

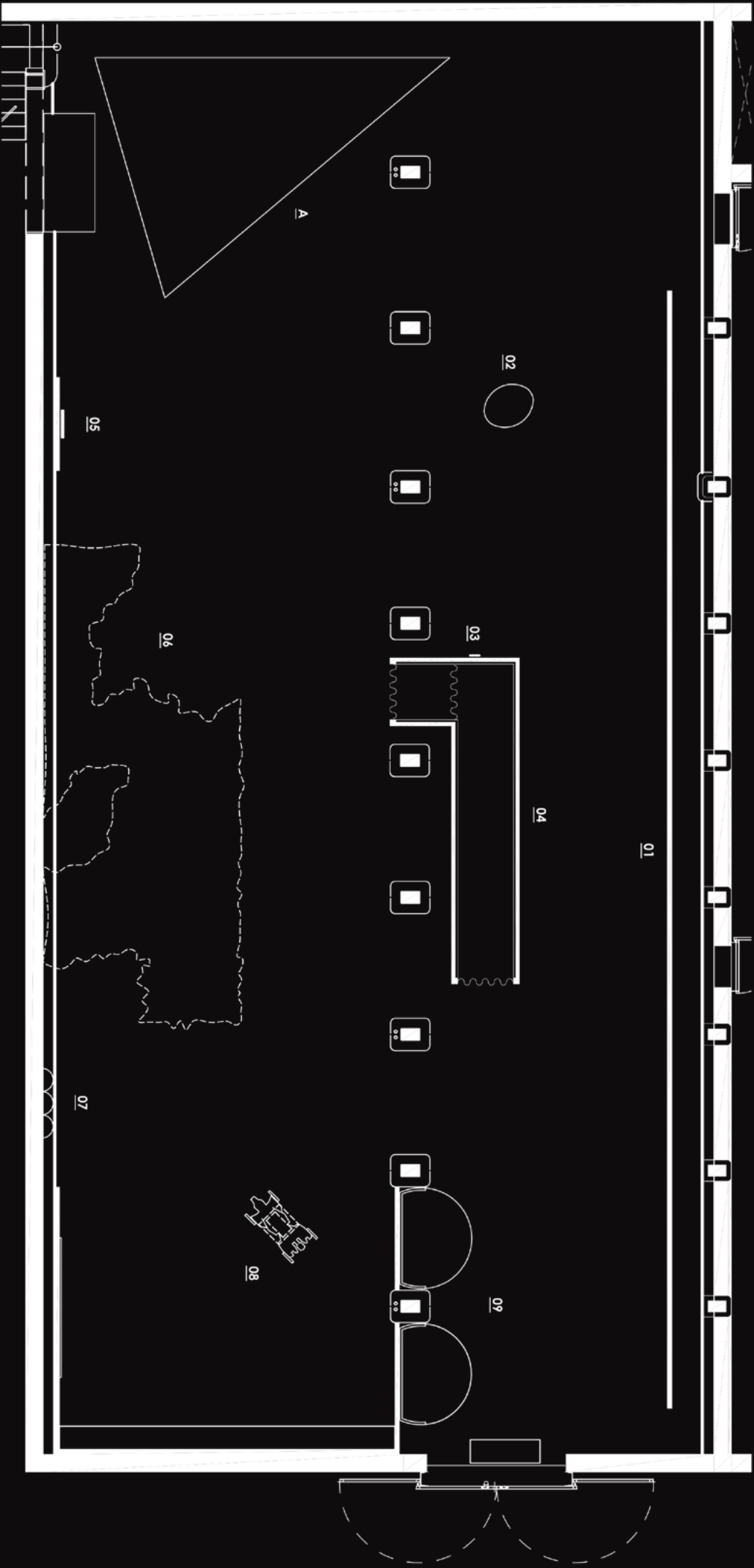
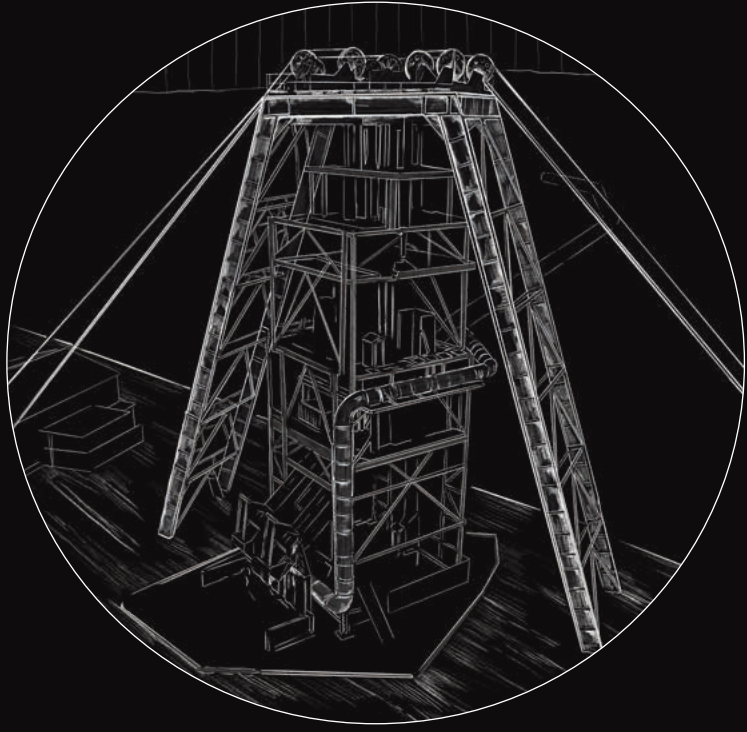
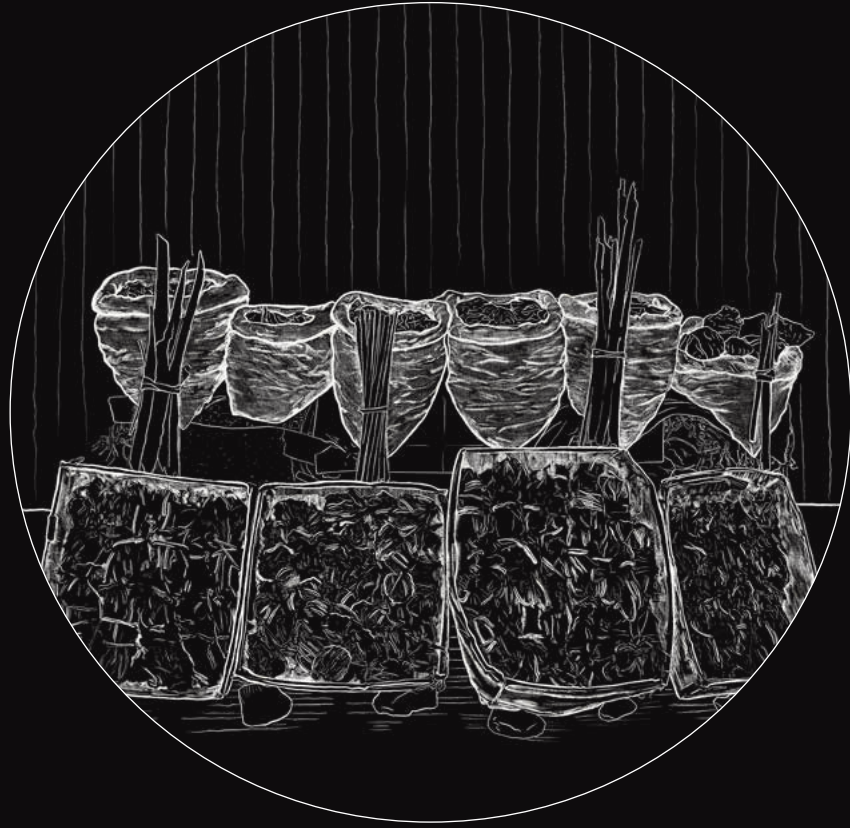
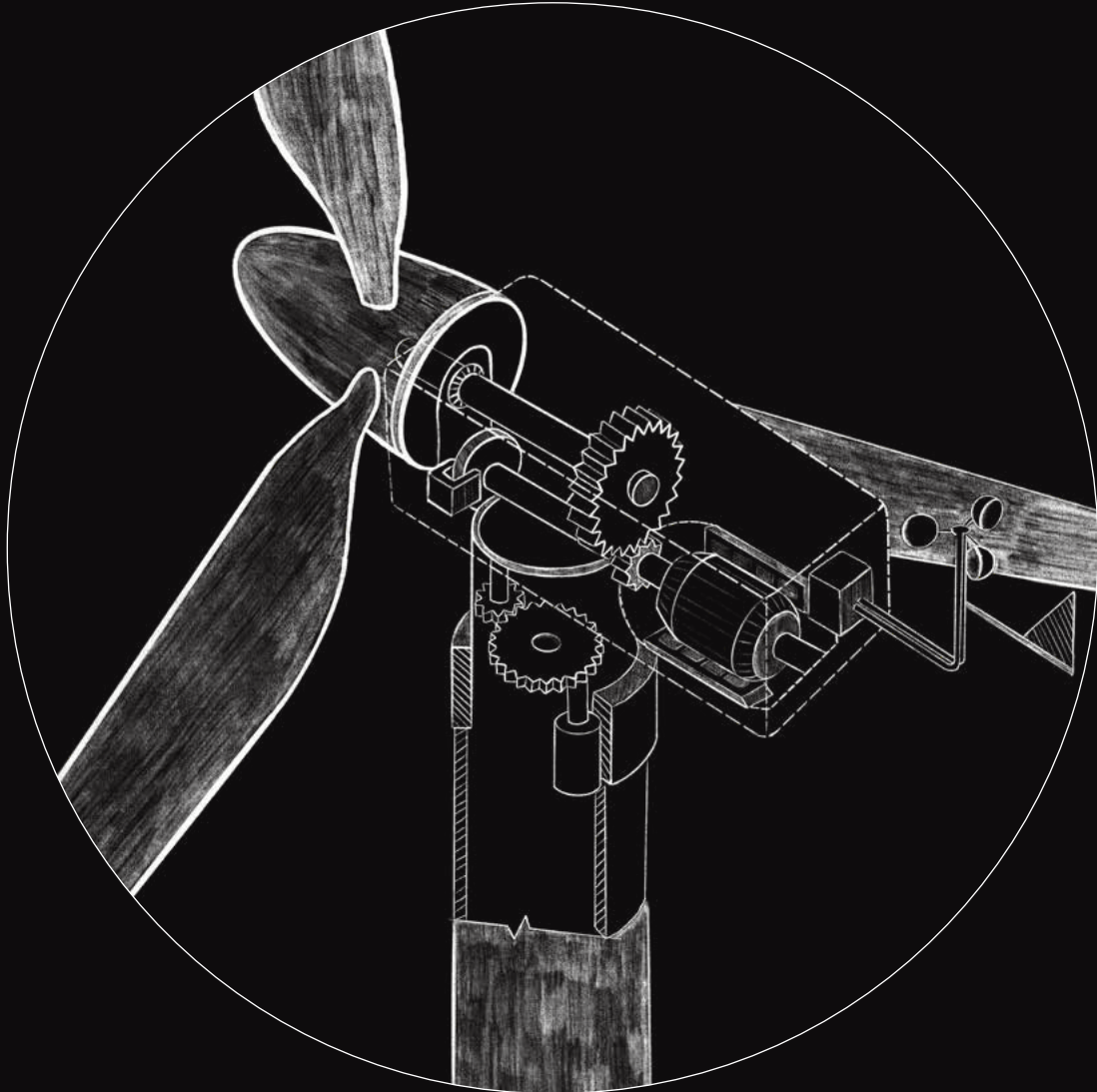
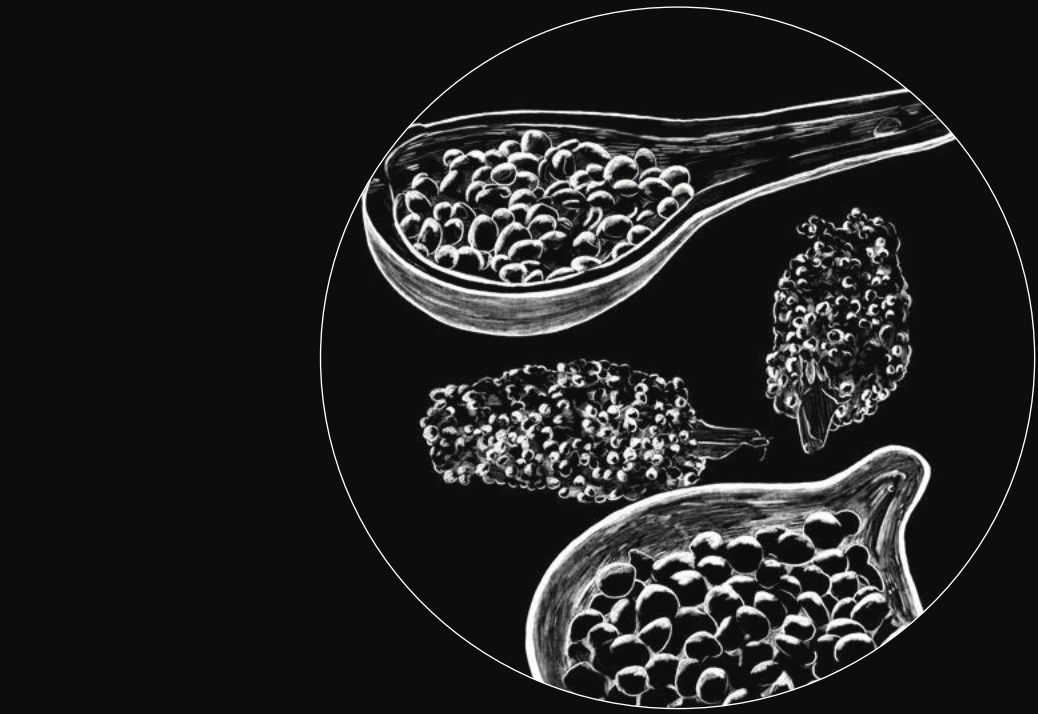
The Joburg Contemporary Art Foundation (JCAF) is currently undertaking a three-year programme under the theme of *Worldmaking*. The theme explores, through a trilogy of exhibitions and an accompanying series of talks and publications, the kind of world we want to inhabit and leave behind. **Ecospheres** (2024) reflected on the natural world, **Structures** (2025) focused on the built environment, and **Reverse Futures** (2026) considers the techno-future.

The concept of ‘the future’ is often dominated by narratives, technologies and ideologies rooted in the West. Through the triumvirate of science, technology and media, the future is frequently presented as either dystopian or utopian. This is portrayed through popular culture, particularly in Hollywood sci-fi films and series. Yet for many in the Global South, the future is not distant but rooted in the present, where communities who have long grappled with inequality, environmental change, conflict and extraction, carry within them the vision and urgency to transform it.

REVERSE FUTURES

26 JUNE -
5 DECEMBER
2026

WORLD
MAKING



JOBURG CONTEMPORARY ART FOUNDATION

REVERSE FUTURES WORLDMAKING

- A Wolff Architects
B Rebecca Potterton
01 Calculating Empires (Kate Crawford & Vladan Joler)
02 Yinka Shonibare
03 Erel Adnan
04 Kamil Adnan Hassim
05 Ernest Mancoba
06 Cave_bureau
07 Georgia Munnik
08 Paula Gaetano Adi
09 Traci Kwaai

Reverse Futures centres on ideas of the future from the Global South, where past, present and future are interconnected. Grounded in historical research, artists’ lived experiences, community narratives and Indigenous knowledge systems, the exhibition examines how the effects of colonialism, migration and technological change continue to shape both the present and our vision of what lies ahead. It suggests that a fair future requires acknowledging historical injustices while foregrounding plural, locally grounded knowledges shaped by community practices and more sustainable ways of living.

The artworks reflect on migration, memory, ecology, the cosmos and power, inviting viewers to reconsider the role of technology. These themes unfold through immersive and unexpected encounters: a dive underwater to hear the stories of the Kalk Bay community, an African astronaut searching for a habitable world, traces of slavery in Kenyan caves, the contradictory smells of jasmine and concrete in Johannesburg, a robot re-enacting a 19th-century liberation campaign in the Andes, and an expansive visualisation of the calculative logics of empire. Such situated approaches challenge dominant narratives of progress, opening space for alternative ways of imagining the planet’s future without losing sight of ongoing injustices, including how they may be reproduced beyond Earth. Visitors can navigate the exhibition through three interconnected sections:

Space presents the cosmos through Indigenous knowledge, displacement and perception, framing it as a site of survival and imagination.

Time connects cave histories and modernist painting, showing how past and present intertwine through shared marks and gestures, and the legacies of colonialism.

Place explores how technology and sensory experience can connect locations, memories and communities, creating new ways of archiving personal and collective stories.



Research Theme

Worldmaking

Exhibition III

Reverse Futures

26 June - 5 December 2026

Curated by Clive Kellner

Designed by

Nasir Patel

Edited by

Bronwyn Law-Viljoen

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Technical drawing for Guanaquex (2024), © and courtesy

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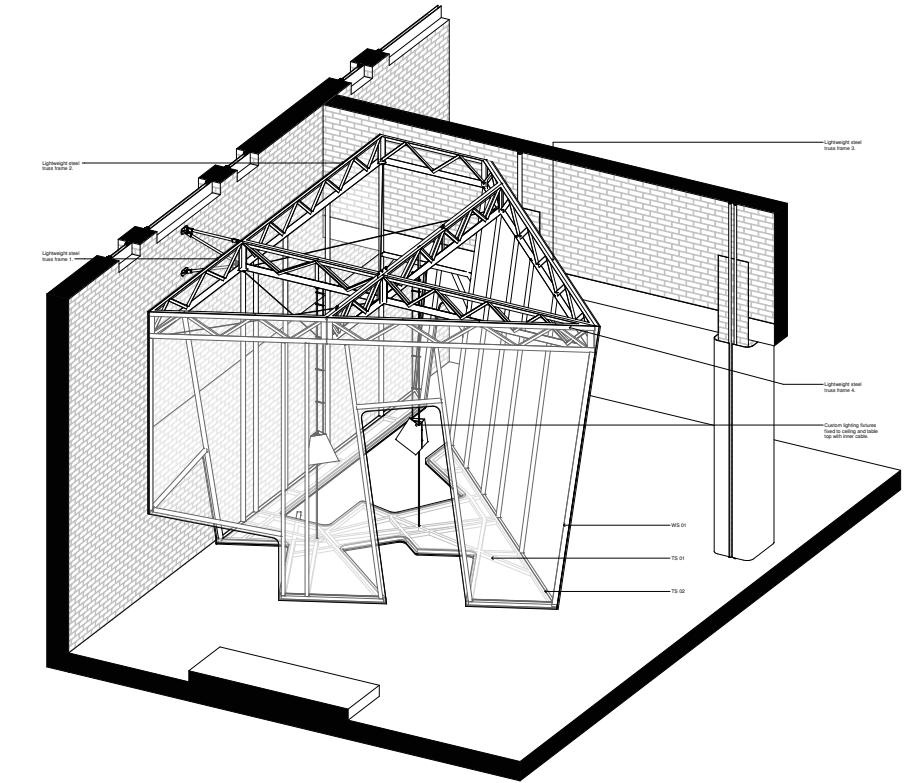
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SPECIAL PROJECTS

A WOLFF ARCHITECTS

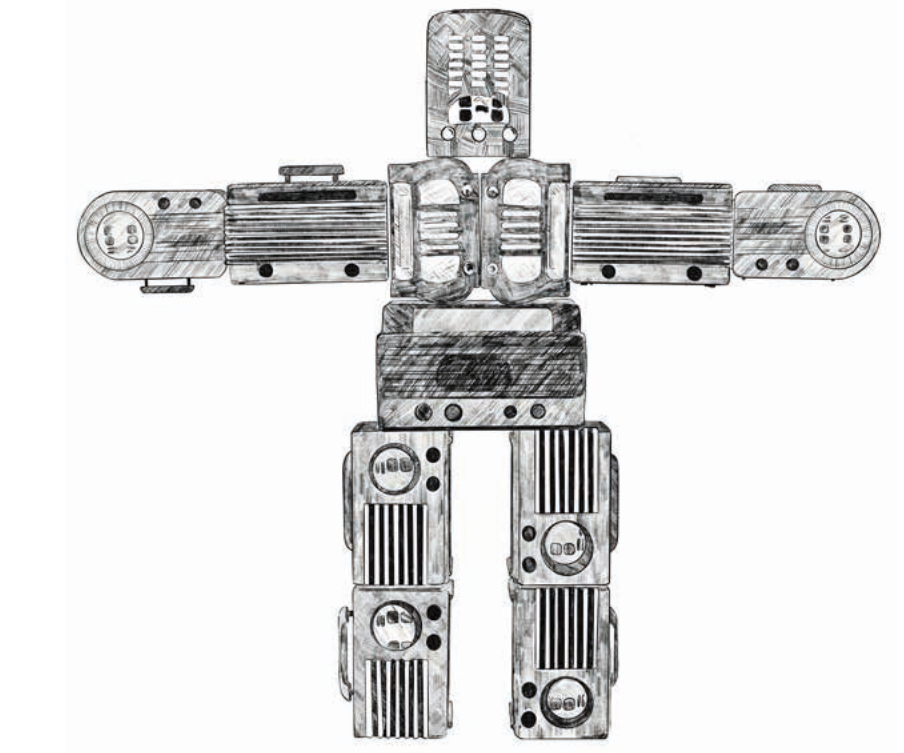
Wolff Architects was commissioned by JCAF to create a Reading Room, a new space in the gallery to accompany the three *Worldmaking* exhibitions (2024-2026). In their proposal, the architects describe the room as “a table with walls, a library without shelves or a room in a room”. The Reading Room hosts a single publication, the exhibition *Reader*. The structure fosters conversations and social engagements while also providing a space for reflection and pause. Wolff Architects draws inspiration from traditions of conviviality, and references Manolo Callahan’s conception of convivial gathering, proposing this as a “structure of contemporary knowledge creation where everyone brings their own skills and insights to advance our common understandings.”



Wolff Architects, structural perspective massing drawing from the proposal for the Reading Room (2024). © Wolff Architects.

B REBECCA POTTERTON

Remembering Tomorrow (2026) is a series of thirty illustrations depicting human rituals, practices and objects that carry us forward. The title suggests that the future is not something entirely unknown, but something we are already rehearsing. Through these illustrations, Potterton’s work proposes that progress may lie less in invention than in remembering the practices that sustain life, strengthen communities and orient us toward a more thoughtful tomorrow. Reproduced across the exhibition’s publications, the illustrations extend the curatorial thread and invite readers to discover other possible imagery for the future



Rebecca Potterton, *Remembering Tomorrow* (2026). Digital illustrations. © Rebecca Potterton.

01. CALCULATING EMPIRES (KATE CRAWFORD AND VLADAN JOLER)

Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler are researchers whose collaborative work combines data investigation, critical cartography and visualisation to examine the social and political structures of technology. *Calculating Empires* (2023) is a large-scale visual manifesto created to highlight the relationship between technology and systems of control over the last five centuries. The diagram traces the imperial pathways of power since the 1500s across systems of power like colonialism, militarisation and automation. Through hundreds of handcrafted illustrations and texts that draw relationships between today’s empires and those of the past, Crawford and Joler visualise how technical and social structures have co-evolved over the centuries. The mural traces the environmental and social impacts of systems of calculation, and how empires have used technology to centralise power. More than 24 metres long and three metres high, *Calculating Empires* helps us understand our contemporary moment and how we got here.



Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler, *Calculating Empires: A Genealogy of Technology and Power since 1500* (2023). Large-scale visual installation. © and courtesy the artists. Photographed in the exhibition *Dans les plis des cartes*, © Le Lieu Unique, Nantes, 2025. Photo Fanny Trichet.



SECTION 1: SPACE

02 YINKA SHONIBARE

Yinka Shonibare is a British-Nigerian interdisciplinary artist who draws on Western art history and global histories of trade and colonialism to explore the relationship between Africa and Europe. *Refugee Astronaut X* (2024) is part of Shonibare’s ongoing *Refugee Astronaut* series (2015-) and features a life-sized nomadic astronaut travelling through space in search of a habitable place to live. The astronaut’s suit is made from Dutch wax fabric, a material often associated with African aesthetics but rooted in global trade histories, which the artist uses to question notions of cultural heritage. The astronaut’s mesh sack is filled with belongings Shonibare collected in Madagascar, including a compass, binoculars, a hat, pans, rope and a Malagasy board game. *Refugee Astronaut X* evokes the experience of displacement caused by environmental crisis, war and global inequality, warning that if rising sea levels and climate-driven migration remain unaddressed, humanity may face a future of constant displacement extending even into outer space. The figure also suggests that as long as space exploration follows the colonial logics that shaped exploitation on earth, it will likely recreate those inequalities there too.



Yinka Shonibare, *Refugee Astronaut X* (2024). Fibreglass sculpture, Dutch wax fabric, net, possessions, astronaut helmet and moon boots. Courtesy Collection Fondation H. © Yinka Shonibare. Image courtesy the artist and Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, Johannesburg and London. Photo Stephen White & Co.

03 ETEL ADNAN

Etel Adnan (1925-2021), born in Beirut, was a Lebanese-American poet, writer and painter. Adnan’s work was influenced by her experiences of war in the Middle East and her life between Lebanon, France and the United States. She reflected on ideas of home and belonging through contemplation of her immediate surroundings and her childhood memories. While Adnan’s writings are overtly political, her paintings frequently turn to abstraction, using simple geometric forms and vibrant colours to evoke emotional and physical landscapes. The artist was fascinated with space, closely following U.S. space exploration in the 1960s, even as she remained deeply critical of the country’s military presence in the Middle East. Painted decades after humanity’s first steps on the moon and during the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, *Satellites 27* (2020) forms part of Adnan’s *Satellites* series, in which she shifts her gaze from the earth to the sky. In this small-scale oil painting created late in Adnan’s life, imagined planets float against a pale pink background recalling the sky of Beirut and reflecting Adnan’s lifelong enchantment with the region’s intense sunlight. The work’s pure and unmixed colours create an environment where nostalgia and cosmic fantasy coexist.



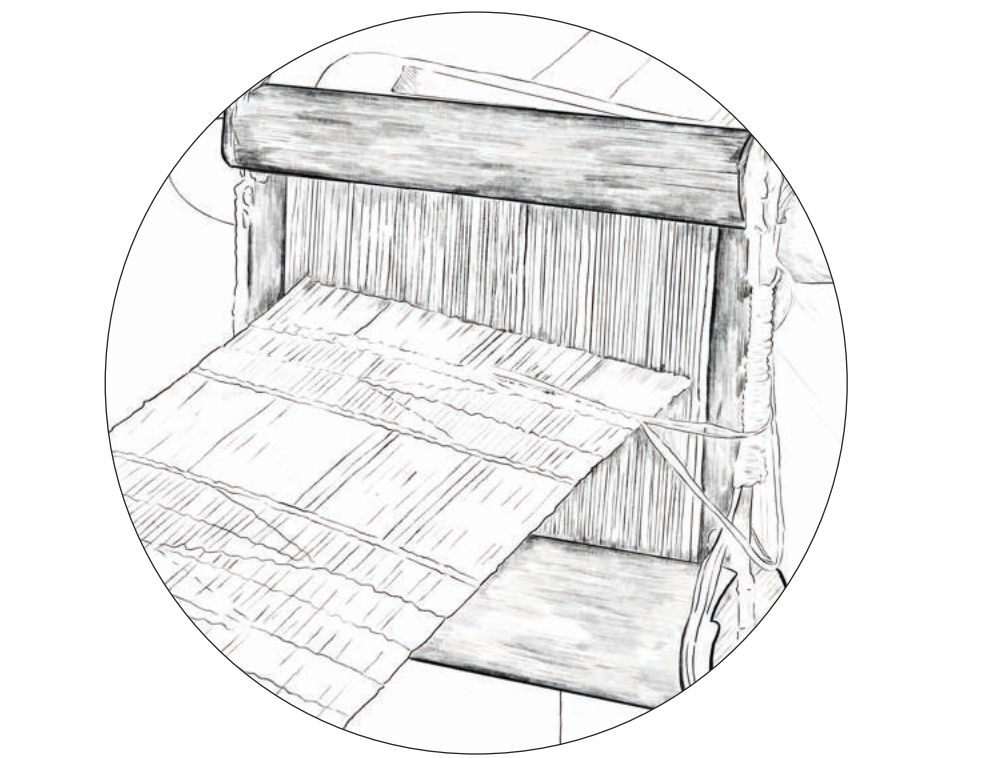
Etel Adnan, *Satellites 27* (2020). Oil on canvas. Private Collection. © 2020 Etel Adnan | DALRO. Image courtesy Galerie Lelong and the Estate of Etel Adnan.

04 KAMIL ADAM HASSIM

Kamil Adam Hassim is a South African transdisciplinary artist drawn to the concepts of space and time. He has conducted research with astronomical observatories, collaborated with engineers and scientists at the South African Large Telescope (SALT), and was the youngest recipient of a residency at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN). Drawing on Polynesian wayfinding, an Indigenous method of navigating space and time, his work explores the intersection of cultural paradigms, information flows, and ways of interfacing with the cosmos. *Event Horizon* (2026) is an immersive installation that reconstructs the conditions of a moonless night in the Karoo desert. Conceived as a subtraction instrument, the installation strips away the sensory and electromagnetic noise of contemporary life (light, sound, Wi-Fi, cellular and radio) to focus on what the body perceives once civilisation is removed. Visitors enter a red chamber that recalibrates the body’s sensory baseline before moving through a tunnel of darkness and silence. Using defunct astronomical lenses, the installation functions as a cosmic detector, registering muon particles as they pass through the space and the body. This also reflects Indigenous Xam philosophy whose cosmologies recognised no boundary between the earth and the sky, and who were among the first human observers of the universe.



Kamil Adam Hassim, *Event Horizon* (2026). Cosmic detection instrument. © and courtesy the artist.



SECTION 2: TIME

05 ERNEST MANCOBA

Ernest Mancoba (1904-2002), a South African painter and sculptor, is regarded as one of the first modernist artists in the country. In 1938, he left South Africa to study at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Paris, and spent the rest of his life in self-imposed exile. Mancoba’s work was influenced by African geometric forms, *ubuntu* philosophy, religious themes, Danish fresco painting, and West and Central African masks and funerary figures. After arriving in Paris, he began searching for a universal artistic language through abstraction. He challenged Western ideas of African art as primitive and rejected stereotypes and expectations of what African art should look like. Instead, he developed his own painting style by debunking the separation between the spiritual and material realms. His work echoes cave paintings, connecting the past and present through the very human impulse of making a mark. In *Untitled* (1971), two rhombus shapes lightly touch against a background of warm tones punctuated by dark blue accents. Their interiors reveal areas of pale cream that appear as a respite amongst the organic lines that move in multiple directions across the surface. The form may suggest a shield, a mask, an hourglass, an infinity-like symbol, or a pair of leaves, arrows, diamonds or kites, without settling into a fixed meaning. This intentional lack of definition reflects the artist’s pursuit of a universal language, where spontaneous forms and reduced detail allow for an expression of the inner being.



Ernest Mancoba, *Untitled* (1971). Oil on linen. Private Collection. © and courtesy of Ferlov Mancoba Foundation / Galerie Mikael Andersen.

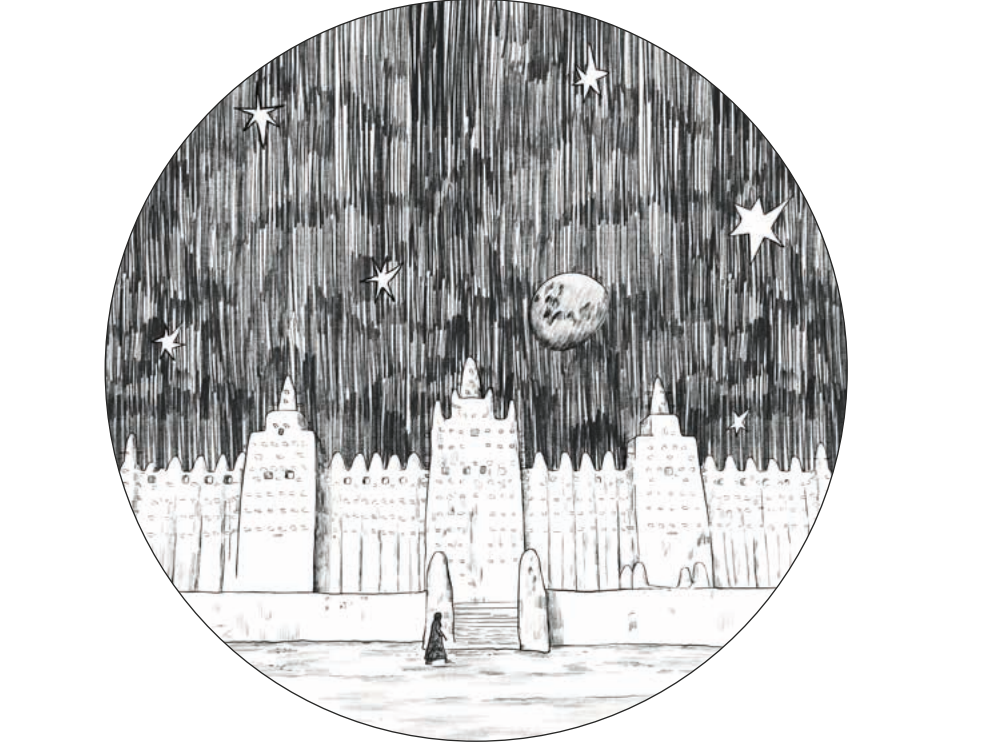
06 CAVE_BUREAU

Cave_bureau is a Nairobi-based group of artists, architects and researchers exploring how architecture can help address social and ecological challenges in local communities in Kenya. Founded in 2014 by architects Kabage Karanja and Stella Mutegi, the group draws inspiration from their ancestors and conducts research into caves in and around Nairobi. In 2020, they travelled to Shimoni, a coastal town in Kwale County, to study the Shimoni Caves of the Enslaved. This site, little known outside the region, was used in the 19th century as holding chambers for enslaved people during the East African slave trade. Cave_bureau worked with local custodians to document the caves, creating 3D renderings using laser scanning. The cave form was then reconstructed at 1:1 scale using a Kagome triaxial weaving technique, an ancient form of weaving originating in Japanese basket making. The architects bring caves, which were also humans’ first shelters, and their various historical uses to the forefront through contemporary technology, prompting reflection on the connections between past, present and future. The *Shimoni Slave Cave* installation transforms a space of trauma into one of contemplation and repair, revealing the lasting impacts of colonialism while preserving the memory of lost histories for future exploration. The handwoven rattan installation is exhibited at JCAF alongside a 1:100 3D plastic model of the cave made by Cave_bureau, and their film *Anthropocene Museum 2.0: Shimoni Slave Caves* (2021) to contextualise the project.



Cave_bureau, *Shimoni Slave Cave* (2022-2023). 1:1 Kagome hand-woven installation in rattan. © and courtesy Cave_bureau in collaboration with the Chair for Biohybrid Architecture, Royal Danish Academy. In the foreground, Cave_bureau, *Shimoni Slave Cave* (2023). 3D-printed plastic 1:100 scale architectural model. © and courtesy Cave_bureau. Photographed in the exhibition *The Architect’s Studio: Cave_bureau*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark, 19 June 2023 - 14 January 2024. Image © and courtesy the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art and Cave_bureau.

Cave_bureau, *Anthropocene Museum 2.0: Shimoni Slave Caves* (2021). Video. © and courtesy Cave_bureau.



SECTION 3: PLACE

07 GEORGIA MUNNIK

South African artist Georgia Munnik is interested in how scents can help us understand ourselves and the world around us. She draws from the imagery of climate fiction, using olfactory practice as a meditation on the binaries of life and death, beauty and decay, growth and decline. *Concrete Jasmine* (2026) is a homage to the artist’s home city, Johannesburg, which she recalls at a distance through the conflicting scents of pink jasmine and damp concrete. The scent references the walls of abandoned buildings in Johannesburg where jasmine proliferates. For Munnik, the image of a hardy climber weed flowering in challenging conditions echoes the character of the city and the resilience of its residents. The coexistence of natural blossom and urban decay reveals the contradictions of daily life in Johannesburg, a complicated landscape in which beauty is also possible. The *Strangling Fruit* resin-cast flower heads are made of remnants of natural and industrial materials, including Hario coffee filters, black obsidian and citrine crystal shards, and lemon verbena tincture. Mimicking porous bodies, the flower heads act as carriers and diffusers of the scent *Concrete Jasmine* (2026), which was commissioned by JCAF for the *Reverse Futures* exhibition.



Georgia Munnik, *The Strangling Fruit* (2026). Resin, Hario filters, black obsidian and citrine crystal shards, lemon verbena tincture, tree moss tincture, synthetic cannabis raw material (scent molecules), oxidised copper residue, copper pigment, gold pigment, brown shimmer eyeshadow, coffee residue, honey and rose fermentation residue, saffron absolute, dragon pea flower tea and thyme essential oil, oxidised brass lamp fitting and unique hand-cast lamp holders. © and courtesy the artist. Photo Slater Studio, courtesy Whatthefworld.

Georgia Munnik, *Concrete Jasmine* (2026). Bespoke olfactory scent. © and courtesy the artist.

08 PAULA GAETANO ADI

Paula Gaetano Adi is an Argentine artist working across robotics, sculpture and performance. She proposes an alternative to models of technological innovation rooted in violence, oppression and exploitation. The full-scale *Guañauqerx* (2024) robot was inspired by the guanaco, a camelid native to the Andes Mountains, and the myth of Yastay, the guardian of the mountains. Constructed from colihue cane and dressed in Andean textiles, the robot merges ancestral knowledge with contemporary technologies. Equipped with multi-vision and a sound system, it records the images and soundings of the Andes. Its tail beats a traditional Andean drum, it waves the flag of the Revolutionary Army of Artificial Liberation (ERLA), and it carries a metal plaque that states its allegiance to the earth and all its beings. In 2024, Gaetano Adi organised a reenactment, with the *Guañauqerx* robot, of José de San Martín’s 1817 Crossing of the Andes, the military campaign that helped secure independence across much of South America. The journey, supported by artists, engineers and *baqueanos* (skilled local guides and horsemen), functioned as both performance and expedition, reflecting on past and present practices of liberation and highlighting possible futures of coexistence between human and non-human species. The installation at JCAF includes the robot, archival material and a film documenting the 2024 Andes expedition.



Paula Gaetano Adi, *Guañauqerx* (2024). Robot, video projection with sound, archival research material and wall graphics. © and courtesy the artist.

09 TRACI KWAAI

Traci Kwaai is a South African story keeper, decolonial ocean historian, and social and ecological activist. As a sixth generation fisher child, she explores belonging and community in her work through the voices of local fishers and displaced families from Kalk Bay whose livelihoods remain under threat due to restricted access to marine resources. *Fisher Child* (2025) is a community-based media project that transforms the oral storytelling archive of a small South African fishing community into an interactive digital repository. Co-created with community members and developed with creative technologist Kyle Marais and Lo-Def Film Factory, the project combines emerging technologies such as 360° video, photogrammetry and virtual reality with traditional storytelling. Viewers are immersed in a submerged, sensorial reality where, underwater, they are prompted to pull a fishing line to activate different community stories. Through this interaction, they encounter 3D documentation of significant artefacts, cultural sites and oral histories, preserving the heritage and identity of Kalk Bay’s Brown communities.



Traci Kwaai, *Fisher Child* (2025). Still from VR installation. © and courtesy Traci Kwaai in collaboration with Kyle Marais and Lo-Def Film Factory.