

ON-SCREEN: GLOBAL INTIMACIES

Globalization is frequently assumed to have negative impact when associated with developing nations. Some scholars view this outside influence as a corruption of culture. At the very least, it is considered a threat to fragile and vulnerable local and traditional cultures. Such views tend to fix and essentialize culture as a static commodity, and disregard centuries of historic encounters that demonstrate the global outreach of humanity across continents. Since early civilizations, people have moved across and within geographical borders in search of better living conditions. Recently, the frequency of travel, the accessibility of technology, and the availability of information has compressed time and space in ways that allow for human interconnection to occur more remotely.

The exhibition *On-Screen: Global Intimacy* brings together ten artists—from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the United States—whose works investigate the transnational reach of globalization. Working primarily in video, these artists project images that traverse national boundaries and highlight the confluence of cultures and technologies that mark our time. Using visual narratives that range from the literal, to the imaginary, and to the abstract, the artists engage “globalism” as current reality. In doing so, the works call into question facile distinctions between tradition and modernity, resilience and restraint, empowerment and subjugation. They reveal a myriad of connections and relationships that emphasize similarities as well as differences. In their play with time, space, sound, and symbol, the films evince deeply sensorial “landscapes” of the transnational, which require us to rethink conventional definitions of national, community, and personal identity.

The exhibiting artists draw from their diverse identities and histories to explore competing and contradictory claims about the homogenizing force of globalization. The video piece by Alex Hernández Dueñas turns the simple act of taking a bath into a poignant commentary on the disparities of wealth and control over resources in cities where resources are limited. Tiong Ang’s dreamlike video of three men returning home from a day’s work speaks to issues of class and race. The men, isolated and alienated from their surroundings, stare past the camera in an almost trancelike state into the far distant rural landscape. Achilleká Komguem trains his lens on a chaotic intersection in urban Africa; though lacking a traffic signal—the ultimate regulating tool of modern

urban planning—the chaotic flow of traffic remains, miraculously, collision-free. Andrew Dosunmu draws inspiration from the nomadic, marginal lives of gypsies (*gitanes*), who forge ties with various cultures and traditions regardless of territorial boundaries. Hank Willis Thomas and Kambui Olujimi respond to the social violence that is prevalent in contemporary society. Using toys to simulate real-life scenarios, their work critiques the Western media’s treatment of violence as entertainment. Donna Kukama performs repetitive mundane actions from daily life, which become discreet, transgressive actions addressing absence as much as the presence of time. Fatimah Tuggar’s digital works juxtapose scenes from Africa and America; technology is used to emphasize the experiences of individuals who traverse multiple locations. Keith + Mendi Obadike constantly work across media to examine institutional boundaries of power and their limited capacity to control individual subjects. Using poetry, music, theater, and the Internet as their media, they explore new ways of engaging viewers.

These artists operate across social divisions of race, class, and gender, and envision an intimate reality that challenges the uniformity of “globalism.” Such ideas about nationhood and identity become fragmented and uneven because of the process of translation and of appropriation. What is consistent among these works is the subversion of Western power by previously marginalized artists. Dominant western artistic practices are being challenged as developing nations across the world become increasingly technologically and economically advanced. These nations’ socio-economic and political presence can no longer be undermined. Artists from these regions wrestle with how they are viewed and positioned within the art historical discourse and international scene. *On-Screen: Global Intimacy* situates the dialogue about globalism within an evolving locality, where the outcomes are nothing but an accumulation of countless local actions. Hence the exhibition explores these social interactions as an influence that shapes communities and defines their citizenship.

Tumelo Mosaka
Curator

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