

The approach

Sandra Mujinga
Spectral Keepers

3rd March – 1st May 2021

For *Spectral Keepers*, Sandra Mujinga illuminates the exhibition space with intense green lighting, immersing the viewer into an environment that feels part-nightclub, part-dimension travel dystopia. Inspired by the world-building practices found within video games, science-fiction novels and Afrofuturism, the artist invites us into an ethereal and viridescent world.

The spectre in the title *Spectral Keepers* alludes to the state of existing in different conditions at once whilst also drawing connections to (in)visibility, a consistent theme throughout Mujinga's practice. Departing from 'green screen' technology, Mujinga employs this specific shade of green as a proxy for blackness. The colour functions by being both hyper-visible and not at all visible at the same time; it is the most intense a colour can get, yet being so removed from any other colour – in particular, skin tones – it is also the opposite of colour, an absorbent. It is also camouflage: being immersed in this colour, one doesn't disappear entirely, but becomes something more like an abstraction; shadows remain and movements continue to disturb and disrupt the image plane. One stops seeing green entirely because the world itself is green, we assimilate with this augmented reality. We stand in a green world, we look through the windows of the gallery space out into a green world too. Even when we leave the space, everything still looks different.

Evoking the idea of a bodyguard or a sentinel, something or someone standing watch, the *Keepers* take the shape of four tall hooded figures. Looming in the space, their outer shell is structured in layers of green tulle fabric. This material has a special quality for Mujinga: it is protective yet breathable, transparent yet visible, empty yet voluminous. As the audience navigates around these sculptures, the different layers and formations of the tulle fabric seem to shapeshift and they appear almost as ghostly apparitions.

Evolving from the figures designed by Mujinga in previous incarnations, such as *Seasonal Pulses*, this family of sculptures will be a new addition to the ongoing development of her world-building practice. Huddled together within the gallery space, the sculptures adopt an animal strategy of safety in numbers and possess protective qualities; imagined by the artist as self-sufficient guardians, defenders and cultivators.

Perhaps used for harvesting or capturing, each figure has its own basket close at hand. The artist feels that a kind of co-dependent relationship forms between a tool and its user, that each one's needs shapes the other's, and they evolve together. The basket itself is informed by the shape of cephalopods i.e. squid, octopus and cuttlefish. These creatures are a significant inspiration for Mujinga, since they use their skin as their main form of protection, at once a barrier, they can also change colour and transparency. Furthermore, Cephalopods are adaptable to their environments, existing in both the dark and light, the warm or cold. Mujinga maintains a non-anthropocentric focus in her work. For the artist, it is no longer a choice, for our collective survival as humans, we must decentralise and deprioritise our needs and understand ourselves as equals to the animals and the aliens.

Sandra Mujinga (b. 1989, Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo) lives and works in Berlin and Oslo. Recent solo exhibitions include Swiss Institute, New York, NY (forthcoming 2021); *Midnight*, Vleeshal, Middelburg, Netherlands (2020); *SONW – Shadow of New Worlds*, Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, Norway (2019-2020); *ILYNL (It's Like You Never Left)*, Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, GA (2018); *Hoarse Globules*, UKS, Oslo, Norway (2018); *Calluses*, Tranen, Copenhagen, Denmark (2018) and *Clear as Day*, performance for the Norwegian Sculpture Biennale (2017). Group shows include: *Studio Berlin*, Bergahin, Berlin, Germany; *Who Are We Are Who*, Braunsfelder Family Collection, Cologne, Germany; *Magical Soup*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, Germany; *Witch Hunt*, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, Denmark; *Beyond the Black Atlantic*, Kunstverein Hannover, Germany; *Symbiotic Agencies*, Gallery Körnerpark, Berlin, Germany (all 2020); and *SHAPESHIFTERS*, The Approach, London (2019).

The publication *SONW – Shadow of New Worlds* was published in 2020 on the occasion of Mujinga's solo exhibitions at Vleeshal and Bergen Kunsthall