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*For Malvin Patrom Duarte And His Family. A Friend, Present To Help Out. July 2019.*

**Destination Country: Cape Verde**

# Synopsis

The Heterotopia Project (Heterotopia) will take the form of an artist residency program on the mountain of Pico Da Cruz, Cape Verde.

Heterotopia will exist as a physical and theoretical space which will provide opportunities for cultural exchange and connect the static geographic location of Pico Da Cruz to globally relevant ideas. It will engage with the participating artists, the local residents, and the environment in an experimental and research-based educational artistic program which will reach beyond the introverted sphere of the exhibition space and allow participants to discover and transfer skills, knowledge, and activity.

Heterotopia will approach the act of making art in a way which integrates personal artistic practice into the much wider realm of reality. This approach will account for the needs and aspirations of ourselves and of others, and produce social change, community interaction, cultural awareness, and shared experience. Heterotopia will develop, choose and make use of the various approaches towards, and the processes within, artistic practice, and will contribute to the development of a new practice within the subject area of Contemporary Art.

Heterotopia will situate itself as an artistic project within several different contexts, challenge tradition, and ask highly relevant questions.

Heterotopia will explore truth and fiction, and the area which sits between truth and fiction – one's perception of truth – to question the reality in which we live, and imagine (and deliver) a future in which things can be different.

## Exhibition

Within an exhibition context, the ideas, findings, and work made during the time spent in Cape Verde will be presented as alternative sources of information to restage this passage of time. This documentation will provide insight into the project through a combination of a sound, image, text and materiality.

## To Raise An Issue



*View Towards Paul City, On Sao Antao Island, July 2019.*

Heterotopia will ask, and is asking a number of questions about a number of issues. These are:

- What is the issue?
- Why is there an issue?
- Why are Africans misrepresented?
- Why are black African bodies misrepresented?
- Why is that an issue?
- Why is misrepresentation an issue?
- What are the causes and effects of misrepresentation?
- What is misrepresentation?
- Why is representation so important?
- What is representation?
- Why are Africans misrepresented?
- Does misrepresentation cause misunderstanding?
- What are the implications of misunderstanding Africans?
- Are Africans misunderstood?
- Why are Africans misrepresented?
- How do we understand Africans - the African body or the black body?
- How do we come to terms with this?
- How do we come to a point of conciliation?
- What is it that needs to be done to solve such an issue?
- Where do we begin?
- What are some current discoveries?
- What is a discovery?
- What does it mean to discover something?
- What knowledge can we attribute to the African body?
- How do we better understand the African body?
- How do we attain such knowledge and understanding?

## Preamble Illustration



SEATED IN THE DARK, ANGERED BY THE SORROWS  
OF OUR CURRENT DAYS...



A DIM LIGHT BY THE SIDE OF A DESK ILLUMINATES  
A QUIET SPACE OF THE NIGHT.



MASQUED WITH ROUND DARK SPECTACLES,



...AS REMINISCENT IMAGERY INDULGES HIS MIND.  
THE WIZARD OF THE DARK KNIGHT RECOUNTS THE  
MONSTROSITIES OF A NOT SO DISTANT PAST.



IN THE BLINK OF A SECOND, HIS DILUTED  
PUPILS PLUNGED INTO THE REALM OF DREAM,  
INSIDE WICH CHARACTERS BEGIN TO REVEAL  
THEMSELVES.



AS WE PLUNGE INTO THE DARKNESS,  
THE INEVITABLE SENSATIONS OF A PIT  
SEIZES HIS BODY AND CAPTURE HIS SOUL.



AN UNEXPECTED CRUSH TORTMENTS HIS MIND IN AN  
ENDLESS LOOP BETWEEN THE BODY AND THE  
INNER SELF...



...RUPTURED BY THE SUDDEN STATE OF  
ZERO GRAVITY.



WE ARE IN A BEDROOM WITNESSING THE EARLY  
STAGES OF AN ENDING.



THE COLLAPSE...



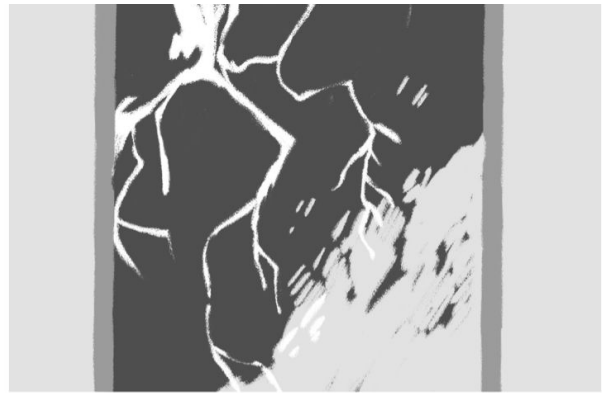
OF CIVILISATION.



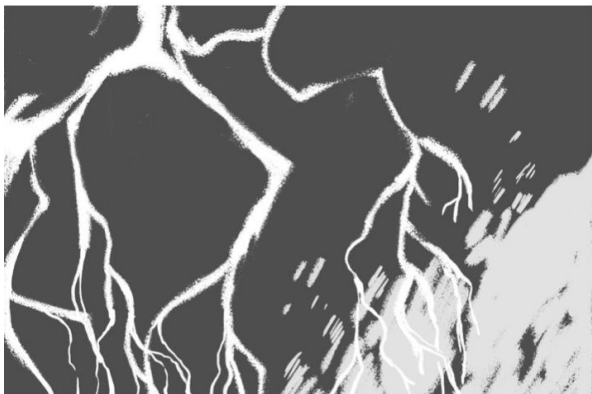
WITH INTERNAL PROBLEMS



AMONG FRIENDS AND PARTNERS.



DIVULGING SOCIO-POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS  
ARE BREAKING...



AND THUNDERING APART.

# An Introduction



*Close Up View Of Cactus, July 2019.*

My investigation started with the notion of improving the African problem of misrepresentation. My eureka moment occurred in Shanghai, China, in 2018-19 during a postgraduate course which pretended to be a preparation for PhD future candidates. My design specifics occurred through reimagining a tertiary institution.

I have such a multiplicity of past experiences in different systems of power structures. These experiences triggered my commitment towards establishing an institutional reality of my own. I became convinced that I needed to explore the specificity of a location for the benefit of sharing skills and knowledge.

I have belief in the creation of an alternative post-academic ground that could provide space to nurture future African creative entrepreneurs - by which I mean - those who use their creative or intellectual knowledge and skills to earn a living. In that manner, I propose an artist residency which will provide the appropriate conditions conducive to creative entrepreneurs. This creative entrepreneurial journey will occur in a geographic location bound to that of the African continent. It will make use of the local environment in its development of a suitable curriculum.

In my process of investigation, I came across a wild pedagogy. The theoretical paradigm - which will allow me to explore the answers to the issues raised in the context of this artist residency - is *Heterotopia*.



*Mountain View, The Casa Cogumelo, July 2019.*

# HETEROTOPIA

My goal involves creating space for an economy based on solidarity and cultural dialogues. In order to achieve this goal, I needed examples of institutions with which I could align myself; exemplary institutions which would provide me with concepts and systems for a curriculum program. I have spent enough time in various art institutions over the course of my creative career and discussing these various spaces of enterprises has helped me to understand what it means to be an institution of prestige, quality, and great caliber.

It was at the beginning of 2019 in Shanghai where I began to immerse myself into research. I spent time writing and gathering information and contacts of those who could join me.

Fast forward to the 26th of May, and to my arrival in the city of Mindelo, on the Cape Verdean archipelago, St Vincent. I started exploring the cultural spaces and engaging their occupants in a dialogue and an exchange. After a while, I took the journey to St Vincent's sister island, Santo Antao, where I began to establish a deeper understanding of the locality of Pico Da Cruz, the place which I had envisioned for Heterotopia.

My contact with the local residents of Pico Da Cruz came through my embodiment of the role of a photographer, and through the use of photography as a documentation of assembly and memory sharing. I explored the different nuances of local life while attempting to grasp the genuine feel of this multifaceted culture by participating and engaging in daily chores and activities.

As I left Cape Verde on the 20th of July, I concluded that the reality of an institutional utopia catering for the creative entrepreneur would not be established so easily or so quickly. Embracing what the environment has to offer while making use of the spaces that are open and available to us in order to add value to the state of the place; is one of the most important aspects of the project. Hence the value we placed on the name, *Heterotopia*, which has been taken from the concept imagined by the philosopher, Michel Foucault.

I began to ask myself fundamental questions about the aims of the project. I knew that I wanted to develop a cultural program in a community space, but I also wanted to:

- Help participants rediscover who they are in the context of Africa.
- Understand where anyone stands in an African society.
- Understand what responsibility one has towards such a society.

I realized that I wanted to create a setting in which these questions could be asked. An educational space which would meet global standards. *Heterotopia* aims to provide such an education on the African continent.

### **Reflection on my return**

My time in Cape Verde was spent exploring the different nuances of local life, whilst simultaneously attempting to grasp the genuine feel of this multifaceted culture. I had begun to gain a better understanding of its people, its history, and its capacity for potential educational opportunities.

Upon my return to Paris, I immersed myself within the hotel industry to understand its various facets. I took the position of a night receptionist at the Mercure hotel, Paris LaVillette. In my process of investigation, I became interested in corporate social responsibility and how hospitality businesses advocated (or didn't advocate) sustainability, promoted collective conscience, and how they developed a sense of corporate citizenship within the hotel. I focused on observing and understanding the employee to employer relationship, as well as employee to employee interaction. I compared this experience with my experiences of other hospitality spaces and attempted to understand how one could create shared value and social welfare whilst maintaining financial success.

I shifted my focus towards tourism and speculated about how one becomes a responsible traveller within natural environments and local cultures. How could I bring together these educational systems and ideas into a space of tourism? How

would this, in turn, allow for genuine discovery and an understanding of the ramifications of otherness?

-

It is necessary that we fully understand the environment of Pico Da Cruz for Heterotopia to take place. We must know how we will tackle the challenges that will present themselves in the spheres of interpretation and the translation of content. Will cultural mediation come into play? Or will hospitality, service, and curatorship be enough?

Through a program of entrepreneurial development, accessibility, amenities, and accommodation, could activities emerge which will enable the flourishing of an area and the sustaining of local people as well as participating residents?



*Mountain View, A Sunset At Pico Da Cruz, July 2019*



*High Rise View, Pico Da Cruz Center, July 2019.*



*Horizontal View Upward, In The Woods, July 2019.*



*Manuel Frank, Fernando, Nathalin, Local men Working Agricultural Land, July 2019.*



*Another View, Pico da Cruz, July 2019.*

**Q and A** between Edward May, Director of Circle Triangle Square, and Opoku Mensah, artist and initiator of the Heterotopia project.

*Edward May:*

**What are the fundamental aims of the project?**

*Opoku Mensah:*

- *To develop a cultural program within a global education space in Pico Da Cruz. This provision of such an education on the African continent, a place that is not necessarily perceived for stellar education is very important.*
- *To help participants rediscover their position in this area of Africa, and the possible positions that they can take in the context of Africa. By reconsidering their position, they will be able to better understand the responsibility that they have to themselves and their society.*

**What will the artists in residence and the residents of Cape Verde have in common, and what will the differences be in terms of their socioeconomic positions and cultural values?**

- *The residents of Pico Da Cruz live on the peak of a mountain top in one of Cape Verde's Archipelago called Santo Antao. It is around 3 hours travel from Mindelo, a significant cultural and economic hub sustained by the Cape Verdean diaspora. Pico Da Cruz is predominantly a self sufficient and close community with around 50 people. The artists in residence will be traveling in from a number of different continents, and will be much more connected to an international way of life.*
- *The artists-in-residence and residents of Pico Da Cruz will not share equal amounts of monetary wealth or international exposure, but the participants of Heterotopia will engage in the overall experience of the project, regardless of their socio-economic or cultural gaps. The proximity of the space will allow for close interaction and companionship.*
- *The act of intertwining the disparities between the groups will help to establish a better understanding of what it means to be part of a community. The specificities which are particular to the identity of Cape Verde is inescapable and the superposition of these different variants is a social phenomenon not to be disregarded.*

**What knowledge and experience and different ways of living are we aiming to share and who will benefit from this?**

- *The participants are from different locations and cultures, and as a result of these differences, they will be able to learn from one another. The participants from the more industrialised countries will learn that they are the most vulnerable to collapse because they are the most disconnected from the earth system, the soil, the trees, living creatures, as well as the climate. It seems actually that these industrialised populations have the most to lose in terms of*

*everyday comfort such as consumption, leisure and accommodation because of their complete lack of resilience and autonomy. The complex global economy - with its reliance on national and international connections and interdependencies - has helped to exacerbate the inequalities created by capitalist competition and has accelerated the destruction of our ecosystem, thus weakening the communal home shared by living beings. Although we are not able to say what tomorrow will look like, understanding the cultures and physicalities of our different environments could help us imagine different scenarios.*

- *The knowledge and experience that Heterotopia aims to transfer between participants starts with the dismantling of the idea of a homogenous, brutal, and linear system collapse. Participants will engage in a conversation which looks at the impact of our different lifestyles in juxtaposition to our existing and possible environments.*
- *The act of leadership will become a re-learning process. While participating in the process of re-understanding the world and our positions within it, participants will make observations of nature as a co-teacher.*

### **How can we share knowledge, experience, and the different ways of living between the participants?**

*By embracing complexity and spontaneity in educational practices. For this to work, we need to consider:*

- *How we make space for other teaching voices to be heard on their own terms.*
- *How we will learn through the natural world, which will be present as a co-teacher.*
- *How we, as educators, will contribute to the potential flourishing of the participants and those in our proximity.*

*Maybe the answer lies in providing space to integrate experiences, people, cultures, spaces, and processes all together.*

### **What systems can we create which will share knowledge, experience, and the different ways of living?**

- *Through a community cultural program. A sense of dialogue needs to be created amongst all participants.*
- *That which is worth knowing is largely predetermined by those in control. A different system which ignites curiosity, innovation, adaptation, and resilience in the face of change will be examined.*

### **What will the structure of the teaching be?**

- *To continue teaching in the same way which we have been taught previously will not provide the knowledge, skills, and experience which will be required to succeed tomorrow. The teaching will therefore take inspiration from different teaching methods from around the world and consider the benefits, drawbacks, and practicalities of each method. There will be activities and events that will bring people together.*
- *Resisting a solid and controllable teaching method will require us to question current metaphors, practices, and understandings of what it means to learn and to know. It will involve overcoming mainstream education's reliance on defined outcomes, as well as known standards, and measured results. There must be more room for learning that is fluid, flexible, diverse, and accepting. Among other things, this will improve the chances of an unexpected connection to be made and for an unplanned event to occur.*

### **What are the different values of the two groups and how do they intertwine?**

- *This complexity can be understood as dynamic, fluid, and unpredictable and is best described in reference to qualities without fixed boundaries. It stands in contrast to a static, deterministic, and linear view of the world. Such complexity of intertwining invites us to understand our physical and social worlds as open, recursive, organic, nonlinear, and emergent, and to be cautious of complying with models and trends in education that assume linear thinking, control, and predictability.*
- *The real question is, how does one tackle problems which they have not seen before? This implies that creators need to, at least in part, relinquish the control and self-domesticating forces that are ingrained in our pedagogical thinking and practices. In order to intertwine, it implies that one needs to be more open to spontaneous and surprising occurrences.*

### **Do the intentions and aims of the groups match up?**

- *The intentions and aims of each participant would involve pushing off from the safe centre of the human as the centre of the world, in order to allow other ideas, possibilities, spaces of beings, and imaginations to emerge.*

### **There are also practicalities to consider – such as the language barrier – how will we communicate?**

- *Every artist in residence must have at least a basic grasp of the language, if they don't, then the artists should complete a course in that language before they arrive as part of the overall project, so that they can communicate when they arrive and engage in a meaningful exchange. That said, creators are also known to communicate in other ways, not just through verbal language.*

### **What are the other theoretical considerations?**

- *A wild approach to pedagogy leads to a reformation of learning, an escape from the current formality, structures, systems of control, standardisation and separation of each of us from ourselves and our physical reality. These ideas related to systems of control and power structures in order to decree understanding.*

### **What are the other practical considerations?**

- *We know that there are many practical considerations which we have not covered, such as health and safety procedures, transportation, and the funding and resources which will make this possible. We will ensure that we cover the basic needs of all the participants: food, shelter, and necessary medical help. We are in the process of methodically going through these practical considerations.*

### **What happens if something goes wrong?**

- *We will take out the correct insurance and complete the necessary health and safety procedures for Heterotopia to be a safe environment for all the participants.*
- *We will also develop a contingency plan for any foreseeable problems.*
- *Perhaps more importantly in the long term, how do we prepare ourselves for a future that doesn't yet exist?*
  - *We need more passion and compassion.*
  - *We need people with the heart and wisdom to uplift this planet.*
  - *We need to give each other some love in order to give us space to pursue our dreams.*

# Technical Means: Realisation Of Project

To explore the practicalities of the project, I have taken and reproduced a lean-process-canvas. This is a core tool used by planners to assess the viability of an idea. It's a quick and effective way of capturing a planned model and can help visualize the hypotheses and assumptions that are made about a project.

## **Problem**

*The top problems for the defined segments.*

### **The artists in residence**

have a problem engaging with local communities in the creation of artwork which is effective in its engagement with others.

### **The residents of Cape Verde**

have a problem engaging with the contemporary art world and artists who are producing work which is locally and globally relevant.

**Africans of the mainland:** seeking for ways to be recognized in the global area.

**Diasporas of the african continent:** search for creative ways to engage in entrepreneurial endeavors on the continent but they might lack motor skills for connecting and navigating in the African environment.

## **Solution**

*The features and benefits of the solution to each problem.*

Heterotopia will provide an opportunity for the artists in residence to make work which will engage with internationally relevant ideas and local communities.

Heterotopia will provide an opportunity for the residents of Cape Verde to engage with the artists in residence and learn about and become involved in contemporary art practice.

## **Key Actions and Measures**

*Actions required to validate assumptions.*

*What is our story? What are the stories which will grow from this? What tales will emerge from the water margins? Who will hear our tales and how will it be passed on?*

For Heterotopia to succeed, we must create thorough and water tight proposal with achievable goals, select artists committed to the residency and ensure that the community in Cape Verde is engaged.

*How do we join forces with people we can trust? How do we make sure that we can grow and trust them in the process of development? How do we choose people who can understand and get involved in such a cause?*

## **Unique Value Proposition**

*Why is Heterotopia different and worth paying attention to?*

## **Compelling Differences**

The artists in residence simultaneous commitment to their own work and the overall goals of Heterotopia combined with the needs and aspirations of the residents will create a comprehensive programme. Heterotopia aims to bridge the gap between the rest of the world and Africa for the purpose of collaborating and interaction. Bridging the gap between a remote place and the outer world.

Allowing a symbiosis integration of inquisitive personalities into a confined space.

## **Brilliant Basics**

For Heterotopia to operate as a functional and organised residency programme, there must be:

- Charitable organisation set up, with purposeful guidelines and intentions.
- Hospitable accommodation for the artists which is able to fill their basic needs for food, drink, and sanitation.
- Enough money raised for the artists to come, live and work.
- Meaningful engagement between the artists in residence and the residents of Cape Verde.

## **Questions to consider**

How we create meaningful engagement? What is the responsibility of the artist? What are the responsibility of the locals? What is the meaning of what we are doing and why is it important? Who needs to be the pillars of this project?

What role does the cape verdean nation play in this story? What value are we giving to this middle ground?

Why is it important to do this project in Pico da Cruz as opposed to a city or a centralised location.

Where do we go from here?

## **Channels**

*How will we reach the financial supporters of Heterotopia?*

Through a fund-raising campaign which will include crowdfunding, targeting individuals and organisations who have previously supported such projects.

Raising awareness of the Heterotopia through exhibitions, web presence, advertising, and public relations.

## **Unfair advantage**

*What does Heterotopia have that cannot easily be bought or copied?*

The commitment to developing a residency which truly engages local communities with internationally relevant ideas and actions.

## **Supporter Segments**

Who are the target supporters? What are their ages, locations, interests and occupations?

- Individuals who truly believe in what we are doing and have a record of supporting projects like this.
- Organisations who truly believe in what we are doing and have a record of supporting projects like this.
- Friends and family of the artists in residence and the residents of Cape Verde.

## **Identified Assumptions**

That we will be able to collaborate and create a shared experience with the residents of Cape Verde and the global community. That the residents of Cape Verde will be willingly engaged with Heterotopia.

# Budget Of Production Costs

The budget\* is based on an initial time period of 6 months, during which I will stay in Cape Verde for the entire duration, and the participating residents will stay for a duration of 1 or 2 months each.\*\*

Item	Item Details and Estimated Amount			Total
Residents	OPOKU MENSAH	<div></div> (+ 2 guests)	<div></div>	
Travel Return Flights	Paris - Sao Vicente 1st January 2020 Sao Vicente - Paris 31st July 2020 <b>Estimated €500<sup>1</sup></b>	Oslo - Sao Vicente 1st mai 2020 €600 (x3) <b>Estimated €1,800<sup>2</sup></b>	Johannesburg - Sao Vicente 1st mai 2020 <b>Estimated €1,200<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>€3,500</b>
Travel Internal	Cesaria Evora Airport to harbor (x2) <sup>4</sup> €50 Mindelo to Porto Novo (x2) €50 Porto Novo - Pico da Cruz (x2) €50  <b>Estimated €300</b> Price have been extrapolated as additional prices might ay come into play for Sao Antao Local Movement (additional cost upon negotiation of project timeline)	Cesaria Evora Airport to harbor (x2) €50 Mindelo to Porto Novo (x2) €50x3 Porto Novo - Pico da Cruz (x2) €50x3  <b>Estimated €700</b> Sao Antao Local Movement (additional cost upon negotiation of project timeline)	Cesaria Evora Airport to harbor (x2) €50 Mindelo to Porto Novo (x2) €50 Porto Novo - Pico da Cruz (x2) €50  <b>Estimated €300</b> Sao Antao Local Movement (additional cost upon negotiation of project timeline)	<b>€1,300</b>
Accomodation	€200/ Month (x6) <b>Estimated €1,200</b>	€200/ Month (x6) <b>Estimated €1,200</b>	€200/ Month (x1) <b>Estimated €200</b>	<b>€2,400</b>
Food/ Beverage <sup>5</sup>	€150 /Month (x6) <b>Estimated €900</b>	€150 /Month (x3) <b>Estimated €450</b>	€150 /Month (x1) <b>Estimated €150</b>	<b>€1,300</b>
Stipend	€1500	€1500	€500	<b>€3,500</b>
Contingency	€500	€600	€200	<b>€1,300</b>
Art Materials	€200	€350	€150	<b>€700</b>
Additional Books, Equipment etc...				<b>€1,000</b>
Total:				<b>€15,000</b>

\* All prices correct as of 26th September 2019 based on my personal experience travelling to Cape Verde from May to July 2019.

\*\* The residents selected for the budget may change and a list of potential residents has been formulated. The departure date is also susceptible to change.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.skyscanner.net/transport/flights/pari/vxea/200101/200731/?adultsv2=1&childrenv2=&cabinclass=economy&rtn=1&preferdirects=false&outboundaltsenabled=false&inboundaltsenabled=false#/>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.skyscanner.fr/transport/flights/oslo/vxe/200501/200601/?adults=1&children=0&adultsv2=1&childrenv2=&infants=0&cabinclass=economy&rtn=1&preferdirects=false&outboundaltsenabled=false&inboundaltsenabled=false&ref=home#/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.skyscanner.fr/transport/flights/jnba/vxe/200501/200601/?adults=1&children=0&adultsv2=1&childrenv2=&infants=0&cabinclass=economy&rtn=1&preferdirects=false&outboundaltsenabled=false&inboundaltsenabled=false&ref=home#/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.airportia.com/cape-verde/são-pedro-airport/arrivals/>

<sup>5</sup> Recommended areas will be provided. A meal plan will also be available based on dietary concerns.

# Biography

*Opoku Mensah is a research artist, creator and speculative designer. He has a contemplative practice and spends much time thinking and investigating, before creating conceptual performances, audio recordings, and texts. He presents his output to the viewer as an experiential learning process.*

*Mensah graduated from École Nationale Supérieure Beaux-Arts in 2017. He has since participated in the Post Graduate Residency at the Van Eyck Academie and been a guest lecturer in the department of sculpture at the University of Chiang Mai. He has taken part in numerous group exhibitions, notably the 1st Lagos Biennial for Contemporary Art Living on the Edge, Afriques Capitales at La Grande Halle de la Villette, and the Biennale of Dakar, International Exposition for Contemporary African Art. He had his first solo show Incantations Encounters at Chiang Mai University Art Gallery in 2018.*

## Education

*Master's Degree*

École Nationale Supérieure Beaux-Arts, Paris, 2012 - 2017

## Residencies

2018-19

*Offshore Post - Master's Program*

Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts

2017-18

*Post Graduate Residency*

Van Eyck Academie

## Solo Exhibitions

*Incantation Encounters*

Chiang Mai University Art Gallery

## Workshops

*Dance Workshop - Emerging New Moves in New Environment*

In The Making - Oslo, Norway

*Sac-à-Tête\* Workshop*

Coral Banana - Casa Laghinhas Mindelo, Cape Verde

*Storytelling Workshop*

Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts - Shanghai, China

*Developing Vegan Ghanaian Food Workshop*

With Claudy Jongstra - Spanum, Netherlands

## Group Exhibitions

*Storytelling Maastricht*

Curated by Marjolein Van Der Loo

*Gobi Heaven Art Festival*

Curated by Susanne Matz

*CMU Group Show*

Chiang Mai University Art Museum

*Inauguration Exhibition*

Hors Cadre

*Living on the Edge*

1st Lagos Biennial for Contemporary Art

*African Art in Transition*

Indelible

Art The Hague, Art Fair

*Afriques Capitales*

La Grande Halle de la Villette

*Salon d'Automne*

Organized by UNDPA

Champs-Élysées

*International Exposition for Contemporary African Art  
Biennale of Dakar*

## Publication

*Earthworms and Caramels, In Conversation with Poku Cheremeh*

GUILY, Elsa; *Contemporary And*

Poku Cheremeh

MARTIN, Jean-Hubert; *ELSE #13*

Capital Africas

*EXHIBITION CATALOGUE*

NJAMI, Simon; *Kehrer Verlag*

*12 RE-ENCHANTMENTS: The city in the Bleu Daylight  
DAK'ART; African Arts*

## Examples of Previous Works

### Birthday Party (Fooding)



***Birthday Party*, 2015, Photograph (taken from the performance *Fooding*), 59cm x 84cm**

Mensah's early works questioned his being. In his solitary, absent body, locked into space-time, he sought to understand the facets of singularity through collective entity, human identity, and relations. Performing an inquiry into his own representation, relative to his past and current environment, he identified himself through elements of the world which made an impact upon him - such as the taste, smell, and texture of food. His path towards inner happiness was in his creative endeavours, which ascertain warmth and hospitality. His craft was ceremonial, hovering over movements, gestures, and incantations. Using memories to unfold stories, he touched on psychotic reality, dreamlike portraiture, and moments of discontentment in his work, which gave a sense of beauty to his most obscure thoughts. He fed on the positive meaning which arose from the idealised importance of struggle and suffering. Through these recollections, he was able to manage his human relations better and conjure alternate life experiences. Mensah used his practice as a tool to transform the hurdles of his life into a form of artistic expression in which he could imagine possible ways out of his reality.

*Birthday Party* brings attention to the past and the actions and feelings of ancestors

who came before us. It is a study of the position of those who exist in the present, and how their contemporary experience is affected by those actions and feelings of the past, especially those who have been marginalised and discriminated against.

This is a photograph which at first glance appears to echo the paintings of hundreds of years ago, but on further inspection contains details and recurring themes which give away its recent production. There is a table laid with consumables, in the centre is bushmeat lathered in butter; people stand around, eating and drinking, and wipe bread against the body of the bushmeat so that they can feed on it. Looking up at the camera, with an orange in the mouth, a recorded voice speaks and the video cuts to a blank screen:

*“Too long have we kept quiet in our position, a position of society, a construction of our society demolished, of our self-entity we long, [...] they are clustered and motionless, they are kept, motionless, upon the friction of our nation without pause, breathless, forced, caught, lost, bought, tracked, stranded, fight, lashed, bashed, streaming, dealing, breathing, beating, squealing, streaming, freezing, fleeing, leaking. The black man airs on the street, on ... on the street of his imperial nation, like no other man has aired before.”*

### Sac-à-Tête



**Sac-à-Tête, 2018, Digital Image**

\*Sac-à-Tête aims to explore the use of head wears, through an investigation into how the balance of the body plays a role in sustaining a harmonious relationship with any items carried on the head. Sac-à-Tête (head-bag in French) considers the implications of the development and expansion of populations across the globe through the changing nature of how goods and products are transported. Also incorporated are religious ideas surrounding the beliefs associated with the wearing of a yarmulke (the wearer of a yarmulke is in duty to the vast gulf of power, wisdom, and authority that separates God from

mankind) and notions prevalent in Buddhism, where heads are not hierarchically organized but rather, regarded as one of the most important parts of the body - representing the vast wealth of knowledge one possesses. Sac-à-Tête aims to raise awareness of the issues of sustainability, specifically enhancing the RRR strategies (Reuse, Recycle, Reduce) with a focus on the recovery and valorization of plastic within local communities. With such a material, Mensah aims to conceive sculptural head apparatuses, create performances which will be recorded, and in turn, provide people with the tools and methods to reinterpret and engage with the new realities of their environment by ascribing the elements of the East Asian LanNa style architecture and their deities' crowns to the Sac-à-Tête. Balancing an object over the head in order to transport goods asks the question of the process required to maintain change in a balanced fashion. When speaking of sustainability, Mensah believes that it involves designing systems in a flexible and reversible manner and adjusting our individual lifestyles to conserve natural resources. In the case of Sac-à-Tête, it involves bridging the gap between the natural phenomenon of goods transportation and the ergonomics of a bag which is carried on the head. Sac-à-Tête offers an opportunity to discover the properties of materials and stimulate the creation of networks and opportunities among artists, businesses, territories, and citizens.

### **Incantations Encounters**



***Incantations, 2018, Screenshot from Video, 25:00***

Incantations starts with Mensah's voice reading from the book of Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow by Yuval Noah Harari, while a text is displayed on the screen, relevant to the spoken words. Mensah continues to speak, stating the date and time of the recording "Friday 3th of August, 6.39PM, 2018, Chiang Mai, Thailand." The voice-over stops and the interior of a building appears on the screen. The Nights Table sits within this space and is viewed from several different angles, both in the space, within a bedroom and

outside. Pieces of chewing gum are placed upon it by a gloved hand. Again, the screen turns black and a text is read from *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, then a text is displayed upon the screen, which describes the similarities between the Sumerian Gods of the past, and the corporations of today. Whilst this plays, a conversation between Mensah and an unknown individual plays out, arguing about the benefits and disadvantages, similarities and differences between chain stores and local stores, one owned by international corporations and the other owned by an individual. The video continues along this theme, quoting segments of *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, alongside text which outlines elements of economic theory. This is spliced with video footage of *The Nights Table*, and the unidentifiable figure with the gloved hand placing chewing gum upon it.

Halfway through the video, 12 minutes in, a bell rings, before Mensah repeats the words “We are taught that corporations have a soul”, and then “The corporation is a spirit.” A recorded audio clip of a conversation between Mensah and a few unknown people (perhaps from the University of Chiang Mai, in what seems like a party setting) plays out. They discuss their perceptions of ghosts and why they exist, referencing people's souls, imagination, collective energy, and the physical act of painting as an analogy to explain their reasoning. This leads to a discussion about society and the effect that neoliberalism has had on society and on the individual, and how a change in beliefs has increased the power of international corporations. As a viewer listening to this, one is unsure about how the recording was produced. Was it planned and acted? It certainly makes sense within the context of the video, but this is also a conversation which has undoubtedly happened many times over around the world and will continue to be discussed in the future. It is clear from this work that Mensah has moved beyond making singular, individual objects, and is focused on exploring ideas which affect society on a macro level: belief systems, economics, the individual's position, the power of the corporation, and the power of the union. At the same time, there is a very personal element; there is repeating footage of *The Nights Table*, an artwork of great importance to Mensah as an individual. Is it his gloved hand which places chewing gum upon it? Mensah is positioning himself and his artwork within the macro-structures which affect each and every one of us, whilst acknowledging his own humanity, within this vast and sometimes difficult world.

*The text accompanying the Examples of Work section was taken from Opoku's Retrospective Statement. It is available to download here:*

*[https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/78aac3\\_89a67c6a1042469fbe2c4c9e12835b4b.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/78aac3_89a67c6a1042469fbe2c4c9e12835b4b.pdf)*

# Circle Triangle Square

Circle Triangle Square is an art platform which represents emerging artists, helping them to build their careers by providing them with support and promotion.

Circle Triangle Square is working alongside Opoku on *The Heterotopia Project* and is fully committed to its development.

Circle Triangle Square has represented Opoku Mensah since 2018.

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## Other Useful Contacts

