

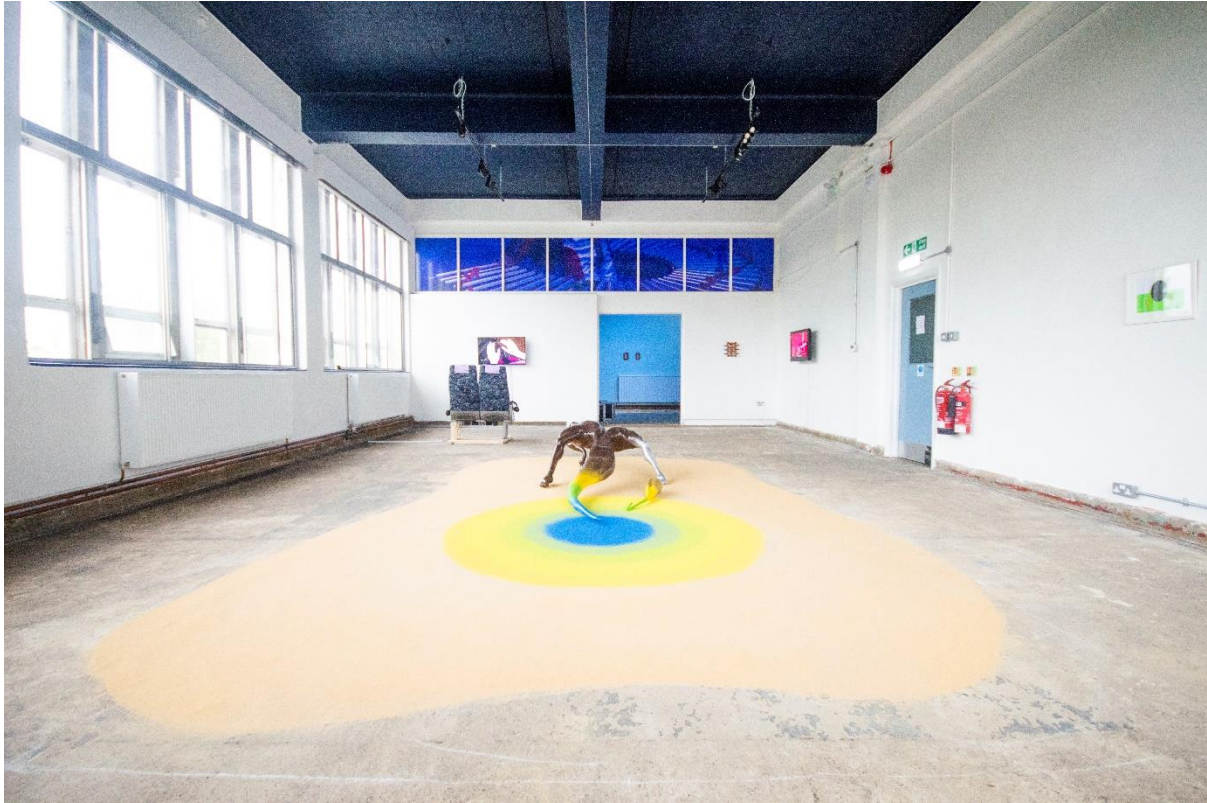
## Player Piano

Curated by Bob Bicknell-Knight

Kara Chin, Kumbirai Makumbe, Catinca Malaimare, Emily Mulenga, Petra Szemán and Rafał Zajko

5th May - 2nd June 2023

The Art Station, 48 High St, Saxmundham, United Kingdom, IP17 1AB



The Art Station is excited to present Player Piano, a group exhibition featuring new and previous works from 6 UK based artists, including Kara Chin, Kumbirai Makumbe, Catinca Malaimare, Emily Mulenga, Petra Szemán and Rafał Zajko, curated by Bob Bicknell-Knight.

Player Piano is an exhibition concerned with different forms of technology, exploring the digital and physical devices that we use on a daily basis whilst considering the tools of the recent past and how human beings will function in the future.

The title of the exhibition takes its name from the Kurt Vonnegut's first novel of the same name, published in 1952. The novel depicts a dystopia of automation partly inspired by the author's time working at General Electric, describing the negative impact technology can have on quality of life. The story takes place in a near-future society that is almost totally mechanized, eliminating the need for human laborers.

The exhibition's theme connects to the location, at The Art Station in Saxmundham, Suffolk, a building that was once a telephone exchange employing around fifty people at its height. As the hardware of technology decreased in size, and the need for people manning the exchange was surpassed by new digital technologies, large areas of the building became disused in the 1980s, and its role became unclear.

The works included in Player Piano highlight both new and old forms of technology, reconstructing and reconsidering our ongoing relationship to these important tools, questioning whether they are helpful or a hinderance.

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Kara Chin's videos, sculptures and wall-based ceramics are present throughout the exhibition space, exploring the implications of fast evolving technologies. *Alexa Séance* (2020) and *Fitbit Worship* (2020), two CGI videos by Chin poke fun at how we often ritualize and misinterpret everyday technologies, and the superstitions we sometimes attach to them. In *Fitbit Worship*, jade figurines are depicted performing YouTube yoga, like an act of worship to the screen, whilst *Alexa Séance* depicts the nuclear family featured in a viral Amazon Echo ad from 2015 performing a séance with their Alexa device.

Another film in the show by Chin, *Awakening Ceremony* (2021), is from a body of work looking into extreme factions of the Transhumanist movement in Silicon Valley; those who believe that humans will (and should) one day merge with technology in order to live forever. The animation takes place in the distant future within a fictitious Cryogenic facility, where Transhumanist bodies are frozen in limbo until the technology to revive them is invented and domestic cleaning robots have been left to run amok in the long abandoned and deserted facility. The robots have gradually developed their own belief systems based on the information left to them, mistaking the conference coffee urn as an object of worship.

*Deluxe Dave Asprey Longevity Charm* (2023) is a new sculpture by Chin, a fictional future object within the same body of work; an elaborate pendent believed to have been popular among Transhumanists, health enthusiasts and followers of the Bulletproof™ Coffee movement. It depicts the Father of Biohacking (Dave Asprey), adorned with ceremonial Bulletproof 360, Inc. paraphernalia, including kettles, supplements, butter patties, mugs, and coffee beans.

Other physical works by Chin in *Player Piano*, *EWOT* (2022) and *PEMF* (2022), depict subjects undergoing *EWOT* (Exercise With Oxygen Therapy), which involves exercising while breathing in higher levels of oxygen than what is found in ambient air, and *PEMF* (Pulsed Electromagnetic Field) therapy, which uses low-frequency electromagnetic waves to stimulate and heal cells in the body. These are two emerging approaches in the wellness industry that are currently generating a lot of excitement within transhumanist circles.

The final works by Chin within the exhibition, *Fire Tiles* (2023) and *Fire* (2023) are from a series of works that explore how movies mythologize the present and influence reality through fiction, transforming franchise disaster movies into modern-day myths. The fire tiles depict ferocious disaster landscapes that serve as premonitions for the future.

Kumbirai Makumbe's *Pre-intertopia*, a sculptural installation that's accompanied by oil stick on paper wall-based works, takes over the main gallery space. The work is Makumbe's initial step in their endeavour to encapsulate the experience and/or condition of being 'in-transit' through exploring the condition of 'inbetweenness' and 'Intertopia'; a speculative 4-dimensional space which Makumbe has located to be in the throat of wormholes where those that are 'in-transit' reside. 'Intertopia' stems from and draws from the cosmology, spiritual beliefs and ritualistic practices of the Shona people of Zimbabwe and its intersections with speculative interstellar travel, trans-ness & diasporic yearning.

Guidance and intercession are requested from ancestral spirits by an extended family through Bira ceremonies performed by the Shona people. Makumbe views these ceremonies as gates for communication, and possibly transportation to that which is beyond, that transgress the laws of physics that govern our experience of space and time. Makumbe hypothesises that the exotic matter required for traversable wormholes could be the spiritual faith, if thought of as a matter, which radiates in abundance from Bira ceremonies.

Catinca Malaimare's film *Gamma and Omega hold hands* (2023) and accompanying window vinyl *Gamma and Omega hold hands (Skylight)* (2023), serves as documentation for a performance-based work where two figures, Gamma and Omega, whilst bathed in a cool blue light, intertwine and labour alongside an industrial roller conveyor belt on movable wheels. Wearing repurposed vintage leather motorcycle racing costumes, religious stoles, and dyed mesh tops, Gamma and Omega undertake an imagined ritual, their intuitive movements promoted through a series of cues and gestures.

The machine acts as another body, each taking turns at being passive and active, connected and disconnected. Machines and devices depend on bodies to function, and in real time we watch Gamma and Omega portray the tenderness and toil of this dynamic. Using poetic, spiritual gestures, Malaimare facilitates an ephemeral, fleeting moment which acknowledges our technological co-dependence, building on the artist's ongoing observation of obsolete technologies.

Emily Mulenga's works included in *Player Piano* are the result of a ravenous media diet, blending the high polish aesthetics of MTV with the jagged polygons of early PlayStation games; mixing YouTube video conventions with lo-fi social media posts of her online contacts. When you first enter the exhibition space you encounter *RELAX!!* (2019), a digital sculpture which mirrors the bombardment of messages, notifications and thoughts experienced by all of us on a daily basis. The rotating, luminous text points to the hypnotic and frenetic nature of the stream of information offered by our devices.

Another sculpture by Mulenga included in the show, *Mother* (2020), is a clay model of the artist's original Tamagotchi. One of many relics retained from the artist's childhood owing to its sentimental value, the cyber-pet represents an early foray into digital worlds and handheld devices, as well as caring responsibilities. The dense nostalgia of the toy is expressed through its imperfect replication in clay, appearing as though it were an archaeological find.

The final work included in the show by Mulenga is *Orange Bikini* (2015), a film that takes you on a journey through a montage of scenarios, set in a digital world created using the chat metaverse IMVU. The protagonist, an avatar based on the artist, moves alone throughout the dreamlike sequence, which involves scenes of her pole dancing in a field of flowers and riding a dolphin through the clouds. The avatar is absorbed in her sensual celebratory and personal activities, never acknowledging the viewer. The work echoes the intentions of users of the early internet, in particular early cyberfeminists, to build a digital utopia.

Petra Szemán's *Openings !!!* (2022) is a densely populated film that inhabits the interstitial zones of anime credit sequences, video game loading screens and regional train journeys. Intensifying the gaps between the layers of animated imagery in an attempt to grasp the kinds of experience that may lie beyond human perceptual boundaries, the film follows the protagonist 'Yourself' as they ride regional trains through intermedial landscapes. From this uniquely conceived and drafted kinetic viewpoint, fragments of different worlds segue into view, signalling perceptual ruptures that seemingly force subjectivity outside of itself, into strange new relationships of interdependency and intoxication with the moving image.

The film is part of the artist's ongoing exploration of the radical potential of animation and fandom. *Openings !!!* rejects its own filmic boundaries, surrendering instead to the free play of a multi-planar and ultimately elusive meta-worldview. The audience is invited to watch the film whilst sitting on *Termini* (2023). Functioning both as a sculpture and seating for the film, *Termini* is made from a salvaged bus seat and features promotional material for *Openings !!!*.

Rafał Zajko's works often refer to the industrial past. He's interested in excavating these histories and reimagining them in an alternative future, incorporating and respond to ideas of togetherness, technology, environment and the body. Zajko's sculptural practice incorporates diverse materials and processes, including ceramic, ventilation systems, prosthetics, and performance as a means to examine Polish folklore, science fiction and queer technoscience; placing emphasis on the industrial materials and processes that resonate and honour his heritage.

Displayed in the staircase of The Art Station is *Siren VI* (2022), bringing with it a host of associations, from classical mythology where hybrid creatures lured sailors to their death, to the civil defence siren alerting whole communities to a potential threat. In early industry sirens were often used to delineate the rhythm of the working day. They signified the beginning of work, change of shift, work breaks and end of day.

Two more recent works by Zajko are exhibited together, *Repeat* (2023) and *Response* (2023), stemming from a recent residency at Rochester Square in Camden, London as part of a Research and Development Project Grant from Arts Council England. During this time Zajko was exploring the impact that the craft of weaving, looming and jacquard had on early computing. Zajko was raised by his working-class grandparents in Poland. They spent their life working in the "FastyFabric Factory" in Bialystok. As a child he spent hours watching them hand operate large machines that used jacquard and weaving techniques, beguiled by the strange performative communication between workers and their equipment.



Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view



Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view



Kara Chin  
Awakening Ceremony, 2021  
HD video with sound  
12 mins 20 sec

See a short excerpt of the film by going to <https://vimeo.com/590972711>



Kara Chin  
EWOT, 2022  
Glazed ceramic, grout, pigment  
14 x 21.5 cm

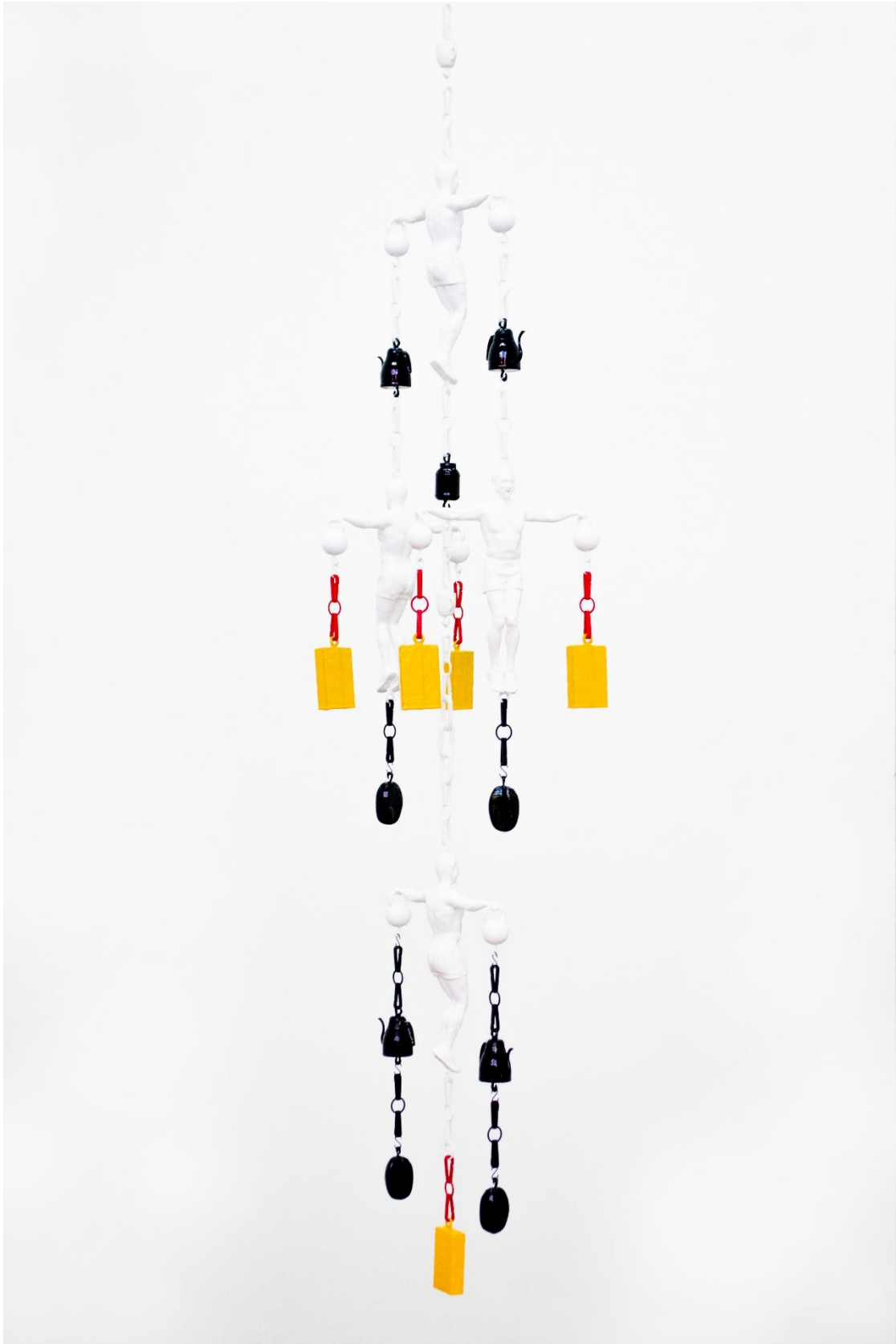




Rafał Zajko  
Repeat, 2023  
32 x 27 x 8 cm  
Ceramics



Kara Chin  
PEMF, 2022  
Glazed ceramic, grout, pigment  
16 x 23 cm



Kara Chin  
Deluxe Dave Asprey Longevity Charm, 2023  
3D printed PLA plastic, spray paint, glaze, plastic chains  
100 x 30 x 30 cm



Kara Chin  
Deluxe Dave Asprey Longevity Charm, 2023  
3D printed PLA plastic, spray paint, glaze, plastic chains  
100 x 30 x 30 cm



Emily Mulenga  
RELAX!!, 2019  
LED USB fan  
30 x 30 x 30 cm



Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view



Kara Chin  
Alexa Séance, 2020  
HD video with sound  
1 min 50 sec

Watch the film by going to <https://vimeo.com/451126323>

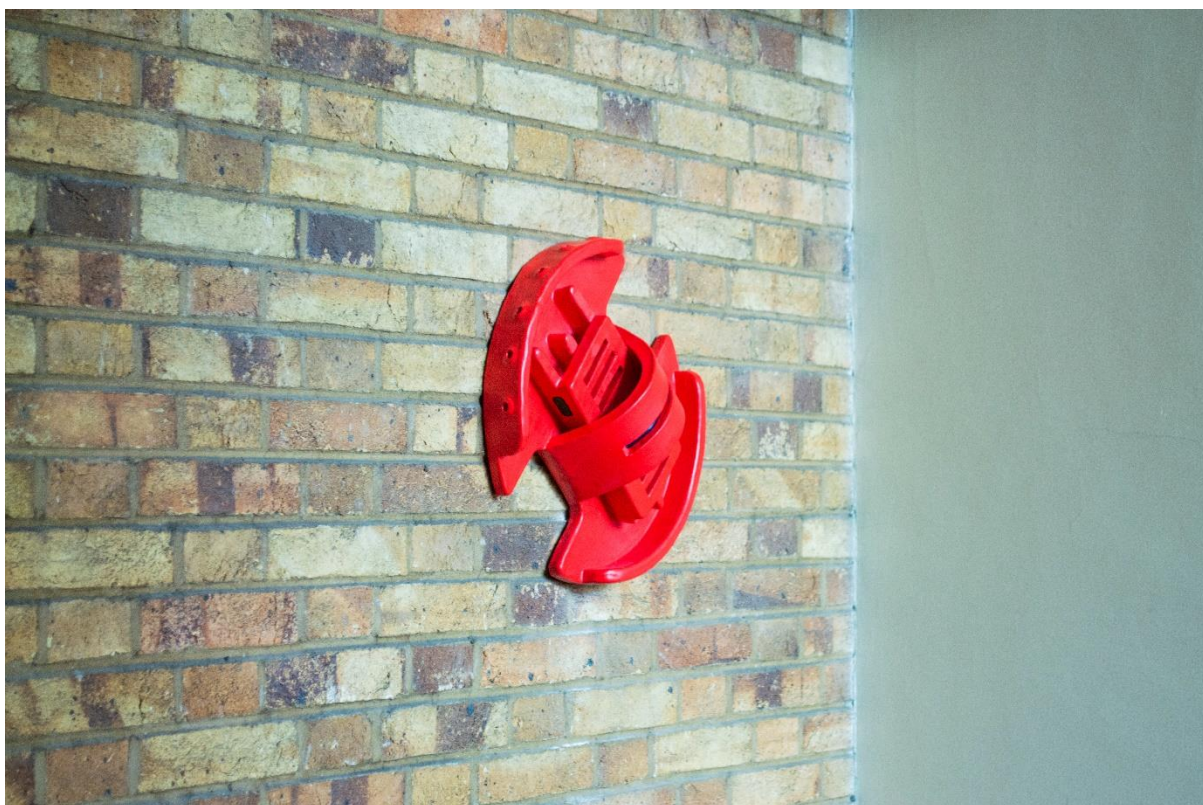


Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view





Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view



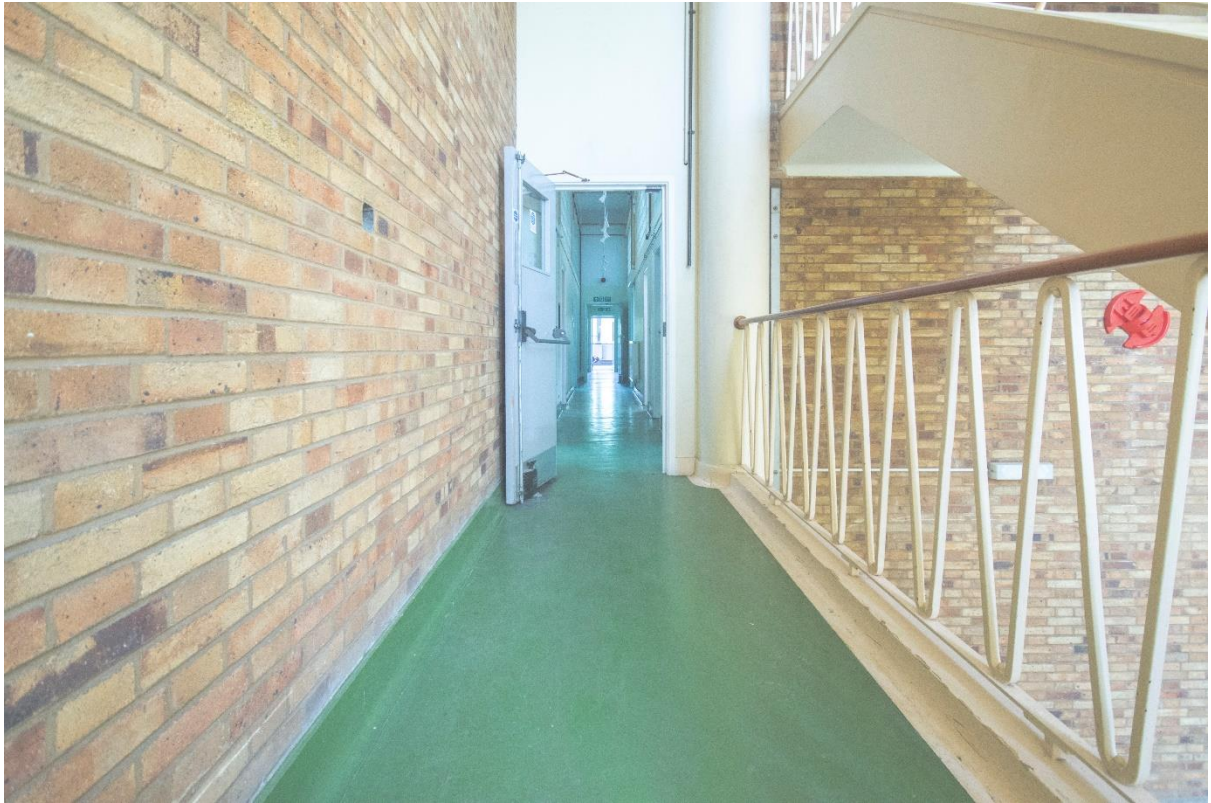
Rafał Zajko  
Siren VI (Pharynx), 2022  
Glazed ceramic, acrylic film, dyed polymer  
38 x 38 x 13 cm



Emily Mulenga  
Mother, 2020  
Air-drying clay  
9 x 2.5 x 2 cm



Emily Mulenga  
Mother, 2020  
Air-drying clay  
9 x 2.5 x 2 cm



Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view



Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view



Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view



Kumbirai Makumbe  
Untitled i, 2022  
Oil stick on paper  
21 x 29.7 cm





Kumbirai Makumbe  
Untitled ii, 2022  
Oil stick on paper  
21 x 29.7 cm



Kumbirai Makumbe  
Untitled iii, 2022  
Oil stick on paper  
21 x 29.7 cm



Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view

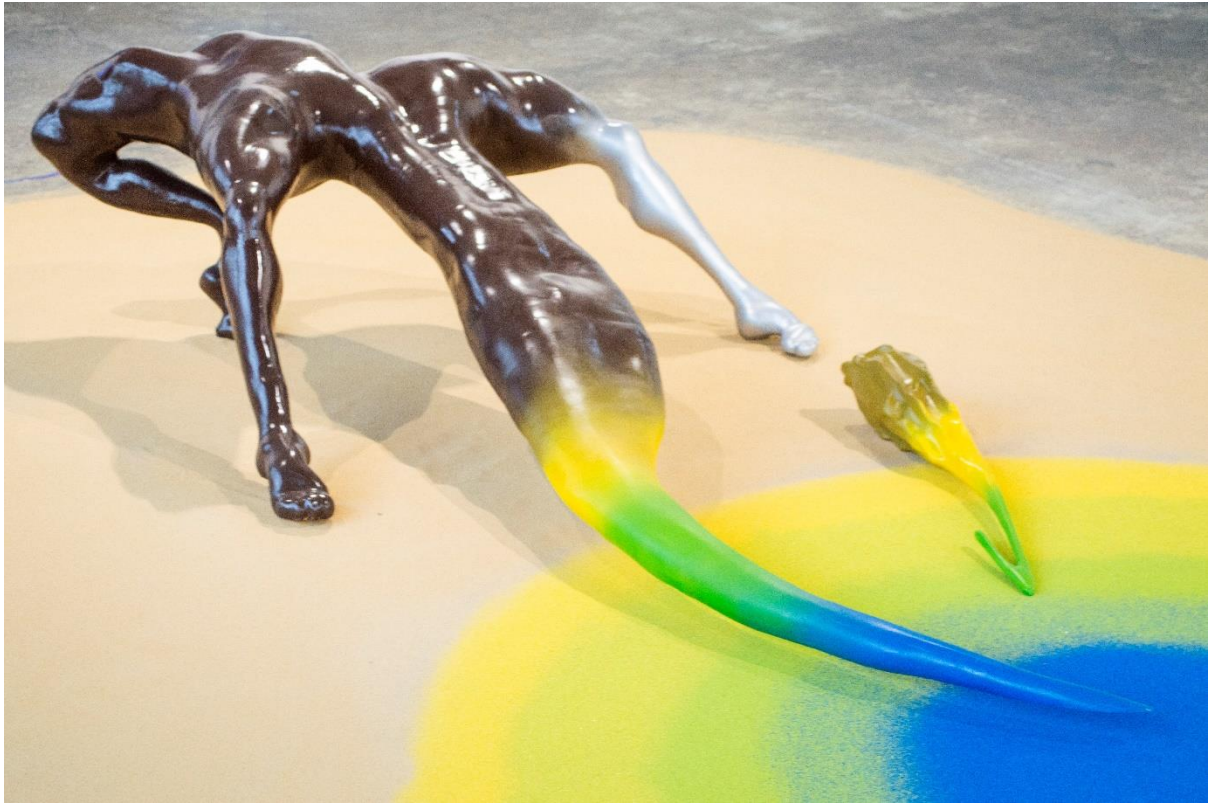


Emily Mulenga  
Orange Bikini, 2015  
Video with sound  
4 mins 47 sec

Watch the film by going to <https://www.youtube.com/live/mVCBgvcFq0E?feature=share>



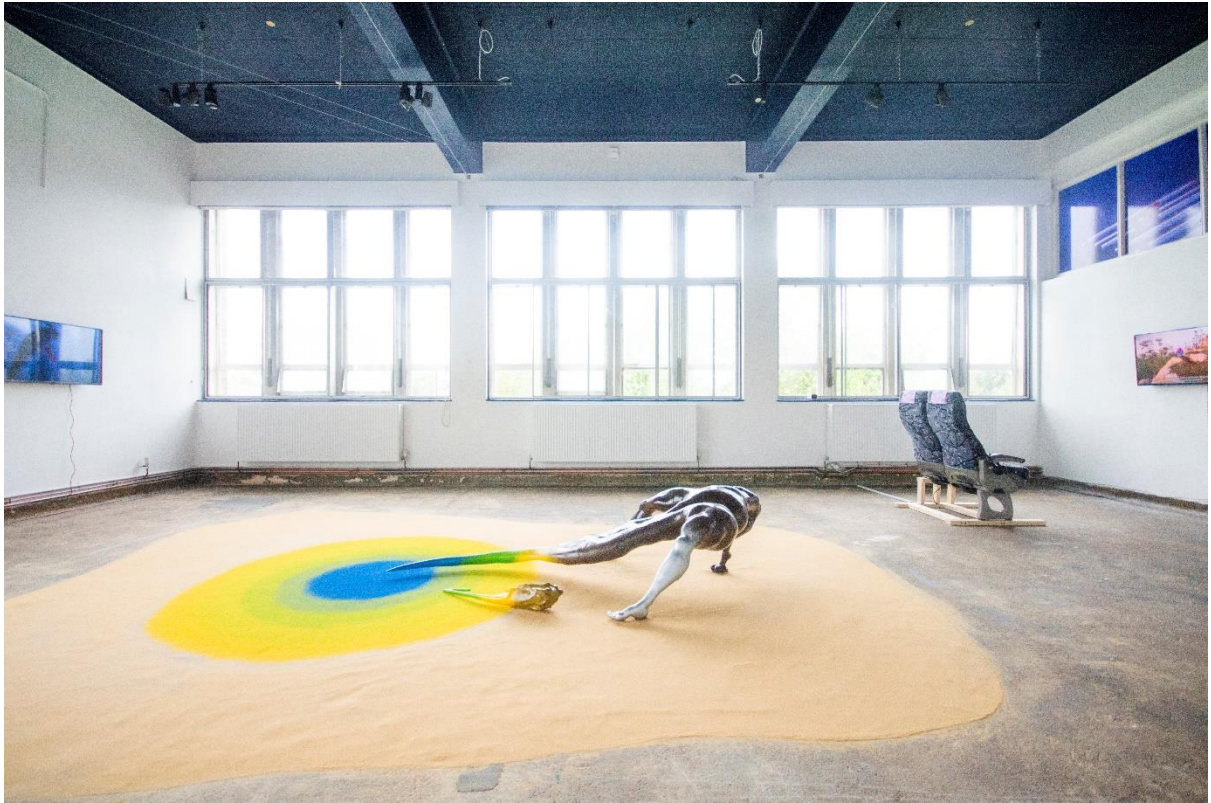
Kumbirai Makumbe  
Pre-intertopia, 2022  
3D printed PLA plastic, resin, aerosol paint, epoxy clay  
205 x 170 x 60 cm



Kumbirai Makumbe  
Pre-intertopia, 2022  
3D printed PLA plastic, resin, aerosol paint, epoxy clay  
205 x 170 x 60 cm



Kumbirai Makumbe  
Pre-intertopia, 2022  
3D printed PLA plastic, resin, aerosol paint, epoxy clay  
205 x 170 x 60 cm



Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view





Petra Szemán  
Openings !!!, 2022  
Video with sound  
18 mins 6 sec

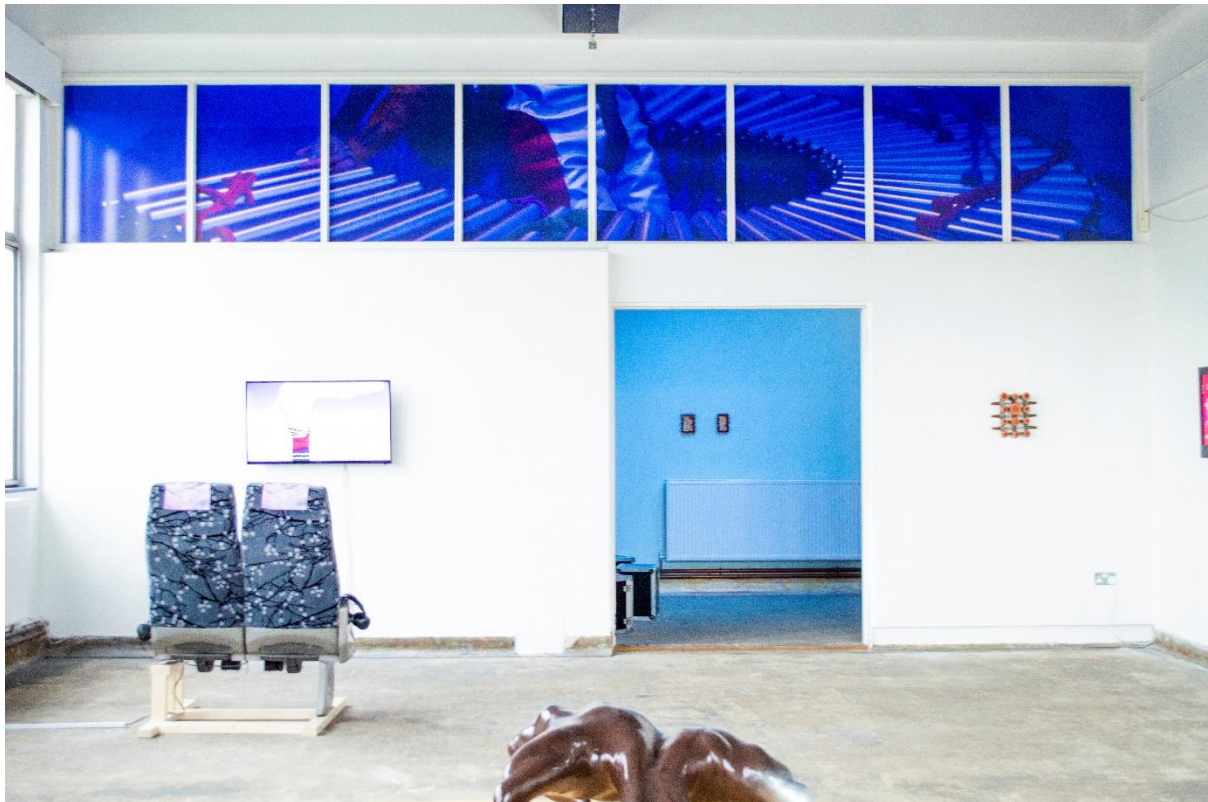
Watch the film by going to <https://vimeo.com/703883221>



Petra Szemán  
Termini, 2023  
Bus seat, timber, prints on cotton drill  
116 x 96 x 83 cm



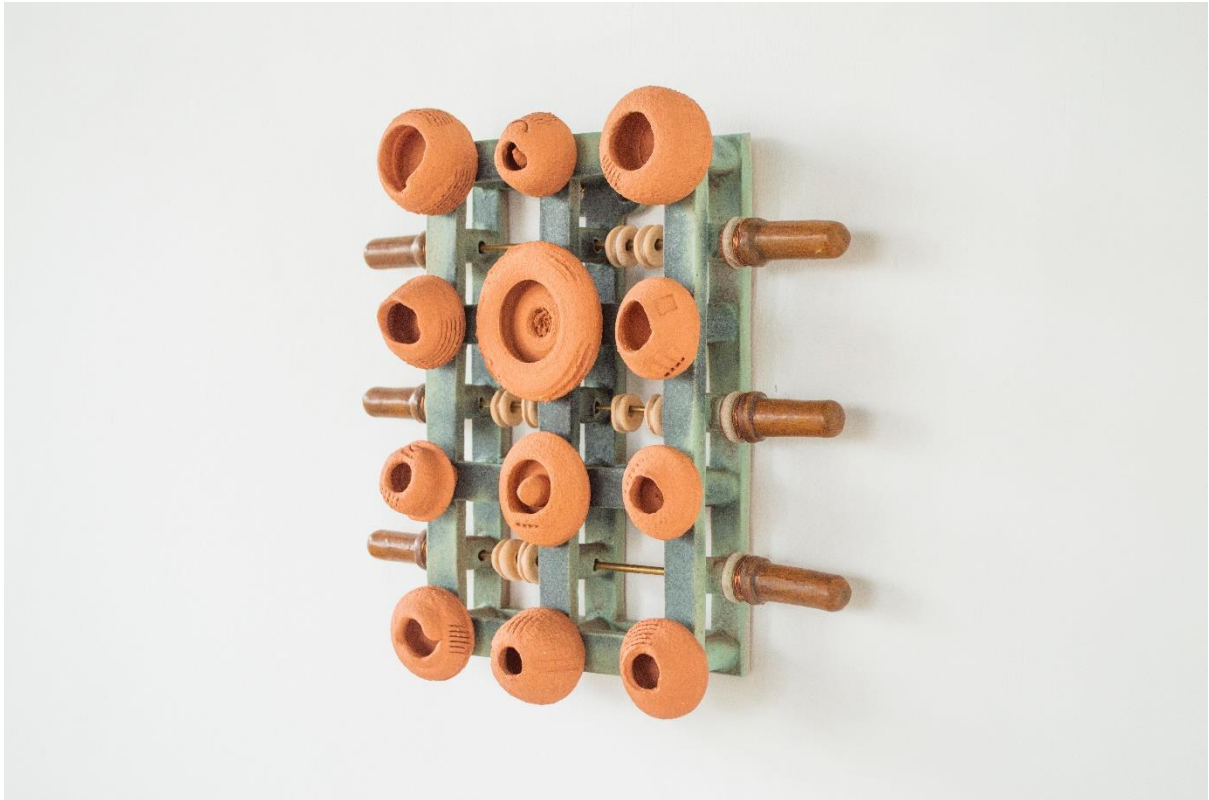
Petra Szemán  
Termini, 2023  
Bus seat, timber, prints on cotton drill  
116 x 96 x 83 cm



Catinca Malaimare  
Gamma and Omega hold hands (Skylight), 2023  
Vinyl prints  
101.5 x 660 cm



Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view



Rafał Zajko  
Response, 2023  
30 x 30 x 8 cm  
Ceramics, brass, tread



Kara Chin  
Fitbit Worship, 2020  
HD video with sound  
2 mins 24 sec

Watch the film by going to <https://vimeo.com/451108625>



Player Piano, 2023  
Installation view





Kara Chin  
Fire 4, 2023  
Glazed ceramics, grout, pigment, wood, polymer clay, varnish  
21 x 15 x 3 cm

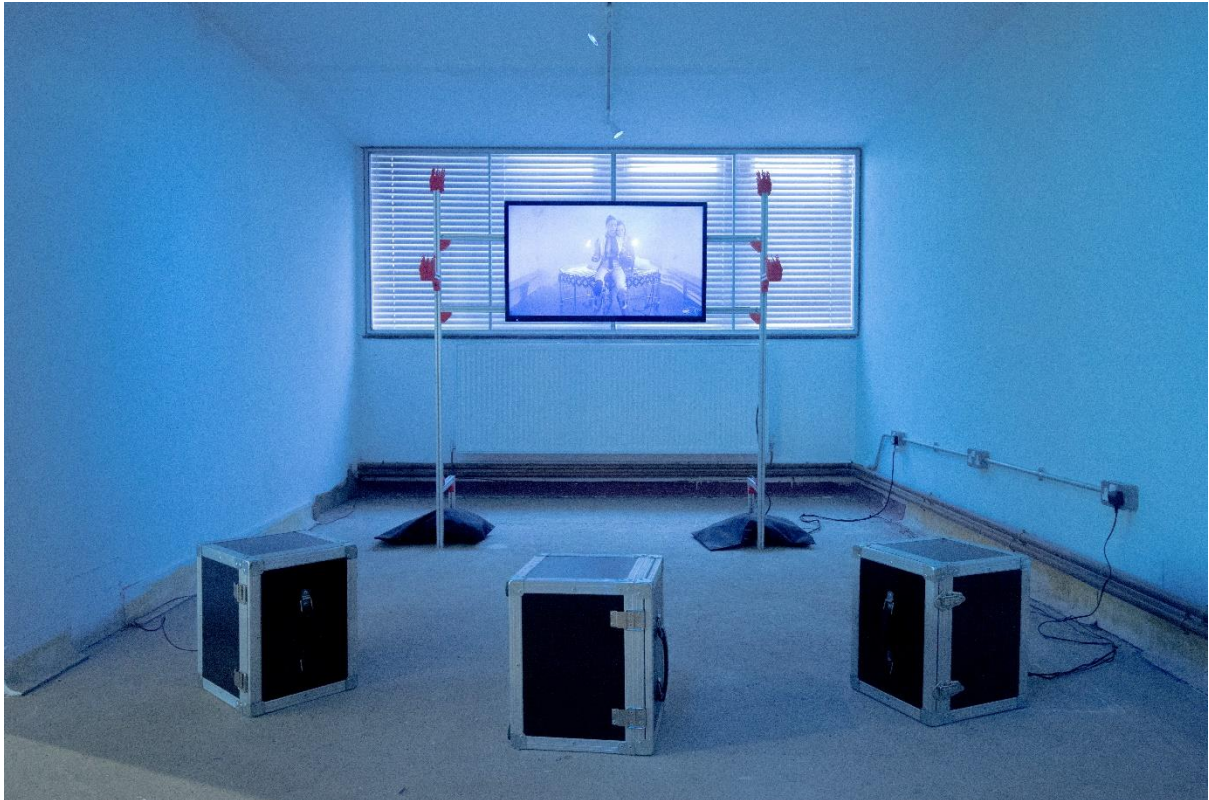


Kara Chin

Fire 5, 2023

Glazed ceramics, grout, pigment, wood, polymer clay, varnish

21.5 x 16 x 3 cm



Catinca Malaimare  
Gamma and Omega hold hands, 2023  
Video with sound  
8 mins 8 sec

Watch the film by going to <https://vimeo.com/820649618/43ed05ec5f>



Catinca Malaimare  
Gamma and Omega hold hands, 2023  
Video with sound  
8 mins 8 sec

Watch the film by going to <https://vimeo.com/820649618/43ed05ec5f>



Kara Chin  
Fire, 2023  
3D printed PLA plastic  
16 x 9.5 x 7 cm



Kara Chin  
Fire, 2023  
3D printed PLA plastic  
16 x 9.5 x 7 cm