

English

# THE COSMOLOGIES OF OBJECTS

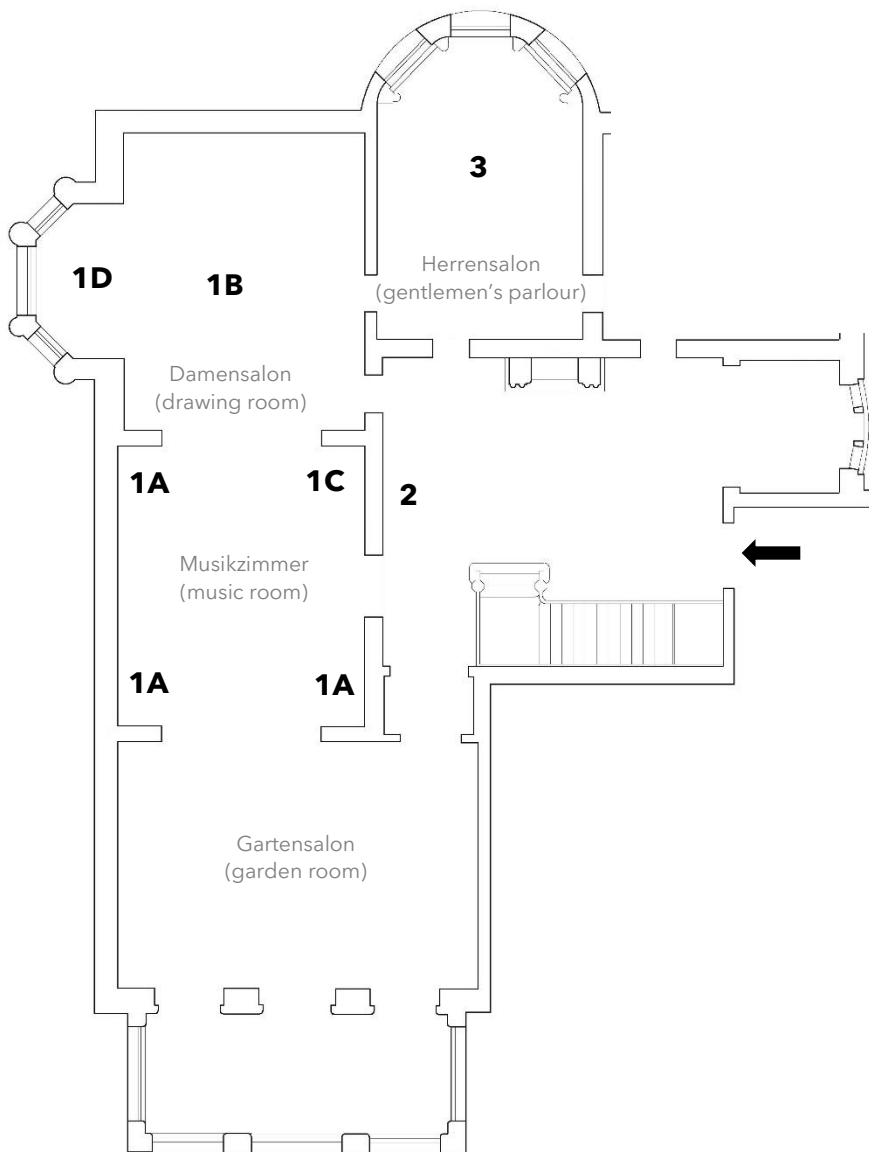
Élise Fitte-Duval, Karwitha Kirimi  
& Adam Yawe

04.07. - 04.08.2024

**KFW** STIFTUNG

**FOLKING  
OBJECTS**





## TALKING OBJECTS ARCHIVE

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„Écoute plus souvent les choses que les êtres“  
„Listen more to objects rather than people“

From the poem "Souffle" (1948) by Birago Ismael Diop

Objects are archives. Memories and stories are stored in their materiality and form, in their traces of use and function, in their sound and scent. How can we retrieve this knowledge? In what contexts of meaning were and are they situated? What cosmologies and knowledge systems are hidden within them? What can we learn from them? And how can we bring them to speak?

The exhibition *The Cosmologies of Objects* shows works by Élise Fitte-Duval, Karwitha Kirimi and Adam Yawe. The three artists are part of the TALKING OBJECTS residency programme, which has been running since 2021. A project led by a Senegalese-Kenyan-German curatorial team interested in decolonial forms of knowledge production. Fitte-Duval, Kirimi and Yawe deal with objects from the collection of the Musée Theodor Monod, Dakar. Their practices attempt to make the invisible visible and establish connections between the past and present. The photographs by Élise Fitte-Duval, based on artefacts from the Manding Kingdom (now Mali), reflect on the role of women in West African societies. Adam Yawe's 3D animations build associative bridges between West African objects and Nairobi's urban culture. Karwitha Kirimi creates a spatial soundscape focusing on loss, grief and healing.

The three artists' approach to individual objects from the Musée Theodor Monod collection testifies to poly-perspectivity and a multitude of possible approaches and interpretations. *The Cosmologies of Objects* unites a variety of aesthetics and shows ways in which objects can be made to speak to ultimately decode what is archived from within them.

The exhibition is curated by Mahret Ifeoma Kupka and Isabel Raabe. The curatorial assistant is Jeanne Mizero Nzakizabandi.

# 1 Élise Fitte-Duval

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**Series *Allégorie pour une femme puissante*** (Allegory of a powerful woman)

## 1A

***Sogolon 1***, 2023, Photography on Aludibond, 90 x 135 cm

***Sogolon 2***, 2023, Photography on Aludibond, 90 x 135 cm

***Sogolon 3***, 2023, Photography on Aludibond, 90 x 135 cm

## 1B

***Reproduction & Charme***, 2023, Photography on Aludibond, Diptych, each 150 x 150 cm

***Reproduction & Couscoussier***, 2023, Photography on Aludibond, Diptych, each 150 x 150 cm

## 1C

***Maternité***, 2023, Photography on Aludibond, 90 x 135 cm

## 1D

***Le Génie du Buffle***, 2023, Photography on Aludibond, 150 x 150 cm

During her residency at the Musée Théodore Monod in Dakar, Senegal, Élise Fitte-Duval worked with everyday artefacts from the Manding Kingdom, which at the time of the European Middle Ages extended roughly over the territory of present-day Mali. The artist is interested in the founding myth of the kingdom. She focusses on the story of the heroic mother Sogolon, the buffalo woman, as the central figure. By changing the perspective, the artist breaks with the conventional traditions of the myth, which focuses on the male hero, Soundjata, and only assigns the mother a secondary role. In the artist's narrative, Sogolon becomes an emancipated woman who plays a leading role in West African society.

Every object, with all its signs of use, tells a story. If objects are viewed as archives of history, they become witnesses to social and political structures. This also applies to the objects that Fitte-Duval

selected for her photo series, which were traditionally used by people perceived as female for their everyday work. The artist looks at the historical tools from a decidedly Black feminist perspective and links them to the female body in her photo collages. The objects become symbols of both oppression and self-empowerment - then and now. The photographs are a critique of the reduction of the female body to stereotypical duties, such as housework and reproduction, and present a strong, beautiful and powerful woman: *Une Femme puissante*.

**Élise Fitte-Duval** was born in Martinique and has lived and worked in Senegal for twenty years. Her photographic work focuses on narrative forms. She also works with dance companies and deals with themes such as everyday struggles and civic engagement. She studied photography at the École d'Arts Plastiques in Martinique and the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. She was an editorial photographer at Panapress until 2018. In 2011, she won the "Casa Africa" prize at the Rencontres Photographiques de Bamako. In 2023, she took part in the TALKING OBJECTS residency programme at the Musée Théodore Monod. Her works were exhibited at the Think Tank in Dakar in May 2023.

## 2 Adam Yawe

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**Mahindi Choma #1**, 2024, Kanga Video Collage with soundtrack  
Credits: Concepts, Video Editing and 3D Renders: Adam Yawe | 3D  
Printing: 3D, Moguls | Soapstone Incense Holder: Michael Manduku |  
Mtaru Table: Collins Muga | Soundtrack: Vfor5 | Videography: Chris Muli

As part of the TALKING OBJECTS residency programme, Adam Yawe has created a mesmerising virtual 3D object that draws on a multitude of references. Of particular importance were an incense burner by the influential Senegalese writer Mariama Ba (1929 - 1981) and a carved seat from the Ashanti Empire (1680 - 1896; today Ghana) from the collection of the Musée Théodore Monod, Dakar. In his work, Yawe combines these two West African objects with artefacts from contemporary Kenyan everyday culture.

In Yawe's video work, the three bright yellow corncobs are the first thing that catch the eye. Laid out like incense sticks, they are stuck in a concrete construction whose shape is reminiscent of both the Ashanti seat and the Kenyan water system *Inverted Block Drainage (IBD)*. The digital object evokes the smell of roasted corn, Mahindi Choma, a popular snack of colonial origin. Today omnipresent on Nairobi's streets, corn came to Kenya through transatlantic trade relations and displaced local crops. Using corn as an example, Yawe points to transcultural interdependencies and their effects.

With his work, Yawe associatively creates new references and questions when (cultural) exchange becomes appropriation and when creative re-creation is the result.

**Adam Yawe** is a 3D artist and product designer from Kenya. Growing up on the streets of Nairobi as a skateboarder and trained as a biomedical engineer, his work focuses on everyday urban material culture and objects. The question of the extent to which reinterpretations of everyday objects change our perception is central to his artistic practice. Yawe took part in the TALKING OBJECTS residency programme in 2024.

### 3 Karwitha Kirimi

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***Muuga? Grief is a portal; bring your heart, i'll bring the water,***  
2024, Sound & Video Installation

"What happens when we begin to grieve?" With this question, Karwitha Kirimi introduces a soundscape that was developed as part of the TALKING OBJECTS residency programme. Grief is at the centre of Kirimi's artistic practice and is linked to themes such as colonial and patriarchal violence, the destruction of nature and indigenous cultural production. The image of the ocean - drowning in grief - forms a recurring narrative in their work. For *The Cosmologies of Objects*, Kirimi creates a portal of mourning. The installation invites visitors to enjoy snacks and listen to the sound of the sea as well as Kirimi's poems. The smell of rosemary and the images of moving bodies of water generate an immersive realm.

Kirimi creates an experience that appeals to all the senses and in this way emphasises mourning as a physical sensation. This can be understood as both an aesthetic approach and a socio-critical reaction. After all, the demand for spaces for mourning is also of socio-political relevance. Kirimi's work thus raises critical questions about the conditions of mourning: What is mourned? How is mourning done? Who is given space to mourn?

**Karwitha Kirimi** lives in Nairobi, Kenya. As an artist and writer, Kirimi works with words, images, rituals and research. Kirimi uses performance as a medium for ritual practices. For Kirimi, cultural work means working with the pillars of our reality. Their work is inspired by ideas in which African subjects are free, beloved, whole and complex. In 2024, Karwitha Kirimi was part of the TALKING OBJECTS residency programme.

## Public Programme

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### **Guided tour**

Friday, 26.07., 18:00 – 18:45

Capacity is limited for the guided tour.

Registration via [www.kfw-stiftung.de/veranstaltungen](http://www.kfw-stiftung.de/veranstaltungen)

### **Think Tank at Villa 102 and Museum Angewandte Kunst**

04.07. & 06.07.

More information via

[www.kfw-stiftung.de/veranstaltungen/the-cosmologies-of-objects](http://www.kfw-stiftung.de/veranstaltungen/the-cosmologies-of-objects)

Guided group tours upon request:

[veranstaltungen@kfw-stiftung.de](mailto:veranstaltungen@kfw-stiftung.de)

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### **Opening hours**

Thu-Fr 13:00-19:00

Sat-Sun 12:00-18:00

Mon -Wed closed



## About the project TALKING OBJECTS

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"The Western archive is exhausted!" Felwine Sarr asserts. It needs new perspectives and questions to break up colonial patterns of thought and Eurocentric and white perspectives that are deeply rooted in the European understanding of culture and knowledge and still characterise Europe's interaction with non-European cultures today. What is needed is a new historiography, different ways of producing knowledge, an "epistemic disobedience", as the literary scholar Walter D. Mignolo calls it. This is preceded by an "un-learning" and "rethinking" of a European world view.

Against this background, the TALKING OBJECTS project is dedicated to the question: What can knowledge be today, beyond European knowledge systems? It is led by a Senegalese-Kenyan-German curatorial team: Malick Ndiaye (Dakar), Chao Tayiana Maina and Njoki Ngumi (Nairobi), Mahret Ifeoma Kupka (Frankfurt) and Isabel Raabe (Berlin). The project consists of the TALKING OBJECTS ARCHIVE, think tanks and the event, residency and exhibition series TALKING OBJECTS LAB.

The TALKING OBJECTS ARCHIVE is a digital platform for decolonial knowledge production that will be launched in December 2024. The archive, developed together with African Digital Heritage (Nairobi, Kenya), is interested in poly-perspectivity and plural knowledge systems that break with European epistemologies and schools of thought. Based on a curated selection of objects brought together from collections of European and African museums, the archive aims to fan out a polyphonic universe of knowledge. Objects are thus made to speak (TALKING OBJECTS) and serve as door openers to enable a different form of relationship. As part of the development of the digital archive, scientists, artists and the public will be invited to three think tanks, which will take place in Dakar (May 2023), Frankfurt (July 2024) and Nairobi (December 2024).

After the first Think Tank in Dakar, Senegal, at the Musée Théodor Monod, focused on feminist knowledge production, the second Think Tank in Frankfurt am Main will explore the cosmologies of objects. Workshops, roundtables and an exhibition dedicated to the topics of materiality, spirituality and gendered objects will take place at the KfW Stiftung's Villa 102 and the Museum Angewandte Kunst.

TALKING OBJECTS is funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media/BKM, the KfW Stiftung, the Federal Foreign Office, the Goethe-Institut and the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

The TALKING OBJECTS Think Tanks are developed and organised in cooperation with the KfW Stiftung.

Élise Fitte-Duval is also supported by the Collectivité Territoriale de Martinique (CTM).

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Curatorial team: Mahret Ifeoma Kupka, Isabel Raabe, Malick Ndiaye, Chao Tayiana Maina, Njoki Ngumi

Project coordinators: Celina Baljeet Basra, Jeanne Mizero Nzakizabandi, Jasmin Anna Awale

Finances: Carina Herring

Press relations: Denhart von Harling

African Digital Heritage team: Mutanu Kyany'a, Kylie Kiunguyu, Muthoni Mwangi, Wairimū Nduba Cheryl Ogada, Malkia Okech

Visualisation, technological realisation: Visual Intelligence

Digital architecture consultant: Erik Stein

Participating museums: Musée Théodore Monod (Dakar), Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde, (Leipzig), Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum (Cologne), Museum der Europäischen Kulturen (Berlin), Museum Angewandte Kunst (Frankfurt am Main)

Further information at: [www.talkingobjectslab.org](http://www.talkingobjectslab.org)

## About KfW Stiftung

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KfW Stiftung is an independent, non-profit foundation that was established in October 2012. Its activities focus on promoting cultural diversity in the fields of art and culture as well as engagement in the areas of responsible entrepreneurship, society, and ecology. In the area of art and culture, KfW Stiftung works with partner organisations to create platforms for the international contemporary arts to strengthen creativity, freedom of expression and discursive capacity and thus promote cultural diversity. Villa 102 in Frankfurt's Westend is the platform for culture and dialogue for KfW and its foundation.

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Event coordination: Marie Schaarschmidt

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All artworks with the kind support of the artists.

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Booklet: Alina Homann, Alica Sanger