

*Arcadia Missa* ï

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ARCADIAMISSA.COM

INFO@ARCADIAMISSA.COM

35 DUKE STREET

LONDON, W1U 1LH

## The Best Exhibitions to See in London This April



Asante & Memorial Head, 2021  
Courtesy of the artist and Maximilian William, London. Photography: Deniz Guzel

**From a new group show at Rose Easton to John Edmond's intimate photographic exploration of Black masculinity at Maximilian William: here are ten of the best art shows to see in London in April and beyond**

APRIL 01, 2024

TEXT Koye Odejinmi

### **Capital by Coumba Samba at Cell Project Space: Until June 2, 2024**

Coumba Samba's enigmatic work explores the lived impact of institutions on human lives. For her first institutional show in the UK, *Capital*, the act and infrastructure of recycling is the means through which she interrogates the circulation of goods and ideologies between the West and West Africa. The exhibition features a room-sized mud enclosure, photographic prints and a sound composition by Gretchen Lawrence (Samba's long-time collaborator as part of the electronic music duo 'New York'). The remixing of field recordings from Senegal alongside royalty-free loops creates an atmospheric backdrop which echoes throughout the space.

A performance titled *FIFA* accompanied the opening of the exhibition, created in collaboration with Dakar-based dance school *École des Sables*. Informed by repetitive body motions found in football alongside the influences of Senegalese lamb wrestling and the South American game *Queimada*, dancers moved rhythmically in and out of sync with the discordant soundscape, leaving a physical record of their presence within the mud enclosure in the centre of the gallery.

# The Guardian



## One to watch

### One to watch: New York

The London based duo with a background in visual arts are making their mark with an addictive mix of cool electronica, reggaeton beats and filthy lyrics

#### Shaad D'Souza

Sat 24 Feb 2024 12:30 GMT

New York play Bethnal Green Working Men's Club, London, on 1 March

New York's name may be totally un-Googleable, but their sound is bracing and completely distinct from the rest of the experimental pop scene. The London-based duo – American Coumba Samba and Estonian Gretchen Lawrence – make unnerving electronic music that's anchored by deadpan, uncannily processed vocals. Their debut album, *No Sleep Till NY*, was one of 2022's best discoveries: a record that synthesised icy electro, body-shaking reggaeton beats and brazenly filthy lyrics into one addictive package. Its highlight, *LA*, sounds like an urbano classic covered by stereotypical US sorority girls, while the pulsating *Makeout* is 11 minutes of tense industrial dance music cut with a droll spoken-word hook: "I hate myself/ I hate myself/ You should see how much I can't stand myself/ Because I'm a lazy bitch."

Lawrence and Samba, both in their 20s, are visual artists first and foremost, and have shown at London galleries Arcadia Missa, Galerina and Emalin among others. Their live show is revealing of this pedigree. At a show supporting buzzy Matador signees Bar Italia last year, the pair performed in a lone spotlight in the middle of the crowd, singing and dancing next to an open laptop and a bottle of water. Since *No Sleep Till NY* they have released one single, *Night N Day*, which turns the hook of Ladytron's 2000s electroclash classic *Seventeen* into a throbbing, aqueous dub track. Between this and *Skinny Jeans*, from *No Sleep Till NY*, it would be easy to position Samba and Lawrence as part of the much debated "indie sleaze" revival that's supposedly going on – but New York are far smarter and more slippery than to slot easily into the zeitgeist like that.

## High Flash: Coumba Samba by Camila Palomino

17.01.2024



Coumba Samba, *Dot Pallet*, 2023, Courtesy of the Artist and Arcadia Missa, London, UK.

Coumba Samba sorts through noise. Whether pulling from the casual detritus of cities or creating readymades from trinkets and personal souvenirs, she makes her way through by foregrounding biographical and nostalgic attachments to material. Samba thinks and moves between the metropolises of London (where she is based), New York, and Dakar (where she grew up), drawing oblique relations between their varied conditions of urban life.

*Stripe blinds* (2023) is a recent work made from broken wooden window blinds that Samba found on the street. The artist evenly painted each horizontal slat in either green, gray, brown, or white, loosely alternating between these colors and slightly varying their shades. Installed at Emalin in London on a wall behind which there is no window, the blinds might first register as a bright and carefully upcycled readymade. But the colors of the slats are linked to a set of studio photographs of Samba's older sister, dating from a brief modeling stint in 2005 when she was twenty-one. This was during a moment after she had moved to New York from Dakar and right before she dedicated herself to religion and building a family. Sentimental and direct, the photographs are, to Samba, an artifact of a radical and glamorous personal transition in her sister's life, and an avenue towards assimilation in the United States. Samba abstracts the hues of the images—the white of her sister's slouched newsboy cap and heeled boots, the brown of her oversize belt, the green of her top, and the pastel yellow of her asymmetrical skirt—from their original context and represents each color along a wooden slat. Can the objects, designs, and built environments around us be refashioned to mirror memories, ambitions, and our treasured souvenirs and histories? Samba practices such transmutations.

Just as *Stripe blinds* tells a story of her sister's personal transformation along frenetic cycles of change and migration, Samba creates another familial portrait in *Rubber Door (for Box)* (2023). She covered a discarded wooden door with a sheet of rubber that she painted Safety Green, the ubiquitous color of caution and construction. The rubber is irregularly crumpled and stretched along the unhinged and defunct door, adhered to the wood with small pins. This work, we learn, is the likeness of the artist's brother. Samba associates the neon hue with him because of his experiences of incarceration and, later, working in construction after moving to the United States—both instances of being subjected to being, and needing to be, highly visible. Design is never politically neutral, and Samba reflects especially on the semiotics of color, and how color can trace or define a lived experience navigating through systems of power. *Rubber Door (for Box)* emerges from these personal associations, collapsing the intimate with the infrastructural.



Coumba Samba, *Letter Box*, 2022, Courtesy of the Artist and Arcadia Missa, London, UK.

With artist Gretchen Lawrence, Samba is also one half of girl-pop band and performance project New York. Hiding in plain sight, the band is almost impossible to google (try “New York girl band”). No Sleep TILL N.Y. (2022), their debut and self-released album, collects free sound bites from the internet and polishes them like cut stones in a tumbler. Throughout the album, the two artists interpret the neon and electro-clash hipster aesthetics of the beginning of the twenty-first century, scraping and recycling the patina of that time, then layering over it confrontational and diaristic phrases and thoughts. In “L.A. (featuring Mina),” Samba—who also wrote the lyrics for the album—opens the track with: “Am I the one you’re looking for? Restless at night, call me yours. I can be your best American girl. Whatever you ask I will do. I will do.” With its adamant and auto-tuned tone, her call accesses the edges of a desperate need for intimacy and assimilation, while also performing a self-aware and automated pre-packaged fantasy. In another song, “makeout,” Samba sings deadpan: “I’m just a lazy girl trying to get by, caught in a popular body.” New York takes the genre of pop seriously, offering playfully earnest lyrics on desire, particularly as it is conditioned under capitalism to create feelings of belonging through clothing and lust. New York’s music videos live on TikTok, where songs such as “night n day” play over slideshows of documentation from performances, reminiscent of the high flash in-between moments captured by indie sleaze photographers or a midaughts Facebook album drop. In their live shows, the two artists perform within the crowd and often face each other, commanding gravity through their intense and militant exchanges.

Samba and Lawrence also collaborate on installations and performances outside the New York moniker. *Cityscape* (2023), was an installation made of found materials, including broken and discarded goods. Carefully staged, the materials draw the silhouette of a skyline when viewed from a distance. Samba and Lawrence both moved to large, hegemonic Western cities (New York and London, respectively) from so-called peripheries (Senegal and Estonia). Mining their own experiences of migration, *Cityscape* was a metropolis rendered through the margins that considers what a modern Western city is made of. The artists’ proposition reminded me of the late artist and theorist Svetlana Boym, and her theorization of the “off-modern,” a word she developed to examine the ruins and alleyways of modernity. In “The Off-Modern Mirror,” Boym wrote about artists who approach the modern from a diagonal, through what she called “edgy geographies”: “The seemingly peripheral situation of these artists and politicians reveals the eccentricity of the center, and asynchronicity questions the progress of cultural trends and artistic movements that are supposed to succeed one another like well-behaved citizens in the express check-out line.”<sup>1</sup> Untethered from a specific place or time, the material list for the installation includes large speakers, a pool ladder, a few computer mice, damaged CD cases, a broken pair of Beats by Dre headphones, and studded and frayed denim mini shorts. Samba and Lawrence organize these objects along the logic of urban detritus, rendering it surprisingly, perhaps even accidentally, both cohesive and exploded. Reading junk like tea leaves, they reveal the eccentricity of the center—and it is shiny, obsolete, and screeching loud.



Coumba Samba, *Stripe blinds*, 2023, Courtesy of the Artist and Emalin, London, UK. Photo: Stephen James

Coumba Samba (b. 2000, New York) is an interdisciplinary artist based in London working with sculpture, installation and performance. Recent projects and performances include *This Is Money*, Drei, Cologne (2023); *World as diagram, work as dance*, Emalin, London (2023); *Ways of Living 3.0*, Arcadia Missa, London (2023); *Slow Dance (3)*, Stadtgalerie Bern (2023); Support for bar italia with New York, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2023); and *Couture*, Galerina, London (2023).

Camila Palomino is a curator, researcher, and writer based in Queens, New York. Her research is invested in aesthetic relationships between urban infrastructures, social memory, and imaging technologies. She is Curatorial Assistant at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics and the co-editor of "Retail," the current issue of *Viscose Journal*.

## Coumba Samba at DREI



This Is Money  
Coumba Samba  
Drei  
November 17 — January 13, 2024

In *This Is Money* by Senegalese-American artist Coumba Samba, curls of language fall to the floor like wood shavings and are swept away. Meaning flakes, as the artist enmeshes individual and collectively intelligible references in a series of interventions more akin to veneers on the architecture of the gallery. Playing with the major theme of this exhibition—the question of to which extent the materials we choose to be surrounded by are significant, and how—Samba has created three kinds of hybrid domestic-presentational interiors, each fed by vessels of colour, and identified by anti-imperialist, self-referential, and performative features.

The artist's preceding interest in the deconstruction and staging of raw materials is exemplified by the fully-fledged aquatic tank (*Tank*, 2023) composed atop a shallow plinth swimming in a dark hardwood prefab floor. The imposition of this life-recreating mini oasis (configured to support the delicate Penny, one of the artist's two pet turtles, in absentia) is unsettled against the proud backdrop of swirling wood grain which, like a pattern of prize animal hide, professes not to re-create life, but to directly inhibit it and glorify the spoils.

In the second room of the space, a linoleum tricolore is politely laid out for trampling. Walking over the full scope of the solemn blue, innocent white, and blood-red French stripes, however, is confounded by a full encounter with *Wall*, 2023, two wall-mounted quadrilaterals to the trompe l'oeil effect of bearing the innards of the wall, insulation and all. *Wall*, 2023 is a sculpture of a concept. How to vandalise a space while keeping it pretty. Demonstration becomes decoration as the artist's desires are thwarted by material realities.

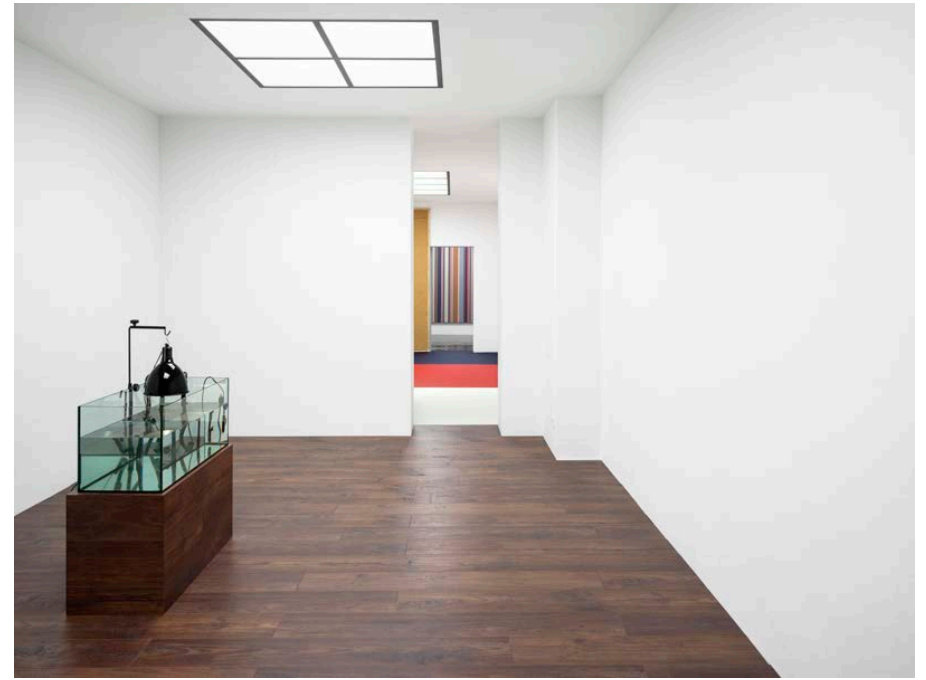
The slick black gloss on the floor of the third room is like a broad lacquered thumbnail, obediently reflecting the broad pool of light cast by the corporate in-ceiling fixture above. The dark pool eddies and billows with muted streaks of colour from the four paintings which flank the white walls (*Stripe*, 2023). The vertical colour fields—the pinks swatched from her mother's "feminine, boring, and comforting" apartment in the Bronx, and the brighter tones from the free stock image website Pixabay—mark a continuation of Samba's colour field experiments through which the artist manages to project strategies of assimilation onto domestic or otherwise functional objects removed from context. (See the earlier *Stripe Blinds*, 2023, a surreptitious "portrait" of the artist's elder sister as the individually painted slats of a reclaimed Venetian blind.)

Besides displacement, highlighting value paradoxes and the codification of memory emerge as Samba's preferred themes of engagement. "This Is Money" tells us the cash is there but doesn't let us see it for a second. — Olamiju Fajemisin

Coumba Samba was born in 2000 in Harlem, New York City. She is based in London. 2023 saw her solo exhibition *Couture* at Galerina, and contributions to *World as diagram*, work as dance at *Emalin*, *Ways of Living #3* at Arcadia Missa (all London), and *Slow Dance (3)* at Stadtgalerie, Bern. Upcoming projects include the artist's first institutional solo exhibition at Cell Project Space in London (2024). *This Is Money* marks the artist first solo exhibition in Germany.



Coumba Samba 'This Is Money' November 17, 2023 - January 13, 2024, Cologne.





# Coumba Samba

Interview by Tosia Leniarska

## Born *2000*

Coumba Samba (b. 2000, Harlem, New York City US) is an interdisciplinary artist based in London, UK. Her work is rooted in studying process, hybridity, materiality and modes of visual communication. Samba investigates the uneasy relationships between the durable and the temporary against a backdrop of uncertainty and accelerated cultural consumption. At the heart of her enquiry is an unlikely event of play, community, collective care or love-making spawning semi-randomly in the universe against the odds of it's unfriendly environment, where color, symbol, humor and naiveté are utilized as instruments for formative and conceptual upcycling.





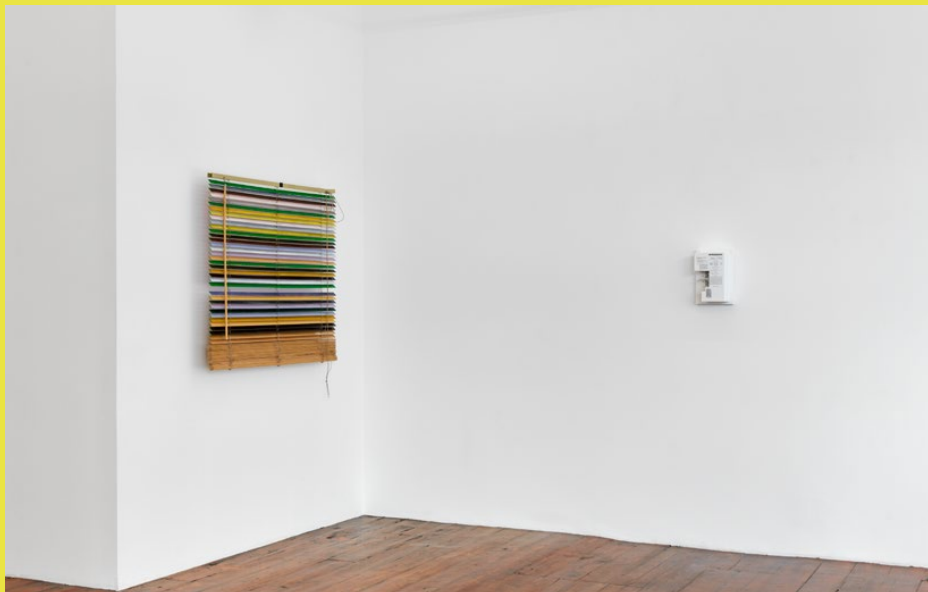
Stripe blinds, window blind, acrylic and oil paint 102 x 121.5 x 7.5 cm 40 1/8 x 47 7/8 x 3 in, 2023, World as diagram, work as dance installation view at Emalin, London, 2023. Courtesy of the artists and Emalin, London Photography: Stephen James



Stripe blinds, window blind, acrylic and oil paint 102 x 121.5 x 7.5 cm 40 1/8 x 47 7/8 x 3 in, 2023, World as diagram, work as dance installation view at Emalin, London, 2023. Courtesy of the artists and Emalin, London Photography: Stephen James

I keep remembering your pink ribbons – when we lived together, you were tying them everywhere in bows. I love seeing that kind of seep into your practice, you have this really interesting way of engaging with the question of what it means for colour to be itself. So now – not ribbons but flags?

A lot of my practice has to do with really bold colours. It kind of naturally led to asking, what do colours mean? And then, what do colours mean in flags? And then, what do flags mean? In the show I'm working on now, there are three rooms of instal-



Installation View, *World as diagram, work as dance*, Emalin, London, February 3 – March 4, 2023, Curated by Tosia Leniarska, Images courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London. Photos by Theo Christelis.

lations you walk through. The first room is a turtle tank with my turtle Penny in it. But in the second room, the floors will be covered with vinyl in stripes with colours taken from the French flag. The third room is for flag-inspired modernist paintings. The show is a study of flags – of colonialism, of colour.

These rooms, the ribbons, the *Stripe Blinds* (2023) that we had in our show – are almost like different ways of how you appropriate objects or spaces with colour, and take ownership with colour. Sealing the room with colour, as if painting is like tying a ribbon around a room. Is that how you see it?

Well, yeah, first of all, it has a lot to do with abstraction – like with *Stripe Blinds* being an abstraction of a photo of my sister – the colour being like a conduit able to tell her story. Once an image is broken down into this colour, I also ask, what does it mean to give colour so much power? Like I was saying before, in giving colour so much power, the connection to a flag seems like the most seamless link. When I was doing research for the vinyl floor room, at first it was supposed to be yellow, green and red, which is the flag of Senegal, but also

a bunch of other African countries. And I realised that I don't want it to be recognisably one flag, so I made some combination, and I was like, great, this is it. And then it turned out that it was the flag of Lithuania.

Ha! Do you know why it is that way? I haven't actually thought about this before, but it does seem that red, white, blue are for France and America and Britain and so many colonial, imperial powers. And then the yellow, green, red is, like you're saying, a lot of African countries. Do you know why that is?

I'm not sure about the red, white and blue. I think I learned about it in school, but it was something stupid, like, red for

bloodshed or whatever. And then, for Africa, it was basically that Ethiopia was the first to gain independence. So once other African countries gained independence, a lot of them took on the colours of the Ethiopian flag.

I was thinking about, in a way that you were talking about the picture of your sister as the source for the colours of *Stripe Blinds* – in general, you seem to use this kind of hybrid or collective authorship, or this idea of hybridity. Because I feel like the way that you appropriate objects or rooms with colour, in the same way you take from pictures taken by your family members, and then process them in some way and appropriate them as your artworks. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

Yeah, I recently had this situation where my sister stole my identity for credit card fraud. I have all of this legal paperwork, and recorded phone calls with credit agencies. And then I also have this flash drive, where I got all of her high school photos. I want to do a show about her. I can kind of profit off of this because of what she did to me. It is a funny dynamic, but they're still my siblings. So it feels like their story is also my story. And it so easily could've been me. And it is me.

When we were working on our show, the way that I thought about it was how it seems like through your different siblings, their different memories and objects that you have from them, you sort of rehearse these different strategies that they've taken in terms of either leaning into America or holding on to their Senegalese or Muslim identity, or falling into a system set up against them. It seems like these objects are kind of symbols of the different paths through hybridity.

Yeah. And I think also since we all share the same parents, but there's such a huge age difference between us, I can see the things that were imposed on them by our parents. I have two siblings who were born and raised in Senegal and then moved to New York. And one sibling who only lived in New York. You're having these different narratives. I also have my own narrative, but I think it's interesting when they talk to each other. So much has happened in my family that I feel like the experience can speak about a lot of other crazy fucked up



Sand (detail), 2022, *Couture* installation view at Galerina, London, 2022. Courtesy: Galerina, London

things in the world that I genuinely care about. It gives a lot of material to play with.

I was also wondering about how since you went back to Dakar, a lot of that reference of building materials came from seeing the specific types of cinder blocks and sand between buildings on the streets there. So I was wondering – how do you think about these different cities that you've lived in, so Dakar, New York, London?

I love Senegal. There is a sort of duality there. A place like New York is super hyper-capitalist, everything's fast and in your face and fake designer. Senegal, a French (and British) post-colonial country, is trying to get their footing in something but are left with all this baggage and trash. Trying to build itself up, but it feels like they aren't able to move forward. Politically – sure, but also in terms of building infrastructure, like jobs, just because so much has been taken away. In my work, being able to play with both of those has been really interesting – the sad and the funny and the beautiful of both places. And this is also what my



Rubber Door (for Box), 2023. Rubber, wood, thumbtacks, 192 x 76 x 6 cm, 75 5/8 x 29 7/8 x 2 3/8 inches.  
 Courtesy: Courtesy the artists and Drei, Cologne. Photo: Cédric Mussano

Cell Project Space show is about, where it's America being this dominating presence and having this power over African countries systematically. Exporting their trash and also exporting really weird concepts, whether it's colorism or these ideas of 'rags to riches'. Also it's almost impossible to push back on these authoritative countries, because when Kenya tried to tell the UK 'stop sending your clothes and garbage here', they were threatened with losing money and support to their government. Literally, the EU dumps millions of items of clothes and tons of plastic waste in Kenya every year. How is any country supposed to survive that.

It's a rigged game.

Yeah! Literally – the Cell Project Space project is about a soccer game. I'm doing a performance piece and after the performance, the stage set will stay there as a sculptural piece. I'm getting dancers from Senegal, from this contemporary dance school there called École des Sables. I'm collaborating with them because they're very experimental and I want to give back to my country because they are slaying it. So I'm gonna have three dancers from there. The piece is called FIFA. And it is about using all of the dramatics of a soccer game, of getting hurt, or throwing yourself on the ground so that it would be a foul or whatever. Scenes of having to still be 'a good sport', and hyper-masculinity. They like to have some really interesting body movements and language. I like using that and FIFA to talk about everything that I was talking about before, like power dynamics, import and export. Not that the dancers are each representing a country or whatever, but I think more so just what FIFA stands for. And also, the fact that every time I tell someone about Senegal, they respond with football. I don't know anything about football. It's funny that this is their biggest export. This is similar to America where a lot of the black kids that I grew up with, a lot of the boys wanted to be basketball players, even my nephew at some point. I think it's also similar to the piece about my brother where it's kind of about being assigned a future, or assigned a story.

Yeah. Also because in America, you've got the system where you have a chance of get-

ting college scholarships because of sports, that being kind of your only way in that gets funded. Hoop Dreams. The inequalities being so dominating that only if you get good enough at sports, do you get a pass against the system.

Yeah. And also the fact that it is sports and not anything else. This weird voyeurism and obsession with black bodies and culture.

Do you want to talk more about the pieces on your brother?

Yeah, I'm thinking of it as a series called Box, where it's all pieces about the same story, but using different materials and a visual language to tell it. The Rubber Door for Box (2023) is also related to this. I want it to be ongoing. Nothing is super direct but everything's more abstracted, like this neon construction yellow on black rubber. The fact that it's on a broken door, and also that it's a door found on the street. It's mostly just about the materials, drawing on my brother's experience of incarceration and building work. It's an ongoing assemblage piece with parts that will never meet.

I also want to talk to you about music and how it's related to your visual practice. I know that the connection was there in the show we did together, where you made an installation of speakers and CDs in collaboration with Gretchen Lawrence. Together you also have the music project NEW YORK, where the connection is through the idea of found sound, samples being the way that you find objects in the street. Even your lyrics are almost like snippets of diaries or conversations, no?

Yeah, for sure. I think a lot of the values behind our music is that it's all built from free samples, free loops, and the music is free. That you can be building a community and giving back to the community, in the way of not having to buy shit all the time. That everything can be recycled. Not everything has to be owned by someone. Also, it's just a nice feeling to put things out into the world.

When you perform together, these are really way more like art performances than musical performances.

Yeah, I think so. Right now we're working on a new album. I have lyrics about, like,

Cityscape by Gretchen Lawrence and Coumba Samba, found objects, dimensions variable. Installation view, World as diagram, work as dance, 03 February – 04 March 2023, Emalin, London. Photo by: Stephen James. Courtesy Emalin, London.





Cityscape by Gretchen Lawrence and Coumba Samba, found objects, dimensions variable. Installation view World as diagram, work as dance, 03 February – 04 March 2023, Emapin, London. Photo by: Stephen James. Courtesy Emapin, London.

walking around in the Bronx or something. And now with our performances, like the one at Le Bourgeois, that one was super fun because we were super militant.

Yeah, you're military but also like an air hostess.

Also kind of secretary. We have a message and I feel like through performances we can have that more political side of it be brought out.

What's the message?

The message is anarchy, fuck the government, peace and love, save the Earth, everything should be free.



Photos by Esther Bruegilles

Cool. The last thing I wanted to know is can you tell me why Penny the Turtle is taking part in your upcoming solo show?

Penny is really brave. My other turtle bit her tail off. Penny is the perfect character to tell the story of perseverance and personal survival. And she's really cute. Also, it's like, I don't know, I like the fun of someone walking into a gallery and being like, what the fuck? Turtle in here?



Prison letter from the artists' brother, marker, paper, 2009, 2023. Dimensions variable.  
Courtesy: The artists and Arcadia Missa, London





Letter Box, 2022. Wood, keys, coins, dollar bill, receipts and stickers, 48 x 28.5 x 10 cm, 18 7/8 x 11 1/4 x 4 inches. Courtesy: The artists and Arcadia Missa, London



Sand (2022), 2022. Ceramic installation view at Galerina, London, 2022. Courtesy: Galerina, London



Couture, Installation view at Galeria, London, 2022. Courtesy: Galeria, London





*Denominator* by Urs Fischer  
Special Off-Site Exhibition in  
Beverly Hills. Gagosian, 2023.



*Denominator*, 2020–22. Database, algorithms, and LED cube, 141 ¾ × 141 ¾ × 141 ¾ inches, 360 × 360 × 360 cm © Urs Fischer. Photo: Jeff McLane. Courtesy Gagosian

Urs  
Fischer

Arcadia Missa ii

ARCADIAMISSA.COM  
INFO@ARCADIAMISSA.COM

35 DUKE STREET  
LONDON, W1U 1LH