

February 26, 27, 28, 2021

## THE SEPTEMBER SUMMIT

### Toward an Institute of Black Studies



*Members of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) gather at Lagos International Airport ahead of Festac '77, also known as the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, a major international festival held in Lagos, Nigeria, from 15 January 1977. Photo by Calvin Reid. Courtesy of Chimurenga*

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#### Convenors

Sarah Rifky, writer & curator  
Edwin Nasr, writer & curator

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/ February 26, 27, 28, 2021  
/ Online seminar on [YouTube](#)  
/ Lectures and roundtables  
available in English and French  
version



## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26

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6 PM - 7.30 PM

Inaugural lecture

Achille Mbembe

*The Becoming Black of the World*

8 PM – 9 PM

DJ set

By Bamao Yendé

hosted by Rinse, France

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27

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4 PM – 5.30 PM

Lecture

Maboula Soumahoro

*Speaking Black in French*

6 PM – 7.30 PM

Roundtable

*Blackness and Aesthetics of Abstraction*

With Julie Mehretu, Nolan Dennis

Oswald, Nontobeko Ntombela, and

Darby English, and Kodwo Eshun

Moderated by Edwin Nasr

8 PM – 9 PM

DJ set

by Christelle Oyiri (aka Crystallmess)

hosted by Rinse, France

## SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28

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4 PM – 5.30 PM

Lecture

Frieda Ekotto

*Aimé Césaire in the Era of Black Lives*

*Matter*

6 PM – 7.30 PM

Roundtable

*Imagining Infrastructures for Black*

*Architecture*

With Sumayya Vally, Emanuel

Admassu, Ola Uduku and Ola Hassanain

Moderated by Sarah Rifky

8 PM – 9.30 PM

Listening session

Chimurenga - FESTAC '77

On the occasion of Saison Africa2020 in France, the musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac will host *The September Summit*, three days of online lectures, roundtables, and live music sessions. An occasion to come together in dialogue and to contribute to Black Studies in critical thought, architecture and in art for leading artists and scholars

Originally imagined in Saint Louis, Senegal, the *Summit* shares a former future with *The Institute of Black Studies*, a necessary if imaginary framework for Saison Africa2020 that allows us to rethink Africanity through Blackness as “strategic abstraction” (Margo Natalie Crawford), a “concatenation of symbols and narratives” (Achille Mbembe), and a “particular embraced affinity of veering” (Fred Moten).

The program features three lectures **Frieda Ekotto**, **Achille Mbembe**, and **Maboula Soumahoro**; a roundtable on abstraction within African and Black diaspora art with **Darby English**, **Kodwo Eshun**, **Julie Mehretu**, **Nontobeko Ntombela**, and **Nolan Oswald Dennis**; a roundtable on Black urban practices and spatial imaginaries with **Emanuel Admassu**, **Ola Hassanain**, **Ola Uduku**, and **Sumayya Vally**; DJ sets by **Christelle Oyiri (aka Crystallmess)** and **Bamao Yendé**, in collaboration with Rinse France; and a listening session by **Chimurenga**.

*The September Summit* is taking place from February 26-28, 2021 and hosted on Youtube by the musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac in Paris. This *Summit* is convened by Sarah Rifky and Edwin Nasr, and serves as a heuristic platform for the Saison Africa2020, directed by N’Goné Fall.

## *Saison Africa2020*

The Saison Africa2020 is an allegory of the cultural, spiritual, commercial, technological and political networks that have linked the nations of the African continent throughout history. It is also a platform for sharing questions about the state of contemporary societies which, beyond Africa, are in resonance with France and the rest of the world.



FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26

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*Welcoming world: Emmanuel Kasarhérou, President of the musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac and N'Goné Fall, General Commissioner of the Africa2020 Season.*

6PM - 7.30PM: Inaugural lecture (FR)

**Achille Mbembe** - *The Becoming Black of the World*

This lecture by scholar Achille Mbembe will argue that all of subaltern humanity—increasingly surveilled and objectified—has become Black in ways that challenge the very divisions on which universal equality was built. Taking Europe's displacement from the center of the world and the universalization of the Black condition as a point of departure, Mbembe will engage in a critical reevaluation of history, racism, and the future of humanity, as well as reflect on contemporary European states and institutions' ongoing censorship of decolonial and Black studies.

8PM – 9PM: DJ set

By **Bamao Yendé** hosted by Rinse, France

There's no doubt switched-on night owls are already aware of **Bamao Yendé's** work alongside his Boukan Records team: they've promoted atmospheres in Paris which were previously marginalized in the capital, between Garage House, Peckham broken beat, Kuduro, Highlife and Batida from the four corners of Africa via Lisbon and ebullient house tuned to the global sound-system. The young producer-curator from Cergy is implicitly driven by one and only intention: to break down the barriers that exist in nightlife by cueing up bangers released on his label and destroying dancefloors by playing some of the warmest (black) music produced these last decades. Graduating from the most underground clubs to mainstream festivals in a few months, constantly working on his next EPs, there's no doubt his mission will be highly successful.

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## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27

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4PM – 5.30PM: Lecture (FR)

**Maboula Soumahoro** - *Speaking Black in French*

Drawing from autobiographical notes as well as academic methodologies, Soumahoro argues for the urgency of thinking through Blackness in France—and in French—as a means to exposing structures of exclusion in the public sphere and forms of institutionalized racism targeting Black and Afro-diasporic communities. Her lecture originates from her observations on race, racism, blackness, and identity within France and its overseas colonial territories.

6PM – 7.30PM: Roundtable (ENG)

*Blackness and Aesthetics of Abstraction*

With **Julie Mehretu**, **Nolan Dennis Oswald**, **Nontobeko Ntombela**, and **Darby English**, and a response by **Kodwo Eshun**

Moderated by Edwin Nasr

This roundtable will invite participants — art historians, artists, and curators — to reflect on their respective modes of engagement with the historical legacies and contemporary potentialities of abstraction within African and Black diasporic art practices and cultural production.

8PM – 9PM DJ set

by Christelle Oyiri (aka Crystallmess) hosted by Rinse, France

**Crystallmess** (birth name Christelle Oyiri), is a French born Ivorian/Guadeloupean producer, DJ, writer and artist based in Paris. Her teeming production immediately stands out, yet oscillates freely between melodic techno, afro-trance and abrasive dancehall. Her stunning debut EP, *MERE NOISES*, has graced the CDJ's of Bill Kouligas, Kode9 and Bonaventure among others, and has more exciting releases to announce soon. Alumnus of Creative Europe's SHAPE platform for innovative music and art and NTS WIP 2019 as well as NTS Radio resident, Crystallmess approach to production, DJing and performance bridges radical energy and fantasmatic afrofuturism. Her polyrhythmic and eclectic DJ style gives an uncompromising, globalized and diasporic definition to techno and club music in general and has seduced world's finest clubs including De School, Saule/Berghain, Corsica Studios, Concrete, sharing key slots with Helena Hauff or Lotic and created sound designs for fashion houses such as Kenzo

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or Paco Rabanne. Her devotion to club music and multifaceted nature makes Crystallmess an unstoppable force to reckon with.

## SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28

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4PM – 5.30 PM: Lecture (ENG)

**Frieda Ekotto** - *Aimé Césaire in the Era of Black Lives Matter*  
(45 mn + 45 mn online questions of the audience)

This lecture reads Aimé Césaire's work as a continuation of the struggle for the dignity of Black people around the world. As a Francophone philosopher and poet, Césaire is a member of an important global lineage of Black intellectuals. Together with James Baldwin, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, and Claudia Rankin, Césaire's work offers the historical background needed to understand Black lives in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and particularly the Black Lives Matter Movement. These thinkers first articulated enduring questions about the Black condition in the world and established why there will not be peace as long as Black lives continue to be crushed and their dignity ignored.

6PM – 7.30PM: Roundtable (ENG)

*Imagining Infrastructures for Black Architecture*

With **Sumayya Vally, Emanuel Admassu, Ola Uduku** and **Ola Hassanain**  
Moderated by Sarah Rifky

This roundtable will invite participants — architects, urban practitioners, and architecture scholars and researchers — to reflect on how Black urban practices emerge as strategies of resistance that disrupt the spatial legacies of colonial power in Africa, and how they create spaces of radical imagination within and against anti-Black environments.

8PM – 9.30PM: Listening session

**Chimurenga** - FESTAC '77

**Chimurenga** is a pan-African platform of writing, art and politics founded by Ntone Edjabe in 2002. Drawing together myriad voices from across Africa and the diaspora, Chimurenga takes many forms operating as an innovative platform for free ideas and political reflection about Africa by Africans. Outputs include a journal of culture, art and politics of the same name (*Chimurenga Magazine*); a quarterly broadsheet called *The Chronic*; the

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Chimurenga Library – an ongoing invention into knowledge production and the archive that seeks to re-imagine the library; the *African Cities Reader* – a biennial publication of urban life, Africa-style; and the Pan African Space Station (PASS) – an online radio station and pop-up studio.



## CONVENORS

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**Sarah Rifky** is a writer, curator, entrepreneur, and art historian currently writing her doctoral dissertation on Cultural Infrastructure in Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s. She co-founded *Beirut* (2012–2015), an art space in Cairo that “thinks about institution building as a curatorial act.” Her writing has appeared in *Art in America*, *Art Agenda*, *Bidoun*, *The Exhibitionist*, among others. She is co-editor of *Positionen: Zeitgenössische Künstler aus der Arabischen Welt* (2013) and author of *The Going Insurrection* (2012). Rifky is a doctoral candidate at the History, Theory and Criticism program as well as the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at the School of Architecture + Planning at MIT, she is an MIT Legatum and Jacobs Foundation Social Entrepreneur Fellow 2020/2021.

**Edwin Nasr** is a writer and curator. Nasr is the Assistant to the Director at Ashkal Alwan, a Beirut-based non-profit organization and committed to contemporary artistic practice and research, where he takes part in the curatorial development of public programmes, publications, and exhibitions. He writes regularly on cultural production and political mobilizations in the Arab region, and recent essays can be found in *Afterall Journal* (forthcoming), *Bidoun*, *The Funambulist*, *Jadaliyya*, and *n+1*. Nasr was a guest editor of the Beirut Art Center’s *The Derivative* and is part of the editorial team of the inaugural Sharjah Architecture Triennial’s *Rights of Future Generations*. He is currently a participant of De Appel’s Curatorial Programme 2020-21 in Amsterdam.

## SPEAKERS AND PANELISTS

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**Dr. Achille Mbembe** is Research Professor in History and Politics at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER, University of the Witwatersrand). His books have been translated in 13 languages. A member of the American Academy Of Arts and Sciences, he is the winner of many awards including the 2018 Gerda Henkel Award and the 2018 Ernst Bloch Award.

**Dr. Frieda Ekotto** is Lorna Goodison Collegiate Professor of Comparative Literature and Francophone Studies at the University of Michigan. Her early work involves an interdisciplinary exploration of the interactions among philosophy, law, literature and African cinema. She has extensively written

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on African Cinema and was honored for her work on African cinema at the International Film African Film Festival in Zagora, Morocco in 2018. She is currently working on LGBTQ+ issues, with an emphasis on Sub-Saharan African cultures as well as in Europe and the Americas. She received the Nicolàs Guillèn Prize for Philosophical Literature in 2014 and In 2018, she was awarded an Honorary Degree at Colorado College.

**Dr. Maboula Soumahoro** is an associate professor in the English department of the University of Tours, France, where she also received her PhD. A specialist in the field of Africana Studies (Atlantic), Dr. Soumahoro has conducted research and taught in several universities and prisons in the United States and France: Bennington College, Columbia University (New York and Paris), Barnard College, Bard Prison Initiative (Bayview Correctional Facility), Stanford University (Paris), Sciences Po (Paris and Reims), the prisons in Bois-d’Arcy, Villepinte (juvenile detention), and Fresnes. From 2013 to 2017, Soumahoro served as a member of the National Committee for the Memory and History of Slavery. Since 2013, she is also the president of the Black History Month (BHM), an organization dedicated to the celebration of Black history and cultures throughout the world. Soumahoro is the author of *Le Triangle et l’Hexagone, réflexions sur une identité noire* (*Black is the Journey, Africana the Name*, La Découverte, English translation forthcoming with Polity Press in 2021).

**Emanuel Admassu** is an architect and founding partner, with Jen Wood, of AD—WO, an art and architecture practice based between Brooklyn and Providence, and by extension, between Melbourne and Addis Ababa. He is a founding member of the Black Reconstruction Collective, and will be joining the full-time faculty of Columbia University GSAPP in summer 2021. His design, teaching and research practices operate at the intersection of design theory, spatial justice, contemporary African art, postcolonial theory and critical theory. The work is a meditation on the international constellation of Afrodiasporic spaces.

**Sumayya Vally’s** design, research and pedagogical practice is committed to finding expression for hybrid identities and contested territories. She is based in Johannesburg, South Africa. Her work is often forensic, and draws on performance, the supernatural, the wayward and the overlooked as generative places of history and work. She is presently based between Johannesburg and London as the lead designer for the Serpentine Pavilion 2020/20 Plus 1. Vally is the Founder and Principal of Counterspace, a Johannesburg-based collaborative architectural studio. Counterspace occupies a space between the functional and the speculative; pedagogy and



praxis; simultaneously describing cities and their histories and futures, and imagining them. The studio also runs Counterparts, an interdisciplinary space, residency, dialogue and publishing platform, with an interest in tracing, seeding and carving collaborative ways of working.

**Dr. Ola Uduku** took up a Professorship in Architecture at the Manchester School of Architecture in 2017. Prior to this she was Reader in Architecture, and Dean International for Africa, at Edinburgh University. Her research specialisms are in the history of educational architecture in Africa, and the contemporary issues related to social infrastructure provision for minority communities in cities in the 'West' and 'South'. She has in the past published in the areas of African architecture, African diaspora studies, gated communities, and environmental design teaching pedagogies. She is currently researching the architecture of 'aid'. Uduku is also the co-ordinator of the EdenApp Tools for Environmental Analysis Lab, which focuses on developing apps for use in teaching environmental concepts such as lighting, thermal comfort, and acoustics to undergraduates through the use of personal apps and sensors.

**Ola Hassanain** trained her focus on the subtle politics of space—namely, how built spaces react to and reinforce violence from state entities, which in turn, creates a built environment that reflects, responds to, regulates the lives of those who inhabit it. Her most recent work explores an idea of “space as discourse,” an expanded notion of space that encompasses political and environmental questions. Her work tries to develop a spatial vocabulary that follows how ruptures presented by 'political events', make it possible to aspire to new kinds of ecologies. Hassanain's development of critical spatial practice is partly informed by her post-academic training which includes an ongoing Ph.D. in Practice candidacy at the Academy of Fine Art, a BAK fellowship 2017-2018, and teaching in HKU University of the Arts Utrecht and Sandberg Institute amongst others.

**Dr. Darby English** is the Carl Darling Buck Professor of Art History at the University of Chicago, where he has taught since 2003 with a focus on topics in modern and contemporary art and cultural studies. His publications include six books. The most recent, *To Describe a Life: Notes from the Intersection of Art and Race Terror* (Yale, 2019), received the 2020 Frank Jewett Mather Award and the 2020 ASAP Book Prize. He is the author of *1971: A Year in the Life of Color* (University of Chicago, 2016) and *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (MIT, 2007), and coeditor of *Among Others: Blackness at MoMA* (with Charlotte Barat, MoMA, 2019), *Art History and Emergency* (with David Breslin, Yale, 2016), and *Kara Walker: Narratives of*



*a Negress* (with Ian Berry, Vivian Patterson, and Mark Reinhardt, MIT, 2002 and Rizzoli, 2007). From 2014 to 2020, English was Adjunct Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

**Dr. Kodwo Eshun** is a filmmaker, theorist and artist, based in London and Berlin. He is Lecturer in Contemporary Art Theory at the Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, University of London and Professor of Visual Arts at Haute Ecole d'Art et Design, Genève. Eshun is author of *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (Verso, 2nd Edition, 2022) and *Dan Graham: Rock My Religion* (Afterall, 2012), as well as co-editor of *The Fisher Function* (2017), *Post Punk Then and Now* (2016), *The Militant Image: A Cine-Geography* (Third Text Vol 25 Issue, 2011), *Harun Farocki Against What? Against Whom* (2010) and *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective 1982–1998* (2007). In 2002, Eshun co-founded The Otolith Group with artist Anjalika Sagar. The Otolith Group's solo exhibition XENOGENESIS premiered at Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven in 2019, Institute of Contemporary Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Buxton Contemporary, Melbourne and Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, in 2020, continues at Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, Ljubljana and Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin in 2021 and concludes at Sharjah Art Foundation in 2022.

**Julie Mehretu** is a world renowned painter, born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1970 who lives and works in New York City and Berlin. She received a Master's of Fine Art with honors from The Rhode Island School of Design in 1997. Mehretu is a recipient of many awards, including the The MacArthur Award (2005) and the US Department of State Medal of Arts Award (2015). She has shown her work extensively in solo and group exhibitions and is represented in public and private collections around the world. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and is represented by Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

**Nolan Oswald Dennis** is an interdisciplinary artist from Johannesburg, South Africa. His practice explores what he calls 'a black consciousness of space': the material and metaphysical conditions of decolonization. His work questions the politics of space and time through a system-specific, rather than site-specific approach. He is concerned with the hidden structures that condition our social and political imagination. Through a language of diagrams, drawings and models he explores the systematic and structural conditions that organise our plural worlds. Born in Lusaka, Zambia and raised in Midrand, South Africa, he holds a bachelor's degree in architecture from



the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and a Masters of Science in Art, Culture and Technology for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He is a founding member of tech healing agency NTU; the Indexing Literacy Project a collaborative research project between the US, Brazil and South Africa collecting new theory for our indexical present; and the Black Earth Study Club, a loose network for planetary solidarity.

**Nontobeko Ntombela** is a curator based in Johannesburg, where she works as a lecturer at the Wits School of Art, Wits University. Previously, she worked as a curator at the Johannesburg Art Gallery (2010-2020), Durban University Art Gallery (2005-2010), and BAT Centre (2001-2005). Ntombela's curatorial track includes several exhibitions, the most recent being, *The Burden of Memory* (2019) co-curated with Rose Jepkorir and Marilyn Douala Bell, a multiple cite event in the city of Yaoundé Cameroon. She has also published extensively with her recent publication being a co-editing book titled *The Yoni book* (2019) with Reshma Chhiba.

