



Annotations Study Day: École du Festival. Courtesy of G.A.S. Foundation.

## INTRODUCTION

*Re:assemblages* is a roaming body and multi-year programme designed to foster experimentation and collaboration within African art libraries. In 2025–26, its second chapter opens with a provocation: *What does it mean to think with African and Afro-diasporic art archives as living, contested, and future-shaping spaces?* The programme forges vital connections between artists, publishers, and research institutions in Africa, while responding to the urgent need for a global forum to advance dialogue around archives that remain under-resourced, dispersed, and shaped by enduring colonial legacies that continue to determine their access, preservation, and visibility.

The programme was developed in response to the Picton Archive, currently housed at G.A.S. Foundation, which constitutes a significant archival assemblage for re-thinking African modernism and contemporary African art in relation to the broader conditions of the 20th century. The collection was established in 2022 when G.A.S. Foundation received the personal library collection of Emeritus Professor of African Art John Picton and Sue Picton. John Picton's arrival in Lagos in 1961 to work at the National Museum coincided with Nigeria's early post-independence period—a time marked by a rapidly transforming artistic field that rearticulated modernist strategies through African epistemologies and anti-colonial critique.

Comprising rare African-published journals, magazines, and manuscripts, the Picton Archive maps intellectual and aesthetic movements across post-independence and contemporary contexts. It indexes the entanglements of African artistic practices with transnational movements such as Pan-Africanism and Negritude, situating modern African art within wider networks of political and cultural movements.

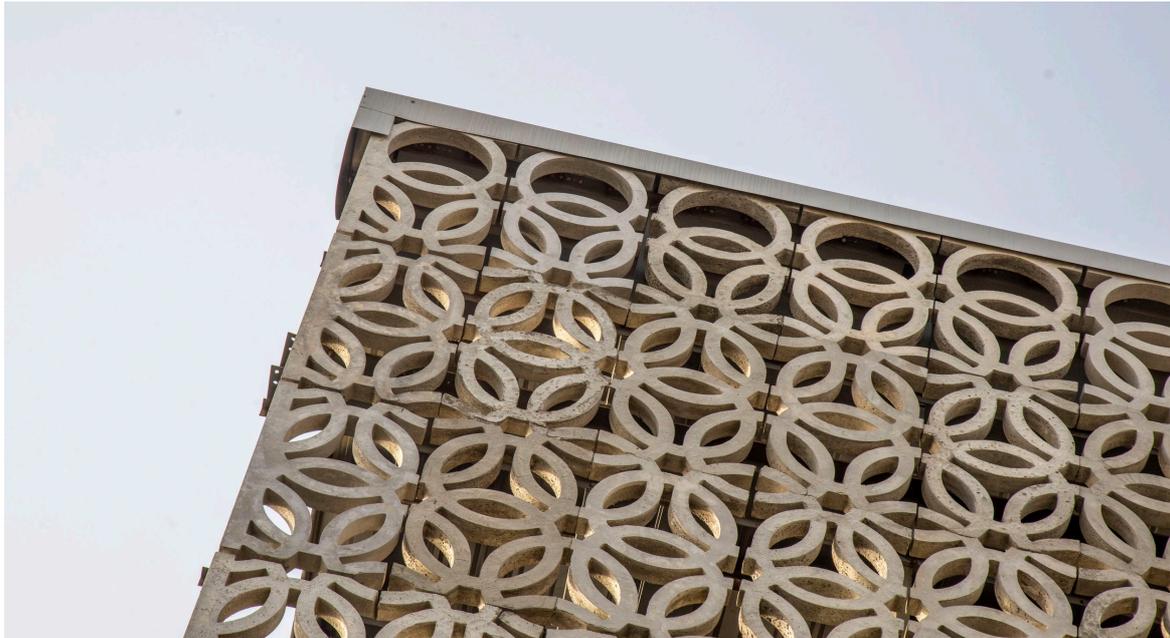


Picton Reference Collection, G.A.S. Foundation Lagos. Courtesy of G.A.S. Foundation and Andrew Esiebo.

The polysemous concept of the assemblage has evolved from archaeological groupings of contemporaneous artefacts to encompassing both the human and non-human, and as a way of thinking about the social world. In the film *Reassemblage* (1982), Trinh T. Minh-ha introduces a radical repositioning of the assemblage as a cinematic device, exploring African female subjectivity through a chorus of abrupt jump cuts, repetitive voice-overs and close-ups. The film's fragmented images and mismatched field recordings emphasise and embody the technique of "speaking nearby."

In this context, *Re:assemblages* unfolds as a platform for critical collaboration and experimentation, cultivating new frameworks for the stewardship and activation of African and Afro-diasporic archives. In 2024, its opening chapter, *Annotations*, aimed to counter-map pan-African festivals, through close readings of conflicting records and ephemera, including state collections, artist accounts, and delegate testimonies. Drawing on Dominique Malaquais, Cédric Vincent, and Prita Meier's *Entangled Panafrika*, the 2024 project asked how can the relational geographies that pan-festivals sought to forge across vast cultural networks be re-encountered?

Across 2025-26, the programme will play host to international convenings, symposia, micro-publications, and a research intensive. The second chapter will explore four conceptual themes — *Ecotones*, *The Short Century*, *Annotations*, and *The Living Archive* — each proposing various mappings and relations between 20th and 21st-century African and Afro-diasporic art archives, inviting modes of affective collaboration, reflection, experimentation, and discursive encounter.



G.A.S. Foundation Lagos. Courtesy of G.A.S. Foundation and Andrew Esiebo.

## 2025 – 26 PROGRAMME

For up-to-date information on the programme schedule and events, please visit [Re:assemblages](#).

### AFRICAN ARTS LIBRARIES LAB

African Art Libraries Lab (AAL Lab)—will bring together a constellation of African arts libraries and publishers in Lagos, Dakar, Marrakesh, Cairo, Nairobi, Cape Town, Limbe, and beyond to engage critical questions on publishing practices, libraries, and archives in Africa. Museums and institutions in Europe and North America will be invited to participate in collective experimentation with AAL Lab members to encourage new ways of networking, preserving, and activating African and Afro-diasporic library collections across multilocational sites.

*AAL Lab Affiliates Network*— invites global institutions holding African and Afro-diasporic collections to support African-led infrastructures through knowledge exchange, co-curation, joint research, and capacity-building. This network nurtures a global community that amplifies African and Afro-diasporic art collections, promoting inclusive access and sustainable preservation.

The inaugural cycle of the AAL Lab and Affiliates Network will be launched as part of the Re:assemblages 2025–26 programme. The AAL Lab will participate in, engage with, and respond to the evolving themes of the second cycle of *Re:assemblages*, shaping it to reflect their priorities and expertise, while also engaging international audiences through the CAAP convening series. The Lab and Affiliates Network are jointly led by the Yinka Shonibare and Guest Artists Space Foundations, and further supported by the Re:assemblages Advisory Committee.

## AAL LAB CONVENINGS

Under the title *Contemporary Art and Archive Practices (CAAP)*, G.A.S. Foundation and Yinka Shonibare Foundation will host a series of public convenings drawing from Re:assemblages 2025–26’s conceptual themes, *Ecotones*, *The Short Century*, *Annotations* and *The Living Archive* at the borders of contemporary art and archive practices. Each convening will feature reflections from the inaugural cohort of the African Arts Libraries Lab (AAL Lab) and wider public, encouraging collaboration, new research methodologies, and critical interventions.

Embracing pluriversal readings and collaboration, the hybrid convening series will unfold across multiple registers and locations. Micro-publishing series, *Archive Futures Chapbooks*, will then gather and advance CAAP’s discourse by harvesting its outcomes.

## THE SHORT CENTURY INTENSIVE

The Short Century serves as a through line for a research intensive hosting five fellows who will explore the question: what forms of relation are possible within the archives of the compressed 20th century? The intensive approaches the mid to late 20th century as a formative ecotonal space—an in-between zone where new networks, collaborations, and tensions emerged, fostering a new ecology of African and Afro-diasporic relations. Fellows will engage across artistic registers, reading with and against archives, excavating overlooked genealogies, and rehearsing speculative modes of citation and annotation.

## MICRO-PUBLISHING

*Archive Futures Chapbooks* respond to the *AAL Lab Convenings*. Each chapbook reflects a single convening, serving as both marginalia and a collaborative archival mapping of its theme. Using the form of a chapbook—small, usually inexpensive booklets that typically contain poems, stories, or other short texts—the micro-publications support the African Arts Libraries Lab and the wider public by introducing, contextualising, and mapping related archives and collections. In doing so, they aim to foreground silences and gaps within official records, while enhancing the visibility of underrepresented materials and informing future acquisitions and curatorial strategies within African art collections.

Correspondingly, the *Archive Futures Repository* will eventually offer a set of working tools anchored by the chapbooks to support new and imaginative relationships with African and Afro-diasporic art archives and library collections.

## RE:ASSEMBLAGES SYMPOSIUM

### PART 1 — 4-5 NOVEMBER 2025

Y.S.F. and G.A.S. Foundation present *Re:assemblages*, a two-day symposium convening archivists, researchers, writers, and cultural practitioners around the archipelagic terrain of 20th and 21st century African and Afro-diasporic art archives through panels, conversations, and site-responsive interventions. Anchored by conceptual themes, *Ecotones*, *The Short Century*, *Annotations* and *The Living Archives*, the symposium marks the inaugural public engagement of the AAL Lab's first cohort—comprising libraries, publishers, and cultural institutions.

### PART TWO — FALL 2026

Closing the AAL Lab Convenings programme, the Fall 2026 *Re:assemblages* Reflections Symposium will workshop a toolkit comprising tools, experiments and adaptive practices that will guide the AAL Lab's future work across institutions, disciplines, and geographies. The speculative framework will chart innovative pathways for archival and curatorial practice, opening up new horizons for collective care and transformative exchange among global institutions holding 20th and 21st century African and Afro-diasporic art archive collections.

## REPOSITORY

*Archive Futures Repository* harvests new approaches to the stewardship, mapping, and activating of African and Afro-diasporic art archives. Like *Re:assemblages* itself, the repository is an unfolding inquiry into how such archives are constituted, how they live, and how we imagine their futures. Developed in tandem with the 2025-26 programme, the repository offers a set of working tools anchored by the *AAL Lab Chapbook series*, which will serve as an open forum for references, conversations, annotations, and outcomes that emerge from the convenings series. Each convening will host an *Archive Futures* dialogue space, offering a space for the African Arts Libraries Lab Cohort, affiliates and collaborators to reflect on and map resonant pathways across archives, practices, and publics.

# T H E M E S

## E C O T O N E S

But more than just a marker of separation or even a marker of connection (although importantly both of these things), an ecotone is also a zone of fecundity, creativity, transformation; of becoming, assembling, multiplying; of diverging, differentiating, relinquishing.

— Astrida Neimanis In 'Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water' (2012)

*Ecotones* is a term that describes a transitional zone between distinct ecosystems. The word "ecotone" comes from the English word *eco* (from ecology), and the Greek word *tonos* (meaning tension). The boundaries of *ecotones* are not always clearly defined but real and observable phenomenon in nature (such as savannah, mangrove, estuaries) that are known for being transitional spaces with increased levels of species adaptability, resilience, collaboration, and tension.

If we think with ecotone in order to visualize a meeting place for different knowledge systems, structures, and stakeholders, undesirable tensions and transformations are expected. Numerous other researchers have adopted the concept to help think through, and seek resistance strategies for, the myriad of complexities and challenges our species' grapples today, in both cultural and ecological terms. Donna Haraway argues that as contact zones, *ecotones* are, 'full of the complexities of different kinds of unequal power' that often do not 'go in expected directions'. Because of the 'edge effects' of *ecotones*—where species exist outside their comfort zones—this 'interdigitating' is what enables *ecotones* to support the richest ecological, evolutionary, and historical diversity.

Cristina Baldauf has described *ecotones* as zones for negotiation between indigenous and conventional researchers, which help to encourage the development of 'partnerships and agendas' between stakeholders, influencing 'policy and development' across and beyond such partnerships. While these *ecotones* contribute to expanding historical meanings, much of archival research still exists within structurally Eurocentric contexts that, by their very nature, limit access to findings and perpetuate many forms of inequality tied to the history of Western academia. This raises the question of whether the

concepts of ecotones and transitional spaces can help to challenge and instrumentalize the asymmetry between embodied and archival research silences. Could these concepts bridge the gaps between botanical archives, source communities, and academic texts? And might they subvert the botanical collection practices that hinder the possibility of radical intervention?

In recent years the ecotone concept has been ‘transposed’ to the social sciences where it is used to describe cultural ecotones as a junction, or a ‘connective tissue’ between distinct cultures, where ‘interaction and interchange of knowledge, skills, and resources’ happens—a place of increased diversity. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands poetically describes ecotones as spaces that are ‘pregnant with change’, and fertile ground with ‘possibilities for change’, where the collective life of one intermingles with and disrupts another, always bringing something new into being’.

An ecotonal method of inhabiting collections—endeavours to uncover, document and analyse those aspects of the past lost, marginalised and excluded from conventional historical narratives. This reflective turn represents the confluence of and the tensions between documents and experience, as manifest in a post-colonial world that acknowledges the historical links between bio-cultural loss and imperialist logic. Unconfined by the distanced gaze of colonial science, those marginalised voices surface and reorient attention toward relational, and situated modes of knowing and understanding, and in the process carve out new landscapes for encounter and dialogue. Along the ecotonal line it becomes possible to reimagine collectively the definitions of knowledge, and to champion epistemologies activated through the embodied, sensorial, and ancestral.

To the African diaspora, to our shared histories, and futures, ecotone is instinctive; conceptually it provides us a space for exploring the boundaries that connect and separate us. The in-between, gradient, the marginal. We understand it well because we are hybrid. While African collective and individual movements, encounters, and transformations are neither solid nor static formations, the ecotonal edge draws us near because, as Mortimer-Sandilands posits, ‘in some respects, we are all marginal creatures’ adapted to and enticed by the ‘risks and uncertainties’ of borderlands.

## THE SHORT CENTURY

In 1994, Yinka Shonibare took part in the Triangle Network's Tenq workshop and residency in Dakar, Senegal. There, he met Senegalese artist El Hadji Sy, a member of Laboratoire Agit'Art, for the first time. Laboratoire Agit'Art was an art collective founded in Dakar, Senegal in 1973 by writer and performer Youssouf John with the goal of revitalising artistic production and critiquing frameworks such as the philosophy of Negritude, a central literary and political movement that emerged in the early 20th century.

— Based on a *History of G.A.S. Foundation* (2025)

The year 1994 was marked by the political dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, a historical closure identified by the late curator and theorist Okwui Enwezor as the terminus of what he termed *The Short Century*. Spanning from 1945 to 1994, this compressed century encapsulates an epoch that reframes Africa not as a marginal subject but as a catalytic agent in the making of global modernity. Invoking Kwame Nkrumah's declaration that, "this mid-twentieth century is Africa's", Enwezor charted a temporal arc that foregrounds Africa's centrality to postwar decolonization and the 20th century's global modernist movement.

Enwezor's seminal exhibition *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994* maps intertwined histories of Negritude and Pan-Africanism to Arab Nationalism and liberation struggles across Algeria, Mozambique, and Angola, refusing linear narratives, and emphasising instead epistemic and aesthetic insurgency. Like Enwezor, the curatorial strand extends a backward-looking frame, drawing on the 1884 Berlin Conference, Ernest Mancoba's interventions in abstraction during the 1930s, and wartime representations of African soldiers to argue that African agency and aesthetic practice were integral—rather than peripheral—to the development of global modernity.

One could read the mid to late 20th century as a formative ecotonal space—an in-between zone where new networks, collaborations, and tensions emerged, cultivating a new ecology of African and Afro-diasporic relations. This expanded timeline complicates Eurocentric periodisations and prompts a critical reconsideration: how might shifting the framing of the 20th century as an ecotonal space reconfigure our understanding of it?

In dialogue with curatorial strand *Ecotones*, *The Short Century* proposes a curatorial methodology that is both

cartographic and archipelagic, moving across African and Afro-diasporic archives, materials, and memory practices spanning 1945 to 1994. Anchored between the end of World War II and the collapse of apartheid, *The Short Century* signifies a moment of intensified becoming across Africa and its diasporas. Pan-African congresses, independence movements, radical cultural networks, and new artistic movements mark this era of rupture, continuity, and renewal. Yet, as Enwezor insisted, its significance resides in that which exceeds official narratives: its silences, insurgent gestures, and speculative futurities embedded in images, sounds, forms, and memories.

Within the *Re:assemblages* programme, the archives of this compressed century will serve as a through line, rendering its constellations and the transnational networks that constituted it as porous and living.

## ANNOTATIONS

I find that although I try to straddle these threads, more often than not, I must sit with the shadow, or the unknown, as a strategy for navigating these archives. In one instance, I record the lapping of the Lagos Lagoon on paper as a repetition of words that the waves form in my mind. Echo, echo, echo. This record is a tonal reminder of the fluidity of memory and, therefore, the archive.

— Liz Kobusinge, *Annotations in Four Acts* (2025)

*Annotations* takes its name from African-American poet and author John Keene’s avant-garde first novel and is deeply rooted in critical fabulation. Saidiya Hartman expounds critical fabulation as “playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story” and constructing speculative arguments to both tell “an impossible story and amplify the impossibility of its telling.” Through the gesture of annotating, whereby citational practices challenge and encourage alternative historiographies, *Annotations* departs from the situated locale of Lagos as a focal point to explore the archival afterlives of four 20th century pan-African festivals (*FESMAN*, *PANAF*, *Zaire 74*, *FESTAC ’77*).

Initiated as the opening chapter of *Re:assemblages*, *Annotations* aimed to counter-map these festivals through close readings of conflicting records and ephemera, including state collections, artist accounts, and delegate testimonies—the annotation serving as a recourse, to challenge traditional or ‘master’ historical narratives, particularly those concerning pan-African festivals. Through *Annotations*, we asked: How can archival choreography destabilise the very notion of the pan-African archives? How can we consider the surface, the spatial presence of these archives, and necessarily travel to an elsewhere? These mappings produced *The Fractal Timeline*, an atemporal archive containing alternative and fugitive traces of the festivals narrated by the project’s six research associates.

In the second chapter of *Re:assemblages*, *Annotations* expands as “method-making,” and situates a broader multitemporal archival excavation of pan-African performance-based histories and futures. As a navigational tool, annotations as method-making manoeuvres through decolonial thinking, which Walter D. Mignolo observes, “delinks from thinking disciplinarily.” Furthermore, Mignolo details, “decoloniality is neither a disciplinary field of studies nor a method to be added to any of the constituted disciplines.” What does it mean to think

archivally, decolonially, and without discipline? To annotate pan-African archival traces and futures? Drawing on Katherine McKittrick's framework for scholarly radical praxis that is "relational, intertextual, interdisciplinary, interhuman, and multidisciplinary," *Annotations* resists the coloniality of archival praxis and wanders with curiosity in the study of African pan-archival practices. Through intimacy and ritual, beyond the surface of the page where the unmarked and unwritten are source material for interrogation, play, and speculation—*Annotations* sutures these archival anatomies into speculative and undefined bodies.

## THE LIVING ARCHIVE

...a 'living archive', whose construction must be seen as an on-going, never completed project [...] 'Living' means present, on-going, continuing, unfinished, open-ended. The new work which will come to constitute significant additions to the archive will not be the same as that which was produced earlier, but it will be related to that body of work, if only in terms of how it inflects or departs from it.

— Stuart Hall, *Constituting an Archive* (2001)

In their text, *In the Theatre of Memory: The Work of Contemporary Art in the Photographic Archive*, artists Raqs Media Collective note that “to consider the photograph in the archive is to consider not just a problem of history, but a question of the poetics of the real, of memory and oblivion.” For many curators, artists and creative practitioners, these poetics are constantly at play. The notion of the archive and the adoption of related practices is embedded in their work, serving as a means of unpacking or understanding what might be presented as real within ever-evolving contexts and situations.

Occurring as creative impulses that expand and contract our notion of time, or as forms of activation which turn systemic practices of control and subjectification on their head, through the development of artist-led archival frameworks there lies the possibility to layer, to reconstruct or even to recodify channels of information. Herein lies a possibility to add complexity to our fields of understanding and creation.

The Living Archive takes the form of artistic and social practice, valuing embodied knowledge with an equivalence to other data sources. Through this framework we acknowledge that how we interact with the world - both as individual beings and in communion with others - creates imprints, builds recognition and offers a means to reconcile experience within wider fields of knowledge.

Within the broader forum of *Re:assemblages*, The Living Archive hosts artists, writers, curators and cultural practitioners whose own work continues to inform conceptual frameworks of archival practices. Actively considering new ways of making and knowledge sharing, each practitioner presents specific works, exhibitions and bodies of research to offer a plurality of approaches which hold archives and their dissemination at their core. This includes, among others, artist and curator Hew Locke, whose three year research process mining through the

British Museum's vaults and storage facilities emerged as an exhibition which not only highlighted the institution's centuries old practice of extraction, but also co-opted labelling systems and archival methodologies to allow viewers to navigate intersecting points of reference simultaneously as they travelled through the show.

Alongside this, the work of Liz Johnson Artur spans almost four decades, amassed as a major body of photographs in an ever-evolving collection the artist has called The Black Balloon Archive. In highlighting the complexity and nuances of lived experiences from black diasporic communities across the globe, Artur's work serves to push forward the notion that archives are living, expanding entities which breathe through lived experiences, recontextualisation and through ongoing activations with their communities. Artur, Locke, and other practitioners working within the field of The Living Archive offer possibilities to deconstruct as well as to embody archival systems in new ways; here fertile developments emerge to replace systems of control, inertia and silence.



G.A.S. Foundation Lagos. Courtesy of G.A.S Foundation and Andrew Esiebo.

## A B O U T U S

[Guest Artists Space \(G.A.S.\) Foundation](#) and [Yinka Shonibare Foundation \(Y.S.F.\)](#) were established in 2019 by the eminent British-Nigerian artist [Yinka Shonibare CBE RA](#). G.A.S. and Y.S.F. maintain a close partnership, working seamlessly together by combining resources and aligning efforts to achieve a shared mission and purpose. Both organisations are governed by boards of trustees chaired by Yinka Shonibare CBE RA.

## S U P P O R T C I R C L E

*Re:assemblages 2025–26* benefits from the support of the Terra Foundation for American Art. The inaugural chapter of *Re:assemblages* was supported by the Outset Contemporary Art Fund in 2024.

The programme is advised by an Advisory Committee comprising Dr. Beatrix Gassman de Sousa, Natasha Ginwala, Dr. Rangoato Hlasane, Patrick Mudekereza, Serubiri Moses, and Dr. Oluwatoyin Zainab Sogbesan.

## T E A M A N D C O N C E P T

*Re:assemblages* is curated by Naima Hassan, with contributions to its second edition from Maryam Kazeem (Annotations), Ann Marie Peña (The Living Archive), and Jonn Gale (Ecotones). Gale's PhD placement with the G.A.S. and Y.S.F. Foundations played a key role in shaping the conceptual development of the 2025–26 edition.

The Programme Planning Committee includes Moni Aisida, Jonn Gale, Naima Hassan, Belinda Holden, Maryam Kazeem, Magda Kaggwa, Siti Osman and Ann Marie Peña. The programme was first developed by Naima Hassan with strategic oversight from Belinda Holden in 2023.

C O V E R B Y S E Y I O L U S A N Y A