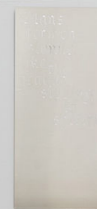
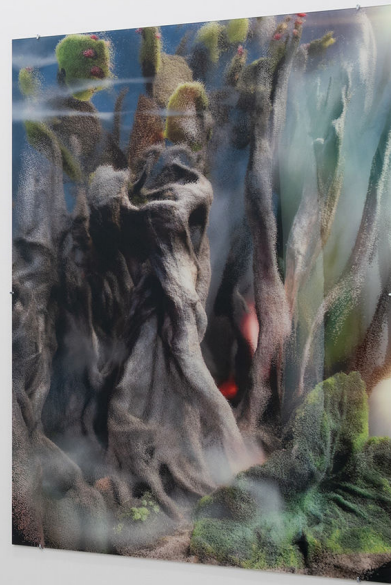
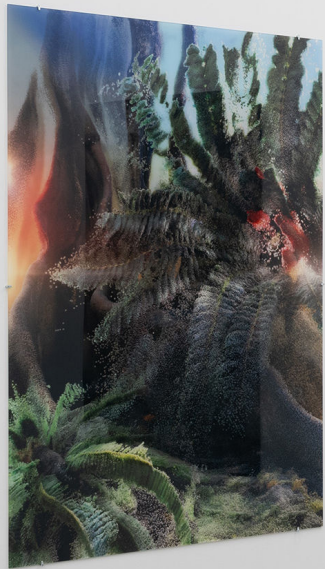


Vanessa Amoah Opoku
Sunrise to Sunrise (Tricksters)



EIGEN + ART Lab
8.9. - 21.10.23



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Sunrise to Sunrise (Tricksters) 8.9. – 21.10.2023

Opening: 8.9.2023, 5-7pm

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“For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.”
(Simon Schama: Landscape and Memory, New York 1995, S. 7)

By illuminating the ephemerality of space Vanessa Amoah Opoku creates alternate realities destined to an existence on the verge between the real and the virtual. Opoku's solo exhibition Sunrise to Sunrise (Tricksters) features artworks that explore the dying of old worlds and practice resistance through the creation of new memory– and dreamscapes. Sunrise is such a metaphor for transience and impermanence, expanding the idea of reality as we perceive it. The exhibition title refers to a strategy of time-mapping through motion. While the Western tradition views time as a linear concept starting at midnight, the Akan, native to the region of present-day Ghana and its surrounding countries, used a system of sunrise-to-sunrise counting to measure the extent of the Ashanti empire. Guided by rhythmic movements in space, this method challenged the cartographic rules imposed by colonial oppressors. In the same way, what appears to be a homage to natural beauty in Opoku's works transmutes into a reflection on the colonial history of art.

Much like the roots and tendrils enveloped in luminous mist in the series of digital paintings, Rooted Resurgence I & II (2023 – ongoing), many of Opoku's works evoke surrealist landscapes reminiscent of those by Max Ernst. Rooted Resurgence uses point clouds, a 3D-scanning technique, to engage with the topic of displacement. While exoticization and fetishization of plants in botanical collections correlate closely to the history of slavery and colonialism, the artist creates new contexts and interpretations of the physical material by scanning it from botanical gardens and digitally re-composing it. Opoku reflects on how alliances between art, science, and technology can change perceptions of reality and all living things, using a variety of mixed media formats such as 3D-graphics, animation, sculpture, photogrammetry, sound, and artificial intelligence. The technique of digital collaging is also an integral part of her latest work, after which the exhibition is named. Presented in form of a triptych with three works attached to a guide rail, Sunrise to Sunrise (Tricksters) (2023 – ongoing) unfolds its meaning by literally placing several layers of material on top of each other. Structurally distinct, these layers interconnect.

The rearmost layer of each of the three works consists of a print on an aluminum plate that, similar to Rooted Resurgence, shows organic material captured through 3D-scans. The point clouds in Sunrise to Sunrise (Tricksters) originate from cacao plantations in Ghana and the Carinthian Karawanks. Whereas renderings of fields and trees from plantation sites reference the colonialism, deforestation and climate crisis tied to Ghanaian agriculture, the latter, marking the border between Austria and Slovenia, is a historic site of Partisan action in World War II. Opoku seeks to build landscapes that embody resistance or elements from her memory and dreams: re-ownership and self-empowerment of the oppressed are set into a dialogue with antifascist movements of the past. With delicate materiality and the particularizing effect of the 3D-scans, Opoku's landscapes seem so fragile, that they threaten to disintegrate at any moment.

A filigree silicone layer serves as a frame, although it can hardly be understood as such. Stretched over the surface and around the images' edges this layer almost resembles a symbiotic organism. Small particles embedded in the silicone layer originate from sites scanned by Opoku – these are the only actual organic and inorganic materials present in her work. The silicone mold's pattern, generated and cast with the help of AI tools, derives from Adinkra symbols. In Ghanaian and Akan culture, Adinkra symbols hold historical and philosophical meaning, conveying aphorisms and allegorical concepts. While these visual symbols are traditionally used on pottery and textiles, Opoku trained an AI with a data set to build her own Adinkra. In yet another piece of the series *Sunrise to Sunrise (Tricksters)*, Opoku imparts a linguistic expression to the Adinkra symbols: Engravings, written also on aluminum plates, feature proverbs from the same data used for creating the silicone layer. Opoku leaves it to the audience to envision the landscape counterparts to these tenets. Utilizing AI to create new images and meaning, the artist references how cultural symbolisms, like the Adinkra and Tricksters, undergo transformations influenced by various factors, especially within the context of temporization. By incorporating aspects of generational knowledge, the dynamics of migration processes, and the enduring effects of the diasporic experience, Opoku's works transcend the mere act of appropriating mysticism, history, and culture. Instead, they explore the intricate alterations and enhancement of culturally significant concepts, deeply interwoven with the essence of temporal progression.

Acrylic glass plates attached with magnets try to preserve the sceneries by partially sealing them off. Figurative engravings placed on the glass complement the landscapes and particles. Among other figures from Akan mythology, Anansi, portrayed as a spider, is one of the tricksters reinterpreted by Opoku for her series. Like a protagonist, the spider enlivens the digitally created forest, becoming the depiction of an ancestor, a guiding spirit representing agency. The tricksters in mythology inhabit a realm of ambivalence. They defy norms using intellect and wit, and navigate through obstacles and gray areas employing inventive solutions. It is precisely this pursuit of non-conformity that relates the figure of the trickster to the notion of resistance. In the Akan folklore tales, Anansi, known as the god of knowledge, stories, wisdom and trickery, poses as such a character by challenging the power- by-strength narrative with his cunning. According to Creole oral lore, Anansi even survives apocalypses and the transatlantic slave trade.

However, the single components of *Sunrise to Sunrise (Tricksters)* are neither static in construction nor division. The series is expandable, allowing its layers to interchange. In line with this approach of re-assembly, Opoku also supplements her 3D-video animation *This Place Bottoms Me (2022)* by adding an acrylic glass plate adorned with another Trickster figure. *This Place Bottoms Me* draws inspiration from Marge Piercy's feminist science fiction *Women on the Edge of Time (1976)*. In reference to the novel's main character Consuelo traversing between present reality and the future, Opoku's work delves into the hidden layers of the point cloud through a portal-like gutter. In this way, too, Opoku points to the contingencies of places and pasts that have yet to exist. Almost like a process of perpetual palimpsest, the layers of her works interact, overwrite and actualize each other without weighing knowledge from past experiences against the potentiality of future narratives. Thus, *Sunrise to Sunrise (Tricksters)* also contextualizes the immersive video work *Rest in Peace Simulation (2022 – ongoing)*, Opoku created in collaboration with Philisha Kay.

The first part of the simulation, already released, is titled Out-of-Sync Recalibration. Unlike the perception of time and space as the construct shaping our reality, alternative concepts of their agency offer a resistive potential. The prevailing notion of time and its measurement follow the hegemony imposed by cultural norms, which Opoku and Kay critically engage with. Through guided meditations in a 360° digitally generated environment built by Opoku and accompanied by a voice-over written by Kay, the artists create a space for experiencing temporary sensorial detachment. Out-of-Sync Recalibration reflects the narratives of self-optimization linked to the capitalist origins of the present-day wellness industry, and suggests ways to escape the ceaseless cycle. Amidst shallow swaying palm trees, plumes of smoke rise into the dark sky. A glimpse of an ephemeral green light meanders through the grass. As dawn hits, day fades, and night falls again in short progression, the linearity of time utterly collapses. The scene described is the final sequence of Out-of-Sync Recalibration, imitating an ostensibly natural environment. In contrast to the two prior sequences of the video work, Opoku here builds a 3D-environment manually rather than using AI.

This digital realm, as it dwells and passes at its own discretion, prompts consideration of the very concept of time's virtual nature. Could this hypothetical world escape current narratives and manifest as an autonomous reality? Through her art, Opoku addresses pressing concerns of the contemporary era, such as the urgent need for climate action and the ongoing process of decolonization. Her artworks beckon viewers to cast their gaze both backward and inward, urging reflection on cultural history as an essential step toward envisioning and building a more equitable and conscientious future. Opoku's explorations of environments, as seen in her use of 3D-scanning techniques, highlight the importance of acknowledging the complex relationship with nature. Her meticulously composed landscapes become a canvas for utopian possibilities. By shedding light on the entanglements of cultural continuities and resilience and indicating the transformative nature of cultural symbolisms, she emphasizes the adaptability of traditions and their potential to evolve within contemporary contexts.

Press release by Naomi Rado

Once
fast air
saw
the
ghost
long
of
spirits.

