

25 May – 15 September



A requiem for humanity exhibition. Credit: La Casa Encendida / Maru Serrano.

A requiem for humanity, dehumanisations, power and black futurisms

- An exhibition that points out the manner in which cultural inferiority – constructed, in an anti-black world, since the Renaissance – became embodied in legal instruments, art, film, literature and popular culture; and how only a new mythology, an alternative to the European humanist narrative, which reconceptualises and reformulates humanity, can offer a different and emancipatory future
- The exhibition, curated by Tania Safura Adam, features works by The Otolith Group, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alice Coltrane, Frida Orupabo, Claudia Claremi, Sybil Coovi Handemagnon, Kongo Astronauts and D. W. Griffith
- From 25 May to 15 September in rooms B and C of La Casa Encendida.
Free admission

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In the black intellectual tradition, the fundamental issue is not class or race, but contesting the Western symbolic order and the Christian vision of 'the human': a symbolic order in which black subjects are objectified, inferiorised and animalised, and thus expelled from the "humanity" that the Western bourgeois embodies. This is the starting point for *Un réquiem por la humanidad, deshumanizaciones, poder y futurismos negros* [A Requiem for Humanity, Dehumanisations, Power and Black Futurisms], an exhibition curated by Tania Adam, which approaches the scientific, cultural and religious production that led to the de-humanisation of "the negro" and the resulting violence on black people. It will also examine and deal with the utopias that allow us to imagine a future of emancipation.

As Aimé Césaire pointed out as early as 1955 in his book, *Discourse on Colonialism*, and as did the anti-colonial movements, the European humanist narrative required the systematic degradation of non-white men and women to construct its myths.

In the same vein, Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter has stated that "man must be liberated. That liberation can only come from below, from those who have suffered oppression". Similarly, Frantz Fanon and other black intellectuals, aware that the problem of humanity is not found in identity *per se*, but in its statements and meanings, suggested not contributing to or participating in the system of knowledge that leaves them outside humanity because of their black condition.

Since the black man is conceived as a defect of the white man, an animal, a non-being, only intellectual disobedience that proposes a new conception of humanity will allow the black – and the indigenous, the "other" – to be human.

The exhibition is organised along these lines of reasoning. There is an initial section, entitled "Dehumanisation", with works by Claudia Claremi, Frida Orupabo, Sybil Coovi Handemagnon, D. W. Griffith, etc., which shows how this construct of the anti-black world leads to a timeless and incessant spiral of violence that persists in present-day societies. Part two – "Rehumanization", with pieces by the Kongo Astronauts, The Otolith Group, and contributions by Alice Coltrane, Sun Ra, Drexciya, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ishmael Reed, Octavia E. Butler, Fred Moten, Sony Labou Tansi – proposes a utopian approach to reflecting and imagining a humanity that goes beyond the human, flirting with a mythology that breaks down the distinctions between the human, the alien and the machine. It is a form of Rehumanisation, of repairing and rehistoricising in order to take back the power of the narrative. We may also say it allows us to celebrate a Requiem for misrepresented humanity.

Between the two rooms, a wall displays "**Escritura y Poder**" (**Writing and Power**), a selection of forty-five book titles – essays, poetry and prose – by black authors from Africa and the entire diaspora, who from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 21st century have used the written word as a form of power and re-humanisation. The journey begins in 1789 with Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, and goes on to include writings by Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, Zora Neale Hurston, Anton de Kom, CLR James, Richard Wright, Paulette Nardal, Tony Morrison, Cheikh Anta Diop, Abdías do Nascimento, Angela Davis, Paul Gilroy, Mario Pinto Andrade, Achile Mbembe, and Saidiya Hartman.

The exhibition's curator, Tania Safura Adam (Maputo, Mozambique, 1979) is a researcher, as well as founder and editor of Radio Africa, a platform for critical thinking and dissemination of black arts and cultures. Her research explores black diasporas, displacements and forms of resistance and African popular music. She curated *Microhistorias de la diáspora. Experiencias encarnadas de la dispersión femenina* [Microhistories of the Diaspora. "Embodied" Experiences of Female Dispersion] (La Virreina, 2018-2019) and the *Blue Black Futures* research project (MACBA, 2021-2022). She was responsible for the programme of activities *Making Africa: Un continente de diseño contemporáneo* [Making Africa: a Continent of Contemporary Design] (CCCB, 2016). Her poems have been published in the anthology *Africa(na)s: Historias para el siglo XXI* [Africans: Stories for the 21st Century] and in *Concreta 22. Maternidad: Un sufrimiento exquisito* [Concrete 22. Motherhood: an Exquisite Form of Suffering]. She is currently directing the research project *España Negra. Viaje hacia la negritud en el espacio-tiempo* [Black Spain. A Journey to Negritude through Space and Time] (Museo Reina Sofía, MACBA, Artium, CCCB, IVAM) and the seminar on Black Iberian Studies at the Museo Reina Sofía's Programa de Estudios Propios [Internal Studies Programme]. She hosts the programme "Radio Africa" on betevé and has just published *Voces negras: Historia oral de las músicas populares africanas* [Black Voices: an Oral History of African Popular Music] (Malpaso, 2024).

Room B - Dehumanisation

It could not be otherwise. If the humanisation of the oppressed means subversion, so does their freedom; hence the need for constant control. And the more the oppressors control the oppressed, the more they transform them into apparently inanimate "things". This tendency of the oppressor consciousness to "make inanimate" everything and everyone it encounters, in its desire for possession, unquestionably corresponds to a tendency towards sadism.

Paulo Freire

With the arrival of Columbus on the shores of what is now called the Caribbean, European imperialism was inaugurated, establishing the colonisation of space and time, and a new logic of power that imposed a structure of knowledge which became hegemonic and dominant. An imperialism that subjugates bodies and minds and destroys everything that threatens or disturbs its own existence. At that time, during the Renaissance, a new concept of Man was established, whose roots were taken from Greek philosophy and which defined the nature of the human on the basis of rationality.

In the mid-16th century, the Valladolid Controversy took place, a theological and political polemic between two opposing views on the legitimacy of the conquest, the soul and the human condition of the indigenous communities of America. The debate pitted the humanist postulates of Father Ginés de Sepúlveda, an advocate of war and empire who claimed that the Indians were soulless beings, against those of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, the apostle of the Indians. The contest ended unresolved. However, in defence of the Indians, Las Casas argued in favour of importing black people to work in the conquered lands, claiming that they were enemies of Christ and disputing that blacks had souls and were as human as the natives of the Americas.

The Valladolid Controversy is identified as a turning point in the slave trade, leading to a new tragic destiny of the "negro", since transatlantic slavery brought about a profound

change in the perception of the black population. For centuries, the black subject has been the signifier of an inferior social status, a half-man or an animal, and his external biological characteristics became the object of racism and a mark of his social status.

The works presented in this room highlight how this dehumanisation has forged and nurtured an anti-black world through legal instruments, art, film, literature and popular culture for centuries and throughout the Black Atlantic.

In addition, this room includes a resource called “Archivos Negros” [Black Archives]. This encompasses the display of part of an ongoing research project entitled *España Negra: Viaje hacia la negritud en el espacio-tiempo* (Black Spain: A Journey to Negritude through Space and Time), focusing on the dehumanisation of the figure of the black person in the Iberian territory. The materials show how science, philosophy, aesthetics, law, literature and popular culture have denigrated and made the black subject invisible in the narrative of history. This is a space for reflection on our past, present and future, a multidisciplinary archive – resounding with violence – that can inspire multiple conversations.

Sybil Coovi Handemagnon
Ils/elles vous re-gardent aussi



A project that examines the history, conservation and heritage of prints and objects in European museums. A series of animated pictures based on images from the phrenological collections at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris.

Claudia Claremi
Amnesia colonial (estupor)

Amnesia colonial (estupor) [Colonial Amnesia (Stupor)] is a film constructed from sounds and images that document the Three Wise Men Parade in the city of Alcoy (Alicante), a Christmas tradition imbued with an orientalist aesthetic in which blackface is worn. The project is a sensorial, hypnotic and disturbing filmic essay on structural racism, colonial forgetfulness and whiteness and its ways of operating. It also hints at how contemporary 'forgetting' of the colonial legacy manifests itself, and how the colonial order is re-actualised and survives.



Frida Orupabo
A Litany for Survival



Frida Orupabo constructs her large-scale collages from appropriated archival material she obtains mainly from the web. Intensive research work leads her to intuitively compose unconnected black figures from cut-out images through which the artist addresses notions of race and blackness, gender construction, the degradation of black bodies in general and women in particular, violence and colonial pain. The artist limits her colour palette to black and white, bringing the notion of timelessness into the conversation, and reinforcing the relevance of the issues she addresses in her work today.

D. W. Griffith
Birth of a Nation



The Birth of a Nation, a silent film starring Lillian Gish, released in 1915, was Hollywood's first blockbuster, the longest and most profitable film ever produced and the most artistically advanced of its time.

Based on the novel *The Clansman* (1905) by Thomas Dixon, it chronicles the impact of the Civil War on two families: the Stonemans of the North and the Camerons of the South, each on a different side of the conflict.

The overt racism in the film outraged African Americans and civil rights advocates. Blacks, especially in the second half of the film, are portrayed as the root of all evil and unworthy of freedom and the right to vote. Furthermore, African-Americans are portrayed as men who always lust after white women. In contrast, the KKK appears in a heroic light as a healing force that restores order to the chaos and anarchy of Reconstruction.

Pinturas de Castas. Anonymous, 1775-1800

Caste painting, or *mestizaje* painting, was a phenomenon that existed in New Spain and the Viceroyalty of Peru in the 18th century. The paintings were intended to represent the product of the mixture of races resulting from the conquest, slavery and miscegenation between Spaniards, Indians and Africans.



De español y negra, mulata [From a Spaniard and a Black, a Mulatto]. Anonymous, 1775-1800. Oil on copper. 36 x 48 cm. Museo de América

De lobo y negra, chino ["Lobo": born from an Indian and a black. "Chino": of mixed race. In this case, the father is a "lobo", the mother is black, and the child will be of all these mixed bloods]. Anonymous, 1775-1800. Oil on copper. 36 x 48 cm. Museo de América

Room C - Re-humanisation

Being an alien is not to belong to a lower rank, but rather a form of emancipation, of re-reading history and playing with race without getting trapped in it.

Greg Tate

The subhuman living conditions that black bodies have endured for centuries run parallel to their strategies of self-defence and desire for freedom; dreaming of another world and another humanity has been a utopia and a political practice accompanied by a thinking that is replete with reflections and proposals for re-humanisation and imagining colourless futures where race is irrelevant. These are dreams of a future where indifference to difference is the norm; dreams full of emancipatory revolts backed by a long intellectual and revolutionary tradition nourished by a culture that resists exploitation and opposes the reinforcement of dehumanisation and degradation, as signs of identity, through the fabrication of subjects defined by race.

Sylvia Wynter, C. L. R. James, George Lamming and Wilson Harris draw attention to the importance of the revolutions in the plantations; of the establishment, by escaped slaves, of maroon villages and communities; of abolitionist movements; and of the struggles for civil rights and anti-colonial, anti-apartheid or pan-Africanist movements. All these phenomena created spaces of emancipation and agency, of spirituality and survival through metamorphoses that evolved over the centuries while the codes of production of anti-negritude continued to be dehumanised and manipulated gratuitously.

The exhibits in this room are based on the idea of metamorphosis as a way to reclaim and achieve rehumanisation, reducing the distance between the human, the alien and the machine. The displayed works and books, together with the sonic universe created in the room, propose a space where human beings can become “another”, leaving themselves behind in order to simultaneously be present in different worlds and modalities that allow them to survive the present. These works are framed in the realm of mythologies, black futurisms and science fiction, providing borderline cosmogonies that generate new possibilities for rethinking humanity. They reflect on other forms of existence while re-appropriating history and inviting us to re-imagine the world in order to break the codes of governance that have created our relationship with reality.

Included in this room is a “Blue Space”, a kind of trial area, a small sample of the meaning of the colour blue in the black symbolic universe, and a route to emancipation through sonic experience and writing. The symbolism of blue as a link between the imagination and the reality of black existences is transcendental. Blue takes us back to the dark waters of the Atlantic Ocean and outer space, to scenarios of dehumanisation and mythologies of liberation in science fiction and sonic science. As the iconic musician and poet Sun Ra argued: “We must return to zero to start again. And the zero – dark and absolute – is in outer space”. Blue is also associated with sound emancipation through blues and jazz, with rhythm and improvisation, with the timeless space

of the imagination where past, present and future collapse. The dark, almost black colour blue – “black and blue” – also refers to the tone of dark skin, and African-North Americans use the term “blue black” to describe bruises resulting from police violence.

With music by Alice Coltrane, Sun Ra, Nihiloxica, Drexciya and Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry, and writing by Sony Labou Tansi, Amos Tutuola, Fred Moten, Louis Chude-Sokei, Kodwo Eshun, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ishmael Reed, Octavia E. Butler, Rivers Solomon, Daveed Diggs, William Hutson and Jonathan Snipes.

In addition, on the occasion of the exhibition and as a complement, the short story *The Comet* (1920), by W.E.B. Du Bois, has been published again. *The Comet* is a tale of science fiction about the relationship between a rich white woman and a black man, the only survivors in the city after a comet crashes into New York.

The Otolith Group ***Hydra Decapita***



Hydra Decapita is a film inspired by the work of Detroit techno duo Drexciya, active between 1992 and 2002. Futuristic theories were central to their practice, most notably on their album *The Quest* (1997), which revealed Drexciya as a submerged underwater country populated by the unborn children of pregnant women who were thrown overboard during the Middle Passage of slave ships across the Atlantic.

The Otolith Group used this imagined world as a starting point to explore notions of globalisation, capitalism and climate change, with a particular focus on the relationships between finance, death, abstraction and language. The film focuses on a 1781 legal case in which a slave ship called the *Zong*, travelling

from Jamaica to Liverpool in England, was lost and the ship's captain decided to murder the 133 enslaved people on board by throwing them overboard in order to claim insurance for the loss of the cargo. When the case came to trial in 1783, it was in relation to the insurance claim and not the murder of the enslaved people.

Hydra Decapita is a way of connecting this historical atrocity to the present of financial capitalism via a few other roots. We link the 1781 atrocity to J. M. W. Turner's painting, The Slave Ship. Then we link that to John Ruskin's 1843 text from Modern Painters (Volume I), in which he talks about Turner's methodology for painting water, and he refers to this painting. So, you have this constellation of dates, and finally you have the Detroit electro group Drexciya, which from 1992 to 2002 created a series of albums that were set in this underwater kingdom called Drexciya. [In their] science fiction, the female slaves who were thrown overboard did not die but gave birth to children who could breathe underwater. We constructed a relation between these elements, [and the] nonlinear, and the present.

Kodwo Eshun, founder of The Otolith Group.

The Otolith Group is an art collective created in London in 2002 by Anjalika Sangar and Kodwo Eshun. They operate at the intersection of research, art, performance, writing and curating to explore the complexity of the political legacies and environmental conditions we face in life.

Kongo Astronauts ***Postcolonial Dilemma Track# 05***



Kongo Astronauts is an art collective founded by Michel Ekeba and Eléonore Hellio, who are based in Kinshasa. Their transmedia practice includes

photography, film, sculpture and performance, and engages with Kinshasa's alternative culture network. Kongo Astronauts' Afrofuturist perspective projects a reality that transcends both the post-colonial intricacies of its urban environment and the incipient persistence of the jungle.

Among the ruined factories of a former Unilever plantation in Lusanga (formerly Leverville), in Kwilu province, Democratic Republic of the Congo, a UFO descends to earth and crashes into a tree. The astronaut in the spaceship, assisted by a crew of ancestral spirits from the future, regains consciousness. Together, they set off through an *interzone* of cultural overlaps. This *interzone* is one of the many that have resulted from unequal politics and techno-scientific cycles of violence, producing industrial circuits that have depleted the earth's nutrients. The futuristic crew plot a speculative recovery plan, in which the astronaut, in his spacesuit – made of electronic waste that regularly arrives in the Congo from the Western world – disposes of...

[A Requiem for Humanity](#)

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