

La Biennale di Venezia  
61<sup>st</sup> International Art Exhibition



La Biennale di Venezia

Arte  
Architettura  
Cinema  
Danza  
Musica  
Teatro  
Archivio Storico

## *In Minor Keys*

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**Part I**  
*by Koyo Kouoh*

*[Take a deep breath]*  
*[Exhale]*  
*[Drop your shoulders]*  
*[Close your eyes]*

This is an invitation to encounter these words in the immediate physical, meteorological, ambient and karmic conditions in which they meet you. To shift to a slower gear and tune in to the frequencies of the minor keys. Because, though often lost in the anxious cacophony of the present chaos raging through the world, the music continues. The songs of those producing beauty in spite of tragedy, the tunes of the fugitives recovering from the ruins, the harmonies of those repairing wounds and worlds.

*There is a reason, after all, that some people wish to colonize the moon, and others dance before it as  
an ancient friend.*  
— James Baldwin, 1972<sup>1</sup>

The minor key, in music, alludes both to the structure of a song and to its emotional effects. It is a rich idea, so rich that it quickly overflows its technical definition and spills with metaphor. It summons moods, the blues, the call-and-response, the morna, the second line, the lament, the allegory, the whisper.

The minor keys refuse orchestral bombast and goose-step military marches and come alive in the quiet tones, the lower frequencies, the hums, the consolations of poetry, all portals of improvisation to the elsewhere and the otherwise. The minor keys ask for listening that calls on the emotions and sustains them in return.

The minor keys are also the small islands, worlds amid oceans with distinct and endlessly rich ecosystems, social lives that are articulated, for better and worse, within much larger political forms and ecological stakes. Here, the evocation of the key and the island extends to an archipelago of oases: gardens, courtyards, compounds, lofts, dance floors – the other worlds that artists make, the intimate and convivial universes that refresh and sustain even in terrible times; indeed, especially in terrible times.

*Look at the creole garden, you put all species on such a little lick of land : avocados, lemons, yams,  
sugarcanes ...plus thirty or forty other species on this bit of land that doesn't go more than fifty feet  
up the side of the hill, they protect each other. In the great Circle, everything is in everything else.*  
— Édouard Glissant, 1993<sup>2</sup>

These are the cues for an exhibition; an exhibition tuned in to the minor keys; an exhibition that invites listening to the persistent signals of earth and life, connecting to soul frequencies. If, in music, the minor keys are often associated with strangeness, melancholy and sorrow, here their joy, solace, hope and transcendence manifest as well.

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<sup>1</sup> James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (New York: Dial Press, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Tout-monde*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 208 ; trans. by Eric Prieto 2010.

In the minor keys, sound and sensation are grounding, they hold the cadences, melodies and silences of resonant worlds that gather and create together a polyphonic assembly of art, convening and communing in convivial collectivity, beaming across the void of alienation and the crackle of conflict.

The 61st edition of the Biennale Arte is grounded in a deep belief in artists as the vital interpreters of the social and psychic condition and catalysts of new relations and possibilities. The Exhibition's composition is formed by artistic practices that open portals, that refresh and nourish, that prompt relation and relationship, that advance concept and form through networks and schools – understood freely and informally. The intended effect scrambles cohesion and dissonance in the manner of a free-jazz ensemble, or perhaps, at the scale of the Biennale Arte, a festival of ensembles with a common premise: that poetics liberate and people make beauty together. Through, relation, sharing and transcendence, the artists and practices that operate in this spirit, like jazz, across methods, scales, senses and forms, propose to visitors an exhibitional experience that is more sensory than didactic, renewing rather than exhausting, and fortifying for the work ahead.

Through a visual and meditative procession, the exhibition prompts all senses to interconnect and meander from one universe to the other, rendering visible the possibilities that reside in the in-between spaces and beyond the portals.

*... there is no choice but to tune in like jazzmen to these imperative mutations. The jazzman constantly meditates on the unpredictable, stands within it according to the laws of polyrhythm, and improvises breathtaking moments. We small-island Caribbeans are not ready, but we have this resource. The change will have to be so profound that we will no doubt have to add to the knowledge of jazz, the old totemisms, animisms, analogisms, and other metaphysics too summarily discarded.*

*These old-world poems are already precious scores.*

— Patrick Chamoiseau, 2023<sup>3</sup>

In this spirit, the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia intends neither a litany of commentary on world events, nor an inattention or escape from compounding and continuous intersecting crises. Rather, it proposes a radical reconnection with art's natural habitat and role in society: that is the emotional, the visual, the sensory, the affective, the subjective.

*In Minor Keys* are sequences of exhilarating journeys that address the sensate and the affective, inviting visitors to marvel, meditate, dream, revel, reflect and commune in realms where time is not corporate property nor at the mercy of relentlessly accelerated productivity.

After all, it is clear by now that the enduring time of capital and empire maligned local, Indigenous and terrestrial knowledges as chimeric, and dismissed co-constitutive artistic practices as artisanal, intended for decoration or devotional rituals.

The “civilising mission” flattens all with condescending contempt, and in the contemporary era entire societies and ecologies are regarded as collateral damage in the headstrong pursuit of growth supported by ruthlessness and greed. In refusing the spectacle of horror, the time has come

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau, 'We Caribbeans are not ready but have the resources to adapt to unavoidable climate mutations,' *Le Monde*, June 29 2023.

to listen to the minor keys, to tune in sottovoce to the whispers, to the lower frequencies; to find the oases, the islands, where the dignity of all living beings is safeguarded.

The Exhibition posits that such radical shifts are taking place – indeed, have been underway all along – in the minor keys, and the artists, poets, performers and filmmakers the Exhibition will convene are grounded in their commitments to realising them. Artists are channels to and between the minor keys and listening to, rather than speaking for them is at the core of the curatorial conceit.

*In Minor Keys* stands as a collective score composed together with artists who have built universes of imagination. Artists who work at the boundaries of form, and whose practices can be thought of as intricate melodies to be heard both collectively and on their own terms. These are artists whose practices seamlessly bleed into society. Artists who accommodate daily life as part of a logical and aesthetically consistent relation of parts. Artists who are exceedingly generous and hospitable to life.

*In our myths, in our songs, that's where the seeds are. It is not possible to constantly hone on the crisis. You have to have the love and you have to have the magic, that's also life.*

— Toni Morrison, 1977<sup>4</sup>

## **Part II**

### **by La Squadra di Koyo**

#### **Under the watch of a mango tree**

Music came before the keys, and before music came poetry. Koyo was not the sort to memorise verse to recite in an assembly, but poetry was to her the guiding light of a curatorial gesture, the raw material for minting a title, and the fodder for structuring a conceit. Like griots, soothsayers or mediums, poets see beyond eyesight and measure time beyond calendar conventions; they chiefly consider deeds, forgive failures, and believe in repair. Koyo shepherded us while crossing the globe and, after months of meeting online to discuss artists, practices and projects, she convened us in Dakar, at the base camp she established with grace and wit, namely, RAW Material Company.

We gathered in April 2025, for an intense week of work, from morning to evening. Recalling that week is like remembering a rehearsal for a musical performance: she was our conductor, and while each of us arrived with a finely-tuned instrument, it took those few days for us to tune to one another. She composed as we improvised. The intensity of our collective focus was taxing, but it was also so exhilarating that we felt the licence to dream, to fantasise, to soar.

We worked in the courtyard of RAW Material Company, under the sheltering shade of the strawroof. A prolific mango tree, its branches cambered from the weight of ripening fruit, watched. The first morning, as Koyo stepped into the courtyard, beaming with her inimitable smile, she picked up the mangoes that had fallen, washed them and bit into one gleefully. The second morning, emboldened by her delight, we imitated her. It seemed ungracious to refuse the tree's offering.

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<sup>4</sup> Toni Morrison interviewed by John Callaway, WTTW, Chicago, 1977.

After that, our discussions were often interrupted by the thudding sound of mangoes falling into the courtyard. Or perhaps: we became attentive to the fruits falling and to the tree. We noted that fruit fell when the name of an artist was spoken. This happened often enough that when a name was spoken and no fruit fell, we paused, in expectation.

This anecdote will stay with us until we each leave to meet Koyo. Like all anecdotes, it points to the ineffable: that which escapes logic, language, systems, category; the dimension beyond reason in which we forge meaning from our lived experience. Opening oneself to the ineffable is tuning one's senses to the minor keys.

That week in Dakar was the edifying week that defined the 61st International Art Exhibition. We mapped practices and projects, we identified resonances, affinities, synchronicities and conversations, we extracted motifs to structure the Exhibition and pillars on which to build it. Notions like enchantment, seeding, commoning and generative practices that invite collectivities emerged organically. On the last day of our convention, after reckoning we had accomplished the most daunting milestone, Koyo assigned missions to each of us. The Exhibition had found its manifest forms, it was no longer intention, nor abstraction. We could hear the music she so gracefully composed with us, under the generous guardianship of the mango tree.

### The exhibition

The **110 invited artists, collaborative duos, collectives and artist-led organisations** in this Exhibition hail from many origins and cultural contexts. But Koyo's interest was less in geographical statistics than in resonance, affinity and the possibilities of confluence where artists may have worked without direct acquaintance. Considering practices in Salvador, Dakar, San Juan, Beirut, Paris or Nashville, for example, she envisioned how their poetics, breadth of material experimentation and visionary ideas connected to other artists and movements in simultaneity. In this spirit, *In Minor Keys* expands upon Koyo's relational geography of encounters with artists over her lifetime.

The motifs that guide the Exhibition were not abstractly determined, but rather emulsified from our collective consideration of a reservoir of art that acts deeply on the soul and mind – one of Koyo's words for artists who worked in this way was *galactic*. The resulting compositional method has produced an exhibition that is organised not according to sections but rather in respect of undercurrent priorities. These include Shrines, which accord prominence to the practices of two lodestar artists while exceeding a retrospective impulse; processional assemblies; enchantment in the face of cynicism about what art can do; the invitation to spiritual and physical rest that is afforded in the oases, keys or small islands of artists' universes; and finally, Koyo's commitment to artist-centered institution building or Schools, in which energy and resources are directed towards a social purpose. These strands leap from practice to practice, snaking an intergenerational path to build across the sites of *In Minor Keys*.

The motifs and their designations were provisional, with an understanding that they would evolve in time, yet it wasn't long before they reached the shores of our collaborators, reverberating with reference points that Koyo had shared. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* were two such touchstones that Koyo offered, as inspiration and gift: texts that connect in their evocation of thresholds between lifeworlds and temporalities. In *Beloved*, Sethe's decision to remain at 124 Bluestone Road – a house haunted by her child who died at Sethe's hands, to spare her from a life of enslavement – sees the protagonist dare to give form to a history when "remembering seemed unwise". Or consider the image, in *One*

*Hundred Years* of a trickle of blood that crosses domestic thresholds, turns corners, and moves across the parlour to arrive at the feet of the character Úrsula, carrying details of the adjacent yet distinct worlds of her neighbours. In both novels, magical realism deepens an emotional register.

In early 2025, Koyo appointed **Wolff Architects**, in Cape Town, to realise the design and scenography for *In Minor Keys*. Following her literary cues, the team honed in on the transformative spatial power of the *threshold* as a portal – if we follow the invitation – to alternative comprehension and experiences. The intelligence of their design is its generosity to each artist's universe and to the sensorial experience that can open up between constellations of practices. In the Central Pavilion at the Giardini and in the Arsenale, thresholds are marked by means of sweeping indigo-dyed banners by NuNu Design, Dakar, that meet the rafters and graze the floor, seeking to calm the senses at the *dénouement* of one phrase and signal the opening of another.

**Sala Chini**, which leads visitors to the core of the Central Pavilion, announces the presence of the Shrines, which Koyo envisaged as tributes to two incandescent worldmakers: **Issa Samb** (1945-2017) and **Beverly Buchanan** (1940-2015). An artist, poet, playwright and co-founder of the revolutionary collective Laboratoire Agit'Art in Dakar, Samb was an enduring presence, mentor to, and inspiration for Koyo, who honoured his practice and life philosophy in international projects. Buchanan's art-making, which Koyo encountered more recently and which moved her deeply, encompassed subtle and confronting readings of locations and communities through anti-monumental approaches to land art and public sculpture, which she often placed in sites of charged memory. Both artists recognised the significance of art as generative, surpassing mere objecthood, and evading conventional preservation. There was a fugitivity to their methods, confounding expectation through their multifarious bodies of work and operating in spaces that didn't always embrace their abundant thought. Koyo described Samb's practice as "certainly comprehensible, yet at the same time it is cryptic, evanescent, and elusive of simplistic or superficial interpretative frameworks"<sup>5</sup>.

Prominent presentations of Buchanan and Samb build across a "simultaneity of forms and actions" and extend to devoted sections in this publication. The Shrines, with their associations of ecstatic visitation, testaments to love, and an absent presence (what the word *saudade* ventures close to) take on greater significance and responsibility following Koyo's passing.

The motif of procession draws on the choreographies of self-organised assemblies, moving across carnivals and similar gatherings across the Afro-Atlantic world through the practices of **Big Chief Demond Melancon**, **Nick Cave**, **Alvaro Barrington**, **Daniel Lind-Ramos** and **Ebony G. Patterson**, to seasonal or spiritual celebration, and mourning. As these ritualised gatherings constitute a body politic that eludes power, they also embody a symbolically emancipatory breach, a release from the prohibitions of injustice, a celebration of fluidity. Their occasion may range from circadian celebration to rituals formed in diasporan centres and peripheries, or in communion between the living and the ancestors. Koyo aspired to channel and transfer this energy to an exhibitional context, for instance, refusing solid walls where possible in order for the works to stand in their power. The intention was to propose a way of journeying through the Exhibition. Together with Wolff Architects, we extrapolated a processional vocabulary that imbues the artworks and their standing supports with animacy. Moving through the Exhibition, visitors are invited to join rather than gaze.

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<sup>5</sup> Koyo Kouoh, "In His Own Words: Issa Samb's Ultimately Decipherable Form," in K. Kouoh, ed., *Word! Word? Word! Issa Samb and the Undecipherable Form*, Office for Contemporary Art Norway/Raw Material Company, 2013, pp. 7-33.

The body politic of carnival also creates a temporal disjuncture from an incumbent system: a stitch in time where relations of power are momentarily subverted and scrambled. Moving away from the carnivalesque and processional, analogous impulses manifest in many practices in the Exhibition. Artists' rigorous engagements with structures, orders, institutions, histories or archives serve not only to trouble their presumed certainties but activate what they have repressed.

A number of artists direct this disruptive and vivifying impulse to canonical literary and representational histories. Thus, **Johannes Phokela** lateralises classical Christian Western art history; **Sawangwongse Yawngkhwe** challenges the canonical understanding of abstract painting; **Sammy Baloji** and **Kader Attia** each undermine the hubris of Western modernity's gaze on art usurped from colonised territories; **Raed Yassin** scrambles the traces of Andy Warhol's forays in Kuwait; **Godfried Donkor** remixes comic-book icons with historical Black heroics; **Buhlebezwe Siwani** appropriates Renaissance-era aesthetic principles to depict African women's spiritual lives; **Tammy Nguyen** offers a lush and troubling interpretation of Dante's *Paradiso*; and **Bubu de la Madeleine** and **Yoshiko Shimada** collaborate in a pasquinade of iconic historic figures from the US occupation of Japan. These moves operate across form, from painting and sculpture to collage, video and installation.

Other projects interrogate the image itself; its deployment, from histories of cinema to surveillance; and methods of staging, from museological formalism to the collective energy of online sourcing and sharing. Works by **Alan Phelan**, **Guadalupe Rosales**, **Carrie Schneider**, **Sofía Gallisá Muriente**, **Pio Abad**, and the collaborative project *arms ache avid aeon*: **Nancy Brooks Brody**, **Joy Episalla**, **Zoe Leonard**, **Carrie Yamaoka**, **fierce pussy** and **Jo-ey Tang**, perform counter-archival work, amplifying the antagonisms of dominance by stretching or unmaking techniques. Works by **Tiona Nekkia McClodden**, **Walid Raad** and **Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn**, among others, employ methods that range from transhistorical to speculative, irreverent and rigorously exacting to implicate the artist in a kind of quest that aims toward broader epistemic freedom. Staging episodes from their own family stories, **Nina Katchadourian** and **Natalia Lassalle-Morillo** (in collaboration with her mother, Gloria Morillo) defraud the objective premise of the documentary film genre to fulfil unrealised dreams and recover lost connections. **Avi Mograbi** harkens back to his Damascene and Beirut ancestors to project a radical futurity, while **Hagar Ophir's** performance and installation revives, through a séance, microhistories erased by the official record. In the Applied Arts Pavilion, developed in collaboration with the Victoria and Albert Museum, **Gala Porras-Kim** engages relationships between cultural artefacts, museums and the institutional conventions that classify and narrativise their place within history. Her investigations resonate with the exhibition's looking askant at the archive and methodologies of repair.

The focus on Schools points to key ecosystems and networks built and sustained by artists, and that carry a clear sense of both localism and transnationalism, in generative symbiosis. These are represented by **Denniston Hill** (Southern Catskills, New York, USA), **blaxTARLINES KUMASI** (Kumasi, Ghana), **Guest Artists Space (G.A.S.) Foundation** (Lagos/Ikise, Nigeria), **lugar a dudas** (Cali, Colombia), **Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute (NCAI)** (Nairobi, Kenya) and **RAW Material Company** (Dakar). What connects these homegrown institutions is an ethos to convene, share knowledge, to stay a while, to take apart, to sow seeds of intent and to build centres that proliferate without the intervention of commercial markets. As an edifying and influential grassroots "school" builder, Koyo sought that the Exhibition make space for those hybrid havens that are a font of learning and creative transmission, and have played a pivotal role in shaping artists. In developing the Exhibition, the nomenclature of Schools took hold for these organisations because, regardless of whether they provide diplomas or not, they are fundamental places of

knowledge and regeneration. Their presentations – nestled within the wider constellation of participants – are inherently collaborative and encompass the work of other artists, but the organising framework is the School's ethos and defining methods.

The plantation, enclosure, curative garden, sediment, tectonic shifts, ruinous flood, tremors and aftershocks of extraction, the insatiable fire – and the profound memory of geology that absorbs their violences – reach across the work of **Dawn DeDeaux, Nolan Oswald Dennis, Torkwase Dyson, Adebunmi Gbadebo, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Alfredo Jaar, Senzeni Marasela, Berni Searle, Kemang Wa Lehulere and Kennedy Yanko**, among others. They are conjured in **Annalee Davis's** altar to the Eskimo curlew, last seen in her native Barbados and presumed extinct; in the elements at risk of disappearance from Palestine's natural realm that **Vera Tamari** iconifies for perennity; or in **Michael Joo's** millennia-old fossils, which incarnate lives mineralised under the weight of time, whispering secret stories. In these instances, artists employ radical pedagogies, geared to liberation, to engage with seismic events that refuse to settle or go quietly – and contend with their material trace and soundings.

One such liberatory space revisited by artists in the Exhibition is the Creole garden – a site of enclosure as well as self-reliance and survivance – and its counterpart, the courtyard. These spaces, where material and imaginative freedom arises dialectically amid constraint, have been the subject of rich analytic and poetic inquiry, notably in Black and Caribbean studies. For the Martiniquan poet Monchoachi, the traditional *lakou* is considered as “the place of exchange... the place from which speech unfolds from difference and keeps it gathered and in harmony”<sup>6</sup>. Within the Exhibition, they emerge as a guiding concept through indoor and outdoor presentations, in the work of **Sabian Baumann, María Magdalena Campos-Pons and Kamaal Malak, Carolina Caycedo, Edouard Duval-Carrié, Theo Eshetu, Ayrson Heráclito, Carsten Höller, Florence Lazar, Werewere Liking and Wangechi Mutu**. From Duval-Carrié's *Vodou Parthenum* to Heráclito's *Juntó*, many gardens are nurtured in the tradition of créolité. In this spirit, the Exhibition cultivates both experiential and metaphorical gardens as places of repose and reconnection.

Gardens are as much method as they are a noun; they require vision, grit and devotion, particularly through the heartbreak of crop failure, plant devastation, and the harsh modalities of farming. Today's gardens – and their industrial forms – are immediate grounds in which to face difficult questions about our rapidly shifting climate, food security, human well being and animal welfare, and how to live and work together across our differences, a quandary that dwells, for instance, at the heart of Sandra Knecht's practice. In the Giardini, **Linda Goode Bryant's** *Still Life* sets the ground for a new vegetable farm, tended by formerly incarcerated women throughout the duration of the Exhibition. At the columned facade of the Central Pavilion, **Otobong Nkanga** has introduced plants and insect homes that, over the duration of the Exhibition, will steadily wild the inorganic structure with the herbaceous cover of shade and scent. These instantiations of the Creole garden orient us to the non-human living: the world of plants, waters, wind, animals, birds and spirits that inhabit all spaces. As **Wardha Shabbir's** paintings hail the lusciousness of flora, **Hala Schoukair's** kinetic compositions draw inspiration from their microscopic make-up, and **Uriel Orlow** tracks their errancy across continents.

Can an exhibition on the scale of the International Art Exhibition offer a place to rest your body, as well as refuse the encyclopedic impulse to compulsively see and name? In the poem *The Unknown Hour...*, Ben Okri writes: “We stayed in the garden long / Enough for celestial history / To

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<sup>6</sup> Translated from the interview *Entretien avec Monchoachi: la parole sauvage à l'assaut de l'Occident*, “Lundimatin”, no. 72, 14 September 2016.



ripen, the slow completion / of the cosmic task”<sup>7</sup>. What ripens in the decision to stay a while in the presence of an artwork, to listen to the layering of voice, or to move with the projections that dance across a painting? Reminders to rest, slow down, and breathe deeply from the gut were vital to Koyo. The introduction of rest spaces to the Exhibition enables contemplative pause. This call is internalised as well in a range of installations that invite reverie, solemnity, devotion and wonder including those by **Laurie Anderson**, **Kader Attia**, **Éric Baudelaire**, **Nicholas Hlobo**, **Dan Lie**, **Guadalupe Maravilla**, **Manuel Mathieu**, **Pauline Oliveros**, **Mohammed Z. Rahman**, **Khaled Sabsabi**, **Himali Singh Soin & David Soin Tappeser**, **Cauleen Smith** and **Tsai Ming-liang**. These projects invite slowing down through the wash of the multisensory. A song; an aroma; a low meditative hum; a repeated physical motion; a fermata, or pause, in a written score; all these become prompts to tune into granular changes within and around us, and thus, as Oliveros put it, become “changed by the listening”.

Koyo was drawn to practices that manifested these motifs and alchemised them beyond thematisation in the mode she often called enchantment. This expanse of feeling presents itself at shifting scales in the poetics of daily life. Thus, artists including **Philip Aguirre y Otegui**, **Akinbode Akinbiyi**, **Mohammed Joha**, **Eustáquio Neves**, **Rose Salane** and **Victoria-Idongesit Udondian** address the physical and metaphysical infrastructures of urban existence, while the slippage between quotidian, natural and cosmic scales manifests itself in the practice of artists including **Seyni Awa Camara**, **rana elnemr**, **Leonilda González**, **Sohrab Hura**, **Georgina Maxim**, **Rajni Perera** and **Marigold Santos**, **Léonard Pongo**, **Mmakgabo Mmapula Helen Sebidi** and **Celia Vásquez Yui**.

The patient command and volatility of the hand is significant: from **Billie Zangewa**’s hand-stitched silk collages and **Amina Saoudi Aït Khay**’s melodic wool weavings using yarn she dyes herself – often from plants grown around her house in Akouda – to **Tabita Rezaire**’s hand-dyeing of indigo cotton; **Alexa Kumiko Hatanaka**’s research and work into the resilience of East Asian papermaking traditions; **Ranti Bam**’s standing clay vessels that hold the artist’s bodily impressions; the material histories embedded through sisal rope in **Kaloki Nyamai**’s paintings; and charcoal, gold and synthetic hair in **Marcia Kure**’s sculptural installations and drawings. Corporeal knowledge beckons new cartographies, from **Kambui Olujimi**’s site-specific mural exploring the weightlessness of being and **Alice Maher** and **Rachel Fallon**’s map of an alternative Ireland seared and transcended through women’s freedom and sacrifice, to **Thania Petersen**’s exuberant textile remapping of the currents of culture and labour that shaped the Cape Colony, and **Bonnie Devine**’s revisioning of colonial maps of the Great Lakes, featuring life-giving waters beyond containment.

As visitors move through *In Minor Keys*, they encounter a number of oases that evoke, for instance, **Issa Samb**’s former courtyard (La Cour) on Rue Jules Ferry in downtown Dakar; fragments of **Marcel Duchamp**’s last studio, where he worked for twenty years on the same installation; **Werewere Liking**’s Village Ki-Yi M’Bock in Abidjan; **Yo-E Ryou**’s *Unlearning Space* on Jeju Island; or the 1990s Zurich itinerant network of rogue parties organised under the name of *Parfumerie*, as revisited by **Clarissa Herbst** and **Dominique Rust**.

At Forte Marghera, artists **Fabrice Aragno**, **Temitayo Ogunbiyi** and **Uriel Orlow** extend the proposition of *In Minor Keys* to the mainland with projects that invite wandering, play, interaction, and relaxation. On the lawns, Ogunbiyi’s undulating sculpture offers visitors a place to lie

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<sup>7</sup> Ben Okri, From “The Unknown Hour”: Brexit and Our Times, “New Statesman”, 8 December 2017 – 4 January 2018, p. 29.

down and reflect, while Orlow's botanical maps look at La Biennale through the prism of plants. Inside the historic fort building, Aragno presents a radical reinterpretation of the late Swiss director Jean Luc Godard's *The Image Book*, expanding the moving image into three dimensions. All these installations involve different media and thematics but together convoke the exhibition's atmosphere. Koyo's preoccupation is also her legacy: a deep concern and investment in artistic practices that are generative and generous, that invite collaboration and radiate back to the ways we are human together.

### Performance and Invocation

The performances of *In Minor Keys* centre the body as a site of knowledge and memory, as well as a political vessel for collective resistance and healing. The call is to breathe and listen to the music that resides in the water, air, fire, and earth. Movement, sound, forms of wandering, and other poetic gestures will counter proscenium staging, instead directly connecting with the spaces of the exhibition, its visitors, and extending into the Giardini della Biennale and Giardino delle Vergini at the Arsenale.

A procession of poets will take place in the Giardini della Biennale, inspired by Koyo's *Poetry Caravan*, a voyage she undertook with nine African poets from Dakar to Timbuktu in 1999. The performance honours her memory and opens a space for poetry and storytelling. It pays homage to the griots; those who seek the source; those who, in Koyo's words, "have carried salt and gold on the backs of the camels, in the desert, and in the canoes, in fulfillment of the human dream to spread the wings of knowledge and power. They joined those who for centuries carried the stories of the people and their lives".

En route from Dakar to Timbuktu, the poets recited and incanted to comprehend the terrain they traversed, to assuage fatigue and dispel danger. In the gardens of Venice, poets will assemble to form a chorus vested with the power of the word, the groundswell of recital and spiritual healing.

*In all beginnings there are words. Words are bridges to the other. Words are a revelation to oneself.  
Words hang in the air, move from tongues to ears au gré des vents, words penetrate the soil as  
clandestine fertiliser, their sounds, rhythms and melodies perfuming the air.*  
—Koyo Kouoh, 2000<sup>8</sup>

### Catalogue

It was important to Koyo that this volume stand not only as a robust contribution to the archive, but also as an exemplar of the collaborative, cross-disciplinary and intuitive mode of making she convened across formats and settings. The ambition was to provide some richness of insight, through both text and image, into the ideas and worklife behind what is presented. In particular, artists were invited to propose the authors of short but substantive essays on their practice, resulting in an ensemble of more than one hundred authors, with texts that vary in approach and voice but that benefit from closeness and insight.

The book's design, as well as the broader visual identity for *In Minor Keys*, has been created by **Clarissa Herbst** and **Alex Sonderegger**, following Koyo's selection of Herbst, with whom she had a long connection dating to the Zurich alternative scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their design draws on *komorebi*, the Japanese term that designates the shifting and

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<sup>8</sup> Koyo Kouoh, "A Poetical Journey to Timbuktu", *Gallery: The art magazine from Gallery Delta*, September 2000, No. 25, 17–25.

dappled effect of light filtered through leaves, to convey, for example, the relief found under the shade of a tree. Declined with subtle gradients that balance evanescence and permanence, the design offers clarity and impact while connoting natural and cosmic modes of perception.

Following this introduction, this catalogue features five Invocations. These are original literary interventions prompted by the tenor and circumstances of the Exhibition. They include an elegiac poem by **Natalie Diaz**; a meditative remembrance of Koyo by her close friend, Frieda Ekotto; a text on friendship by **Abdaljawad Omar**; and two fables by **Teju Cole** and **Ken Bugul**. These voices were dear to Koyo, and remain so to all of us.

A section on *Shrines* offers extended consideration of the work and legacy of Issa Samb and Beverly Buchanan, with respect to not only this Exhibition but also broader contemporary stakes. On Samb, we are fortunate to feature an essay by **Simon Njami** and a conversation between Samb and Koyo, both previously published but adapted for this book, and the latter newly introduced by **Adrienne Edwards**; as well as a new essay by **Elena Filipovic**, discussing Samb and Marcel Duchamp through the lens of Koyo's conceptual adjacencies. For Buchanan, we feature an essay by **Park McArthur** and **Jennifer Burris**, whose survey exhibition in 2016 sparked much of today's rich and generative work on the artist; an intervention by **Patricia Ekpo**; and a conversation with the pathbreaking writers and curators **Lucy Lippard** and **Lowery Stokes Sims**, who knew Buchanan in her early career and have insightful perspectives on her resonance today.

The following section comprises a series of essays that address key thematic, concerns and constellations of artistic practices in the Exhibition, as well as epistemic, theoretical and political issues in international exhibition-making. Each essay is contributed by a peer in the field whose perspective, experience and friendship was precious to Koyo. They are **Adrienne Edwards**, **Stefanie Hessler**, **Miguel A. López**, **Hélio Menezes**, **wanda nanibush**, **Oluremi C. Onabanjo** and **Françoise Vergès**. Taken collectively, their essays constitute a common call to ally poetic and liberatory methods.

The section on Schools opens with an essay by **Tandazani Dhlakama**, who worked closely with Koyo, discussing artist-led alternative organisations and their vital contributions to the field, which have scrambled or rendered obsolete past institutional and canonical boundaries. The six Schools in the Exhibition – which are of course a subset of a much larger and ever-evolving constellation – then provide visual and textual illustration of their methods and energies. In the case of the Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute, an essay by **Serubiri Moses** offers context on the East African works and history of the Makerere Art School in Kampala the organisation is presenting from its collection.

Finally, this volume – like the Exhibition in its totality – operates in the manner that Koyo set forth and exemplified: rigorous yet plural, intuitive yet intentional, determinedly polyvocal yet entirely hers.