

C & x Académie des Traces

# Anguezomo Nzé Mboulou Mba Bikoro: Activating Our Emotional Archives

Through Anguezomo Nzé Mboulou Mba Bikoro's work, Injonge Karangwa explores the impact of colonial collections on the well-being of African communities.



Anguezomo Nzé Mboulou Mba Bikoro, Obeah: Tribunaals & Voyage au Bout de la Pagode, 2024. Photo: Melih Demirkol.

By Injonge Karangwa  
26. March 2025



**As a global health professional with a deep interest in the colonial collections held in Western museums, my research explores the contemporary significance of these collections and the artefacts composing them, as well as the narratives they convey. I primarily study how different forms of interaction—or absence thereof—with these collections can influence the health and well-being of African communities both on the continent and in the diaspora.**

Before concluding my stay in Berlin with the Académie des Traces, I had the privilege of meeting and exchanging with Anguezomo Nzé Mboulou Mba Bikoro, a contributing artist in the international exhibition *Reimagining the Past* (KINDL Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 24.3.24 – 28.7.24). Their immersive installation *Obeah: Tribunaals & Voyage au Bout de la Pagode*, profoundly moved me through the healing dialogue it fosters with a still-active colonial legacy.

The artwork examines the fate, griefs and losses of Andrea Manga Bell, Queen of Douala, a Black graphic designer and journalist in 1930s Berlin, who was forced to resist the violence and exploitation of colonial and patriarchal powers within her personal life as a woman and mother. The colonial traumas stored in bodies and transmitted through generations are “emotional archives” with which Bikoro works. They create rituals involving the audience that open these archives and heal the body. Bikoro describes this creation of intimate and healing moments as their “mode of restitution.”

Early in our discussion, Bikoro shared their reservations about the terms “colonization” and “decolonization”, referring instead to “demaafanisation”, a concept used in the works of Marianne Ballé Moudombou, derived from *maafa*, which means disaster or calamity in Swahili. Maafanisation and demaafanisation describe the horrific histories of genocide, slavery, dispossession, and apartheid, as well as the struggles and methods of liberation. I could not have agreed more: it is essential to question the terms “colonization and decolonization”, whose Latin root *colonus* means farmer, referring to the Roman practice of colonialism, which involved transferring populations to new territories while maintaining the colonists’ political allegiance to their nation of origin. Do these words, in their origin and essence, adequately describe the past and present destruction caused by the modern European colonial projects? Do they account for the immense efforts undertaken and still required to repair the harm inflicted upon people, relationships, ecosystems, cultures, and spiritualities?

Our perspectives on language aligned, and we exchanged experiences and observations on how vocabulary remains a tool of control used by certain institutions to appropriate and commodify our struggles without creating any possibility for healing. This discussion reminded me of a conversation with Dr. Eugene Rutembesa, a Rwandan clinical psychologist and one of my interlocutors in previous work. After the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, Dr. Rutembesa played a crucial role in laying the foundations for what is now Rwanda’s mental health system. One of his team’s first tasks was to translate and contextualize therapeutic tools to support a traumatized population. The words used to express suffering shape and crystallize worldviews and self-perceptions. The words we choose and the meanings we attach to them significantly influence our decisions, beliefs, and well-being.



Anguezomo Nzé Mboulou Mba Bikoro, Obeah: Tribunaals & Voyage au Bout de la Pagode, 2024. Photo: Melih Demirkol.

By creating sacred spaces where the emotional archives of bodies and ecosystems can be activated, honored, and healed through ritual, Bikoro establishes a “mode of restitution” that is non-institutionalizable and centered on repair. In Western contexts, this work is often described as “performance”. However, Bikoro resists these labels, which diminish the spiritual and ritual significance of their work by reducing it to mere spectacle. For Bikoro, these rituals are an intimate form of monument-building, essential for achieving our “demaafinisation.”

Throughout our conversations, we also addressed the relationship with objects from colonial collections in European museums. For Bikoro, these decontextualized now museum artifacts have been desecrated, violated, and symbolize colonial violence: “They have been ruined and have lost their original magic”. Their return may also create conflicts among us, and we carry the traumas of Westerners”. Before being presented in Berlin, *Reimagining the Past* was exhibited at the Théodore Monod Museum in Dakar. There, Bikoro and other participating artists were able to interact with museum objects in a way they described as “far less clinical” than what they experienced in Western museums. In Dakar, Bikoro collected dust residues from museum objects and integrated them into their work. The frequency of this dust allows one to immerse themselves in the narratives carried by these objects, witnesses of maafanisation.



Anguezomo Nzé Mba Bikoro, Obeah: Tribunaals & Voyage au Bout de la Pagode, 2024. Courtesy of the artist.

Sharing stories thus becomes a true path to healing. The beginning of my research on the relationship between African artists and museums, particularly regarding access to cultural heritage from colonial collections, reveals a pressing need for these artists to engage with painful memories, explore colonial traces in their psyches, and generate new narratives—whether fictional or not. These practices, like Bikoro’s, constitute modes of activism and narrative reclamation, aiming to restore truths and heal. Bikoro emphasizes that to heal, we must create new archival forms based on fiction, “knowing that these fictions are as valid as museums ones”, in order to reclaim our lived experiences, often erased or distorted by colonial power. This use of fiction to give voice to colonial traces and absences resonates with the concept of “Black Fabulation,” popularized by cultural historian Saidiya Hartman in her 2019 book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*.

By reclaiming vocabulary and investing in intangible archives, Bikoro initiates a process of reappropriation and restitution, intimately linked to the possibility of healing. This process echoes other creative and care-oriented practices developed to recover from other traumas and catastrophes caused by what is called colonization—processes that have led to the alleviation of suffering or reconciliation. Bikoro’s work and that of others create “pockets of liberation,” offering transformative moments that allow joy, peace, and healing, beyond institutional and colonial control.

*This text was created as part of the collaboration between C& Magazine and the Académie des Traces.*

*Anguezomo Nzé Mboulou Mba Bikoro merges immersive installations, sonic radio, live art performances, archaeology, film and archives. Their work challenges linear readings and representations of histories pursuing parafiction as a radical black queer feminist strategy to disrupt the notion of a single authorial voice. Their work examines processes of power and fictions in historical archives critically engaging in migrational struggles. They create environments for untold narratives of resistance movements by African women and indigenous communities. Sedimented in narratives are testimonies of sonic nature archives, queering ecologies and postcolonial black radical feminist experiences towards new monuments, reacting to the different tones of societies shared between delusions and ritual. They bring new investigations about the architectures of racism in cities, the archeologies of urban spaces and economies of tradition systems by exposing the limitations of technologies as functional memory records.*

*Injonge Karangwa is a Rwandan researcher with over a decade of experience designing and managing health programs across Sub-Saharan Africa using multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary approaches. She studied communication and management before completing a Master’s in Global Health Program Management at the University of Global Health Equity (UGHE) in Rwanda. In 2019, she founded the Hamwe Festival at UGHE, bringing together health and cultural stakeholders. She led various initiatives, including film productions, podcasts, and museum research partnerships. Injonge began her PhD studies in September 2024. Her research investigates the relationships between well-being and access to cultural heritage, focusing on the significance of objects and narratives from African museum collections, particularly those acquired during or associated with the colonial period.*

## LATEST ARTICLES

Inside the Library

**AWARE (Archives of Women Artists, Research & Exhibitions)**

News

**Ellipse Prize 2025 Announces Finalists of 5th Edition**

News

**ROM Announces Tandazani Dhlakama as Curator of Global Africa**

From the Archive

**In Conversation with Lubaina Himid: The Artist Set to Represent the UK at Venice Biennale 2026**

In Conversation

**Osei Bonsu: A Curatorial Lens on Photography as Identity and Tradition, Counter-Histories and Imagined Futures**

## MOST READ



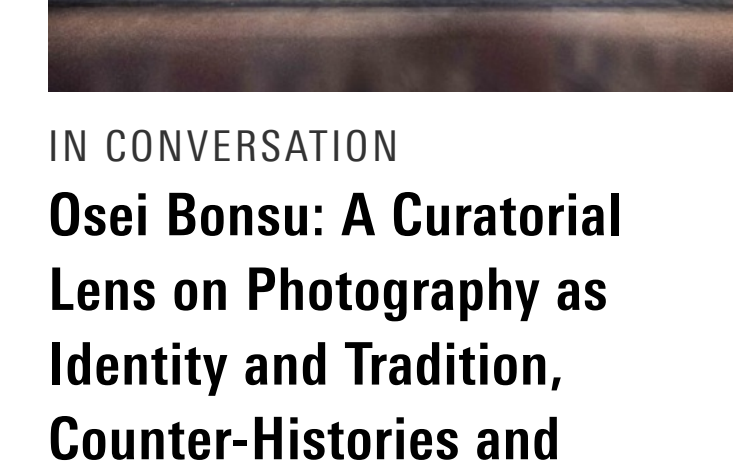
MUSEUM FOR YORUBA CULTURE AND HISTORY

**Five Things You Need to Know About the John Randle Center Before It Opens**



MUSEUM FOR YORUBA CULTURE AND HISTORY

**Five Things You Need to Know About the John Randle Center Before It Opens**

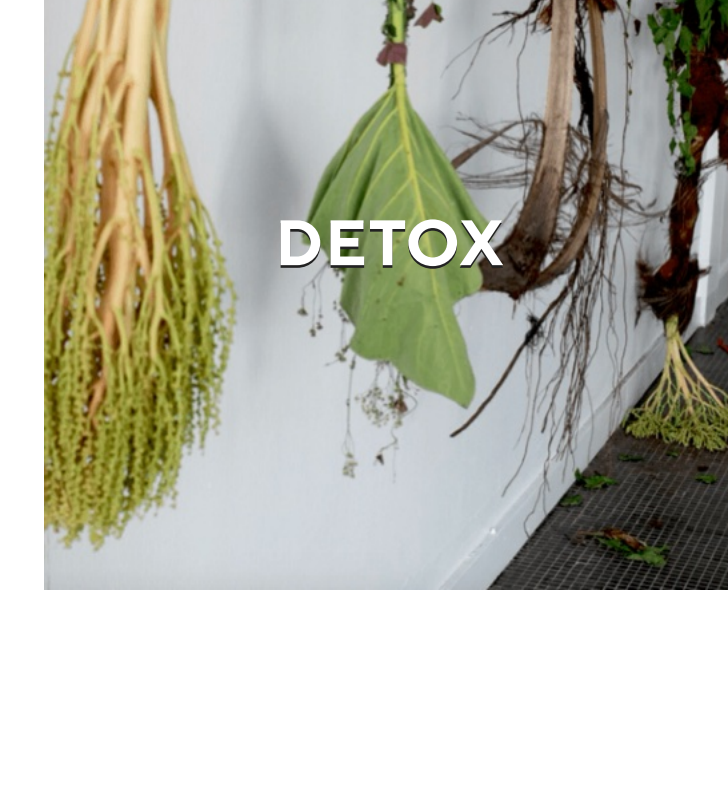
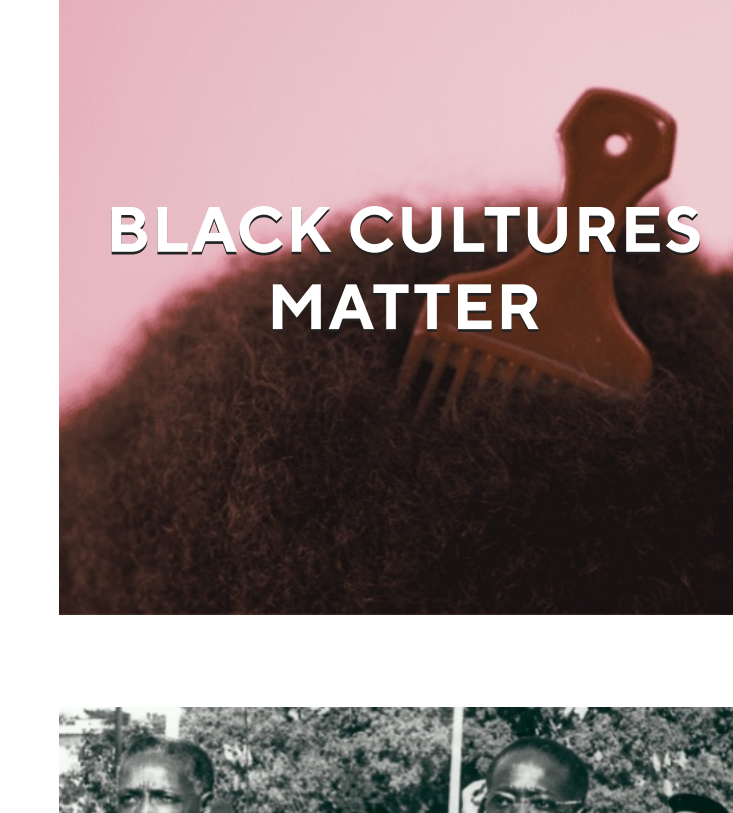
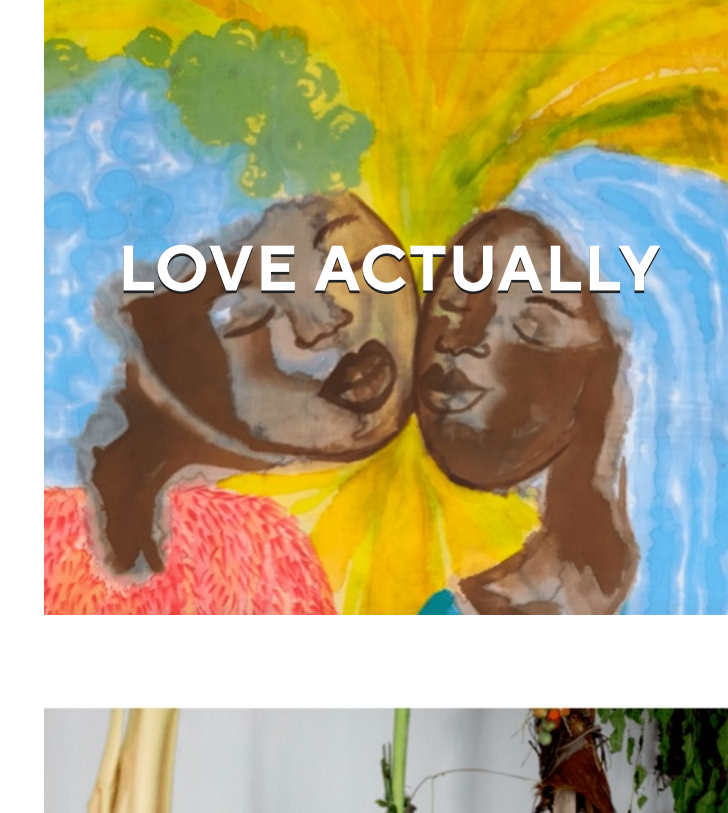


IN CONVERSATION

**Osei Bonsu: A Curatorial Lens on Photography as Identity and Tradition, Counter-Histories and Imagined Futures**

## EXPLORE

VIEW ALL



## MORE EDITORIAL

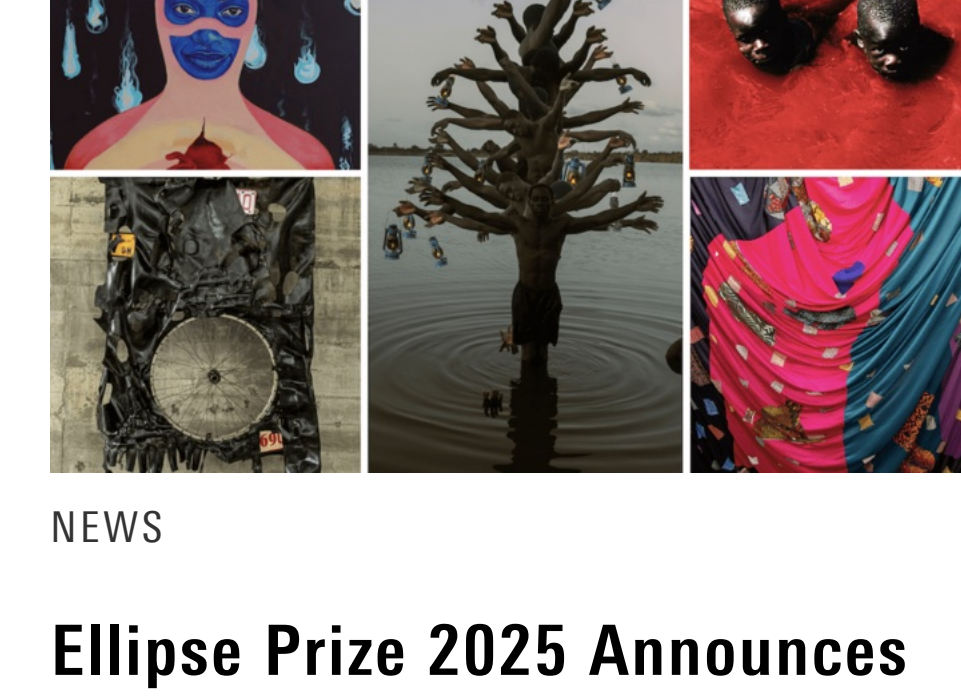
VIEW ALL



INSIDE THE LIBRARY

**AWARE (Archives of Women Artists, Research & Exhibitions)**

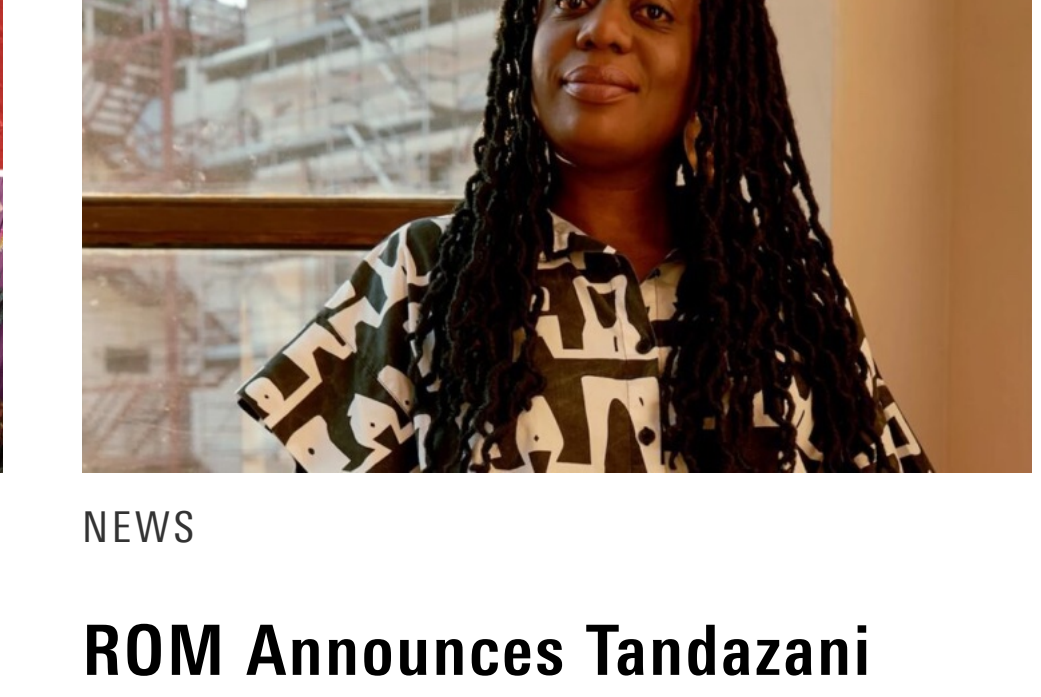
In this series, C& explores special book collections. This time, Keren Lasme shares her...



NEWS

**Ellipse Prize 2025 Announces Finalists of 5th Edition**

Dedicated to the emerging scene in Ghana, the final 5 are Sena Burgundy, Reginald...



NEWS

**ROM Announces Tandazani Dhlakama as Curator of Global Africa**

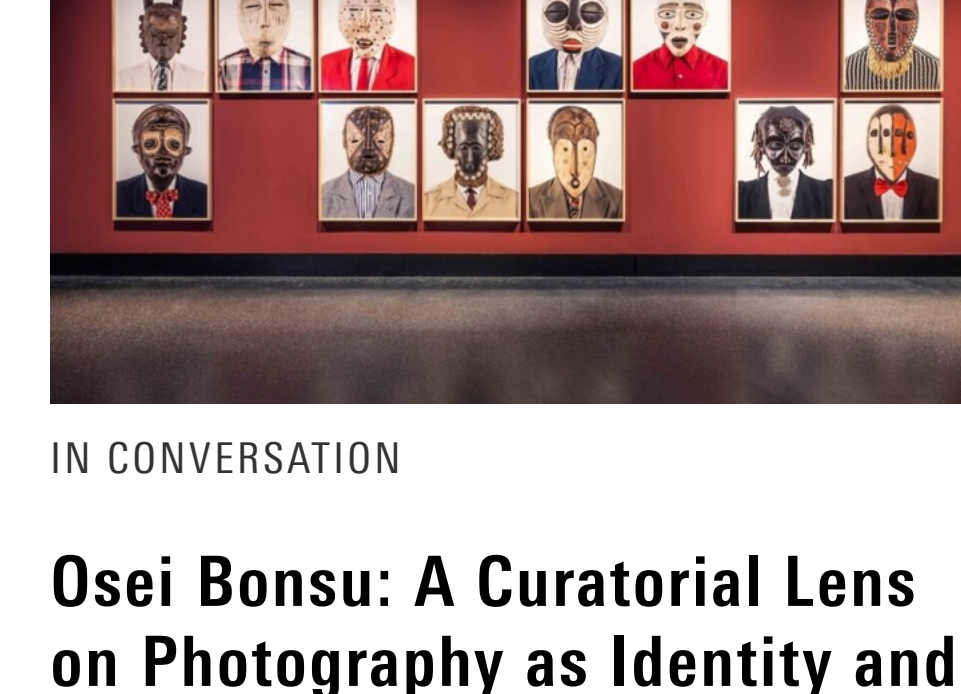
Formerly at Zeitz MOCAA, the curator is appointed to lead the Africa collection and...



FROM THE ARCHIVE

**In Conversation with Lubaina Himid: The Artist Set to Represent the UK at Venice Biennale 2026**

Revisiting an earlier conversation with the artist from our archive, she reflects on her...



IN CONVERSATION

**Osei Bonsu: A Curatorial Lens on Photography as Identity and Tradition, Counter-Histories and Imagined Futures**

C&'s Mearg Negusse dives into the subjects at the heart of the recently opened...

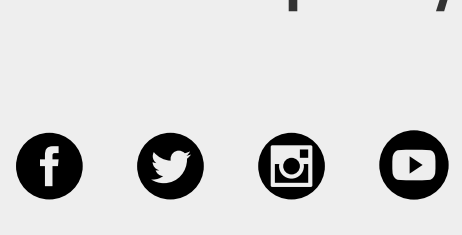


NEWS

**Dr. Zoe Whitley Named Curator of Art Toronto Focus Exhibition**

Dr. Zoé Whitley will curate the Focus Exhibition at the 26th Art Toronto, showcasing...

Contemporary And (C&) is a dynamic platform for reflecting and connecting ideas and discourses on contemporary visual arts.



SUBSCRIBE NEWSLETTER