

GROUND TO REMEMBER

a group exhibition with
**Nii Obodai, Mario Macilau
and Pippa Hetherington**

curated by Nisha Merit



Nii Obodai



Mario Macilau



Pippa Hetherington

CONCEPT

'In a sense, we are unique moist packages of animated soil'. Ground to Remember is a visual and material conversation between photographers Nii Obodai and Pippa Hetherington. Conceived through digital, and physical gatherings, this process-based collaboration is an evolving exploration. Ground to Remember unearths what Hole's statement suggests and proposes soil as something integral to life - from the granular material forced into geography, history, and memory to the ground as the bearer of the invisible and nurturer between life and death. Obodai uses photography and the moving image to map out natural and social landscapes and to anchor visual nuances in time and space, using them as active participants of the (historical) narrative. The black-and-white videos are suspended in time and present a nonlinear reading of history. In his explorations, he visits places, shaped by a human need to control and supply. While we are looking at a built environment he directs his camera towards the natural element and running lifeline - water. His gaze is fixed on one angle as if a still image is in motion, creating an imprint towards a memory-forming process that is in part rooted in his aphantasia, a condition that prevents him from forming images in his mind.

While Obodai solidifies the relationship between humans and the environment, Hetherington moves within the liminal spaces of memory. Through excavating her visual family archive and by highlighting the moments not captured in the images that remain, she asks 'What do we want to remember and what do we choose to forget?' Archival traces combined with her personal work shows the complex relationship of land and heritage which she manifests materially by using pigments sourced from rocks, centering the importance of the ground in her work. Further engagements result in the manipulation of materials, extending the understanding of photography, here, Hetherington combines textiles, stitchings, and chemical processes in her work. Mario Macilau specialises in long-term photography projects and series that address the complex realities of human labour and environmental conditions. Mário Macilau's long-term project Faith documents the practice of animism (the belief that everything has a soul or spirit) within traditional religions in contemporary Mozambique. It reflects local and yet diverse conceptions of God and the cosmos and how ancient Mozambican traditions are preserved.

These practices involve labour-intensive processes, working mainly with analog cameras and old mechanisms of image-making such as collodion postulate a deep engagement with the subject as well as technical precision. The conversation between artists and artworks is based on the aliveness, of nature as an active participant manifested in memory, history, trauma, and our own understanding of the world. Ground to Remember offers a visual journey along these ephemeral traces which lead through the artworks. This visual conversation presents a space of multitudes, blurring established notions and boundaries of photography. The image here is read as an animated chemical process, created by the artist's practices that defines the photograph itself as well as its visual information as alive realities, asking the viewer to think beyond the frame and towards the unseen.

TEAM

Nii Obodai (b. 1968) is based in Accra, Ghana and Maputo, Mozambique. He works with photography, audio, and text and is particularly interested in photography as a medium for recording and celebrating the unseen and the everyday in Africa. Working primarily with black and white photography over the last two decades, his work encompasses portraiture and ethereal landscapes. His deep interest in how the past is remembered stems in part from aphantasia, a condition which prevents him from forming images in his mind. In 1998, he co-established Nuku Café in Accra, which evolved into Nuku Studio and later the eponymous Nuku Photo Festival, Ghana's first photography festival.

Nii Obodai's work has been exhibited internationally, notably in the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Moesgaard Museum in Denmark, the Addis Ababa Festival in Ethiopia, the Alliance Française d'Accra in Ghana and the Bamako Encounters in Mali.

nukustudio.org/gold-matters

Pippa Hetherington (b. 1971) is a South African visual artist who has worked in lens-based work and documentary over the last two decades. Her art practice addresses post-colonial identity, fragments of separated histories, trauma, and memory. Working with photography, textiles, and rock pigment, she explores stories around loss, grief, and remembrance. By excavating collective and personal memory and working with fragmented recollection Hetherington reflects on the pieces in history storytelling that are so often buried or erased purposefully, forcefully, or conveniently. Amplifying tiny slivers of history she reveals what is deemed invisible, a metaphor of overlooked detail. Hetherington graduated with a Masters of Fine Arts with distinction from ICP-Bard, New York in 2019 and was shortlisted for the Contemporary African Photography prize in 2021 and 2022.

pippahetherington.co.za/

TEAM

Mário Macilau (b. 1984, Mozambique) is a multi-disciplinary artist most known for his photography. Macilau specialises in long-term photography projects and series that address the complex realities of human labour and environmental conditions. Macilau started his journey as a photographer in 2003 from the streets of Maputo, becoming professional when he traded his mother's cell phone for his first camera in 2007. Mário Macilau's long term project Faith documents the practice of animism (the belief that everything has a soul or spirit) within traditional religions in contemporary Mozambique. It reflects local and yet diverse conceptions of God and the cosmos and how ancient Mozambican traditions are preserved.

[instagram.com/mariomacilau/](https://www.instagram.com/mariomacilau/)

Nisha Merit (b. 1987) is an independent curator, writer, and producer between Johannesburg and Berlin. Her texts have been published in the magazine SOMETHING WE AFRICANS GOT and in the 2023 book Lost Libraries, Burnt Archives.

Her upcoming exhibition Soil Conversations will be shown in Berlin and Johannesburg and presents nine artistic positions on the politics, social and cultural granularity of soil, including performances and textual engagements. Her collaborative work as a curator is based on Process as Practice and offers an extension to the institutional system, defined in para- an entity that is neither against the institution nor fully defined by it. Applying this methodology Merit works transdisciplinary with practitioners, spaces, and practices.

[workofmerit.cargo](https://www.workofmerit.cargo)

COLLABORATORS

Lagos Photo, launched in 2010 is the first international arts festival of photography in Nigeria. In a month-long festival, events include exhibitions, workshops, artist presentations, discussions and large scale outdoor prints displayed throughout the city with the aim of reclaiming public spaces and engaging the general public with multifaceted stories of Africa. LagosPhoto aims to establish a community for contemporary photography which will unite local and international artists through images that encapsulate individual experiences and identities from across all of Africa. LagosPhoto presents and educates about photography as it is embodied in the exploration of historical and contemporary issues, the sharing of cultural practices, and the promotion of social programmes.

LagosPhoto 2022 presents, *Liberated Bodies, Charged Objects* as an interrogation of lens based media's influence in shaping, archiving and ordering memory within the corporal and how these construct community and individual identities.

lagosphotofestival.com/

The Photographic Collective, a NPO, aims to highlight the work produced by photographers and visual artists based in and from Africa, especially those who are not currently represented by a gallery. Launched in June 2020, the online platform aspires to grant visibility to emerging artists, research overlooked archives and champion new talent. While connecting different practitioners together, The Photographic Collective will offer a valuable source of information to anyone working in the field of African photography and visual culture through carefully selected works and an interactive gallery accessible to all. The platform aims to favour exchanges between lens-based artists, curators, academics, students and collectors and contribute to discussions surrounding the medium of photography in an African context.

thephotographiccollective.com/

PLAN

All participants in this project – artists, curator, institutions – are based in different countries and cities. Often nomadic, they meet in the digital world to connect and to exchange. Language and the subtle nuances of facial expressions transmitted through pixels become the ground on which ideas are formed and developed. This aspect will be an integral part of the travelling exhibition, adding more complexity as we move towards multiple physical presentations. We allow the bodies to be elusive while the works are present. This process will be captured in talks, writings, and traces.

Ground to Remember is a group show including both artists and will develop in response to the different institutions and spaces we present it in, allowing each space to add a layer.

Timeline

Lagos, Nigeria: October/November 2023 at Lagos Photo

Tamale, Ghana: Feb/March 2024

Johannesburg, South Africa: June/July 2024

New York, USA: October/November 2024