

On the occasion of the *Annotations* residency, G.A.S. Foundation calls for applications from libraries, publishers, and institutions interested in forming the first cohort of the African Arts Libraries (AAL) Lab. African Art Libraries Lab will bring together a constellation of African arts libraries and publishers in Lagos, Dakar, Marrakesh, Cairo, Nairobi, Cape Town, Limbe, and beyond to engage critical questions on publishing practices, libraries, and archives in Africa. Museums and institutions in Europe and North America will be invited to participate in collective experimentation with AAL members to encourage new ways of networking, preserving, and activating African and Afro-diasporic library collections in multi-locational sites.

The social practice residency will support artistic interventions within the context of existing FESTAC ’77 archives, using annotative and citational practices as a guiding framework. In consideration of historical FESTAC’77 sites such as the National Theatre, The Center for Black and African Culture and Civilization (CBAAC), Festac Town, the residency will engage a wider public in the act of citation and annotation making of FESTAC’77 as both event and archive.

Research Associates Programme: Timeline: Twentieth Century Pan African Festivals (AAL Lab)

Annotations will also shape the thematic focus for the 2024-2025 cohort of the African Arts Libraries Lab (AAL Lab). Aiming to pilot a pedagogical economy around the twentieth century Pan-African festivals, the digital timeline will be developed by the Annotations Research Associates with the guidance of guest tutors Archival Consciousness. The intention is not to create a survey of the festivals; indeed, much work has taken place to excavate the archives of Dakar ’66, Algiers ’69; Kinshasa ’74 and Lagos ’77. Instead, the timeline aims to collect, trace, and reassemble visual, material and sonic traces of the festivals held in African public libraries and collections. Moving beyond the question of what remains, the timeline will serve as an open-source digital document visualising the echoes and reverberations of festival programmes, performances and artworks and accounts by festival organizers, artists and witnesses reflected in African literature, print media and archives. With a mandate illustrating a form of utopianism that marked the period of decolonization, the timeline aims to connect geographies siloed in the present, and introduces new possibilities for African institutional collaboration.

The Research Associates programme will feature a tandem cohort of postgraduate students from Spelman College (U.S.A.), Yabatech and Lagos. With a collaborative research design, the digital timeline will be *assembled* by students, and supervised by guest tutors Archival Consciousness (Mariana Lanari and Remco van Bladel). The platform was initiated in close collaboration with the Stedelijk Museum and De appel in Amsterdam to rethink the visual and textual infrastructure of bibliographic metadata. The duo are interested in the long-term preservation and dissemination of physical archives, in connection with the digital archive.

Working with the databases, and collective memories of members in the AAL Lab, the timeline provides an overarching place-based inventory of publications associated with the festivals. The timeline will trace literature from institutional collections, to seeds harvested from pan-African festivals within experimental African publishing and literary clubs, to the traces of the festivals in the present. The transcripts of the interviews undertaken by research associates will contribute towards Timeline: Twentieth Century Pan African Festivals. G.A.S. Foundation will host the Timeline on its AAL Lab’s Digital Platform, launching in 2025.

Re:assemblages Symposium 2025

Following the instrumental 2012 symposium Condition Report: Symposium on Building Art Institutions in Africa held in Dakar, the symposium is organised in close association with the first cohort of the African Arts Libraries Lab (AAL Lab) with the aim of illuminating parallels, shared urgencies, and fostering circular pedagogical economies around African art histories. The harvest of year-long project *Annotations* will result in a 2025 symposium panel focused on presenting the outcomes of the associates programme, public programmes and residency held at G.A.S. Foundation.

Curators

Naima Hassan is a researcher and curator based in Berlin. Since 2022, she has led the development of the Picton Collection and Archive at G.A.S. Foundation, Lagos. Concurrently, she is the co-convenor of G.A.S. programme Re:assemblages. Her practice moves between the visual, sonic and textual, to facilitate dialogues between visual anthropology, archival research, social practice and exhibition making. In 2023-24, she is a Liberal Arts Engagement Hub Fellow at the University of Minnesota. Her current engagements include the HKW in Berlin, Het Nieuwe Instituut's Modernisms along the Indian Ocean Working Group and TheMuseumsLab's Steering Committee. Naima holds an education grounded in the undercommons, University of Oxford, BIEA in Nairobi and Goldsmiths, University of London. She is the co-founder of platform and artistic-collaboration *SITAAD*.

Maryam Kazeem is a writer, and the founder of iranti press, a publishing project based in Lagos, which convenes FESTAC 2077: A Speculative Writing Exercise. She has a BA in African Studies from Northwestern University and an MSc in Gender from the London School of Economics and Political Science. She completed her MFA in Creative Writing at the California Institute of the Arts as a Truman Capote Fellow where she also taught courses in Black cultural and performance studies as a Teaching Fellow for the School of Critical Studies. Her creative work makes connections between abstraction, archival research, and the materiality of language and has appeared in platforms including Criterion, Literary Hub, Catapult, Another Gaze, Apogee, and Joyland amongst others. Her writing has been nominated for The Best of the Net, and in 2021, she was the winner of the Goethe-Institut + Huza Press Writing Gender Residency in Kigali, Rwanda. She is currently at work on her first novel.

Collaborators

Archival Consciousness was initiated by artist Mariana Lanari and graphic designer Remco van Bladel in order to collaborate with libraries and archives in cultural institutions. They engage in close collaboration with archivists to implement methods and infrastructure aimed at enhancing accessibility of their collections. The focus lies on the long-term preservation and dissemination of physical archives, in conjunction with the digital archive. The digital component, specifically the databases of these archives, serves as the foundation for their work. They are currently in the process of developing a shared and community-oriented Knowledge Graph that serves as an interaction layer on top of the existing databases of libraries and archives. The platform aims to facilitate the process of discovery, browsing, and navigation for users.

Billy Fowo is a curator and writer based in Berlin and working at SAVVY Contemporary – The Laboratory of Form-Ideas, Germany. Very much grounded in the idea of the Laboratory, for Billy Fowo, rethinking and stretching the idea of the exhibition as a format, forms an essential part of his research and curatorial approach. With points of interest in various fields and disciplines such as the sonic, linguistics and literature, Billy Fowo questions through his practice what is considered knowledge and the spaces in which we find knowledge. Recent projects include *It Go Have To Adjust. On Language As Parasite*, SAVVY Contemporary (2023), *Unraveling The (Under-) Development Complex, An Ode to Walter Rodney's "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa", 50 Years On (1972 - 2022)*, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin (2022), *Wata Go Lef Stone, On the Perpetuity of Accara Across the Oceans, an offering within A Parábola Do Progresso, Sesc Pompeia, São Paulo (2022)*.