

**YOU
HAVE
NOT
YET
BEEN
DEFEATED.**

The School of Mutants
guest curated by Thomas
Abercromby

7 June - 31 August 2024
Tue - Sat / 11am - 6pm

Gallery Text

CCA: Centre for
Contemporary Arts

The School of Mutants and artist-curator Thomas Abercromby are undertaking a research project between Glasgow and Dakar, which aims to explore the creation, dissemination and diversification of knowledge. The project draws inspiration from Senegalese filmmaker and writer Ousmane Sembène's novel *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), and seeks to delve into the intertwined narratives of colonialism, extraction, labour, class struggle and freedom.

God's Bits of Wood is set against the backdrop of the 1947-48 Dakar-Niger railway strike, a pivotal labour movement in colonial West Africa. The story follows a diverse cast of characters—workers, their families, and community members—as they unite to challenge French colonial rule and demand better working and living conditions. *God's Bits of Wood* illustrates the transformative power of collective action and the resilience of oppressed communities in their fight for liberation.

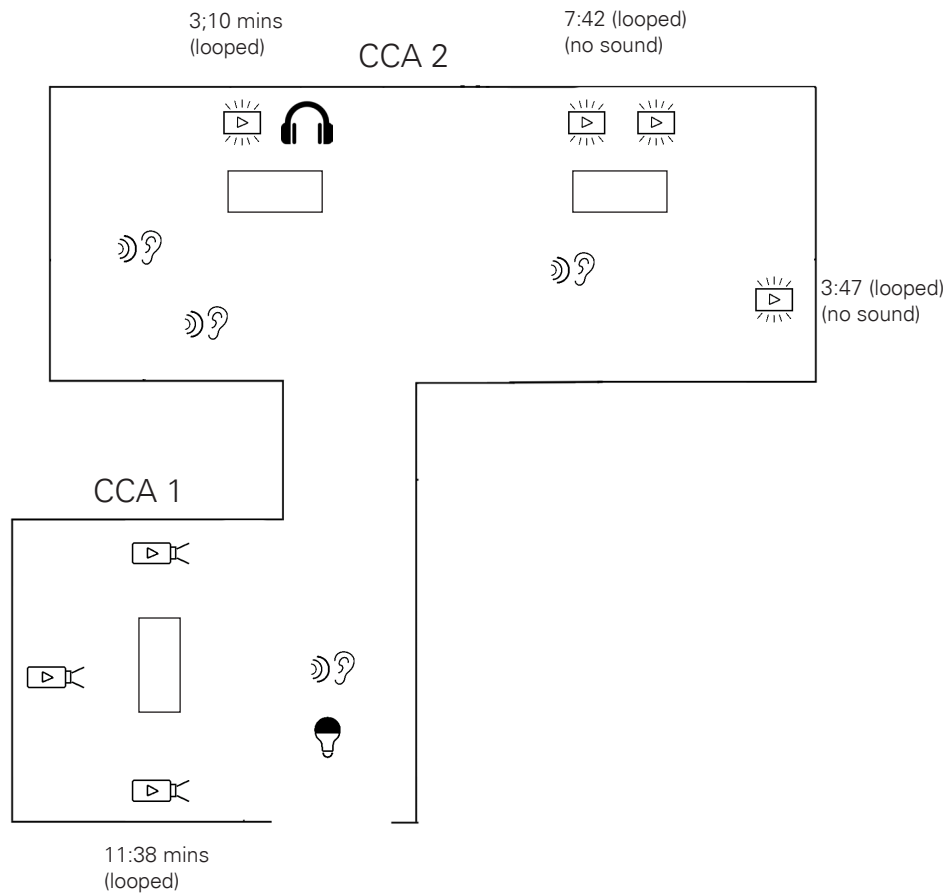
Exhibition







You Have Not Yet Been Defeated takes its title from Egyptian-British blogger, software developer, and political activist Alaa Abd El-Fattah's book of the same name. In his book, Abd El-Fattah reflects on the years of uprising against the Mubarak regime in Egypt, from 2011 to 2021, when he was sentenced for spreading "false news undermining national security." His powerful analysis spans from reflections on technology to the importance of solidarity and community, demonstrating what it means to stand for your ideas regardless of the cost. Like Sembène's work in *God's Bits of Wood*, Abd El-Fattah's writing emphasises that resistance is a communal act rather than an individual effort.

In the spirit of Sembène and El-Fattah's writings, the collective has cultivated this exhibition as a starting point for their ongoing research. Through a mix of new and previously exhibited work, it offers an introductory glimpse into their practice and current thinking on pathways toward liberation. The exhibition includes a variety of works, such as prints, textiles, installation, books, archival materials, and video, all aimed at broadening the reach and impact of these ideas.

Emphasising mutation, *You Have Not Yet Been Defeated* is designed as a co-authored space activated through a public programme, serving as generative moments for developing common ground. The exhibition will continuously evolve, adapt and welcome new elements over time, inviting audiences and collaborators to engage and contribute to the process of collective knowledge-building.

Sensory Map



-  Dim lighting
-  Projected video
-  Video screen
-  Sound out loud
-  Sound in headphones
-  Seating

CCA 1

As you enter the exhibition, you are introduced to the collective's 2020 three-channel video installation, *We Are the Ambassadors of the Blurred Mirages of Lands that Never Fully Materialised*. The three-channel installation is staged around the ideals of a real and speculative future. It begins with a radio interview between two characters discussing how to inhabit a territory in an uncertain time. Their conversation is set against a backdrop of ruins, maintained at a slow, unnerving pace, highlighting the growing indifference between the characters. As they envision their futures, doubt and conflict arise. Value versus value becomes the centre point of their conversation as one character emphasises the need for organic behaviour towards living among the ruins and forging their own path, a belief system contrasting to the despairing opinions of the other, advocating for gentrification and the role of power structures.

CCA 2

Library

Central to the exhibition is a newly commissioned mobile library and textile work, along with a series of shelves distributed throughout the space to form an archipelago of books, archival materials, and writings. These materials explore speculative approaches, methodologies, and practices of liberation, ranging from Marxism and Decoloniality to the Non-Aligned Movement. Audiences are invited to contribute to the library by either loaning books or recommending titles for purchase. The library will be on long-term loan at

CCA to facilitate research and engagement with Glasgow communities as the collective's research project unfolds.

The textile piece by the collective features a quilt stitched with powerful words from El-Fattah's book. Traditionally made by women, quilts have historically been tools of resistance, such as during the era of slavery in the United States, where the Underground Railroad Quilt Code used intricate symbols to guide enslaved individuals to freedom. This piece is also a nod to Sembène's exploration of powerful female characters and their stories of resilience, highlighting how race, gender, and class intersect in complex ways and how different forms of discrimination imposed on women interact and compound over time.

Video works

Throughout the exhibition, several window video works serve as portals into the complex narratives of colonialism and its enduring impacts. They explore ideas of otherness, adaptation and resilience, highlighting how societies and collective memories continuously mutate in response to ongoing struggles for justice and autonomy.

The work towards the left of the gallery is written and interpreted by artist Cromix Onana Djenda Christo, explores extraction and political corruption in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Sung in Tshiluba, the language of the heavily exploited Kasai region, and set against a colonial-era train station, the piece highlights the brutal history of Belgian colonisation and its ongoing impact. The railroad, built to extract Congo's rich mineral resources, symbolises this exploitation, with these resources remaining crucial for the production of Western technologies today.

The work encompassing two screens follows poet Thierno Seydou Sall through Senegal, the setting of Sembène *God's Bits of Wood*. The work juxtaposes the story of the 1947-48 railroadworkersstrike in Sembène's writing with contemporary imagery of the decayed remnants of the Dakar-Bamako train line.

The work on the right of the gallery is a silent video work capturing the view from Edouard Glissant's house in Martinique. It is where the Caribbean poet-philosopher wrote his essay *A New Region of the World - Esthetic I*, which reflects on aesthetic hegemony and imperialism. This rock and its view are part of Glissant's "archipelagic thinking," which emphasises an ex-centric perception of beauty.

Sound works

You Have Not Yet Been Defeated includes a series of sound works:

Inspired by critical texts, the first work explores the roles of libraries, archives, pedagogy, and universities, with a particular focus on the concept of epistemic justice. It also delves into the process of unlearning, of letting go of outdated or harmful knowledge, beliefs, or behaviours to create space for new ways of being and seeing the world.

The second work is based on a text created by the collective after a video interview with Caribbean writer Patrick Chamoiseau, a close friend of Édouard Glissant. The text, read by Haitian filmmaker Michelangelo Quay, draws on Glissant's concept of *Batoutos*, an invisible people free from historical and geographical constraints. These figures depict the essence of Relation, representing the unseen support

and interconnectedness among people facing struggles.

The third work has been specifically produced for *You Have Not Yet Been Defeated*. Incorporating background voices from West African public resources such as radio broadcasts and chants, the work centres around the poem *Not Just Passing* by Palestinian writer and poet Hiba Abu Nada. It also includes a voiceover inspired by José Rizal's *The Social Cancer*, a novel that exposes social injustices in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial era, with the book ultimately calling for national awakening. While this work highlights the past and present violent realities of the colonial project, it also speaks to the power of love, hope, and resilience in the face of adversity.

Hiba Abu Nada was murdered in her home in the Gaza Strip by an Israeli airstrike on October 20, 2023. She was 32.

Prints

This series of prints depicts book covers and film posters of works by post-colonial African authors and filmmakers such as Ousmane Sembène, Sarah Maldoror, Souleymane Cissé, and Abderrahmane Sissako, translated into Slavic languages and spread across the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. They reference seminal works by West African anti-colonial intellectuals who participated in international left-wing struggles in the 20th century and studied in Soviet cinema schools. Sembène famously said, "Europe is not my centre. Why be a sunflower and turn towards the sun? I am my own sun."

Given the themes of this exhibition and global movements to stand in solidarity with those being oppressed, *You Have Not Yet Been Defeated* serves as a testament to the power of knowledge formation and dissemination in the fight for liberation. In the final chapter of Alaa's book, *Palestine on My Mind*, he draws parallels between his own struggles and those of Palestinians, expressing a shared destiny and resilience.

*"I'm an Arab and Palestine's always on my mind. And, in my defence, I'll say that I refused to be humiliated in my country, and I never lowered my banners, and it should count that I stood in the face of my oppressors: an orphan, naked and barefoot, and my solace is that the tragedy I'm living is but my share of yours. I call out to you: you are always on my mind."*¹

In that energy, we say Palestine is forever on our minds, free Palestine.

1. These words are Alaa's (<https://www.madamasr.com/en/2021/09/16/opinion/u/palestine-on-my-mind>), as well as re-arrangement of lines from Tawfiq Ziad's "Unadikum" (I call out to you).

Biographies

The School of Mutants (Boris Raux, Hamedine Kane, Lou Mo, Stéphane Verlet Bottéro, Valérie Osouf and Diane Cescutti) is a nomadic collaborative platform for art and research, initiated in Dakar, Senegal, in 2018. It develops multidisciplinary inquiries on the role of universities and educational infrastructures in the process of forming collective national identities in post-independent Senegal and West Africa. Taking the form of installations, fieldwork, films, archive research, publications, public assemblies and collaborative learning, the project aspires to mobilise spaces for the production, transmission and pluralisation of knowledge in a non-hierarchical way. Engaging with sociocultural, ecological and aesthetic mutations of the real, the artistic process reflects on African futurism, anti-imperialist ecologies, and the legacy of Afro-Asianism, Non-Alignment and southern solidarities.

Thomas Abercromby is an artist and independent curator based between Glasgow and Oslo. His work spans various mediums, including films, sculptures, installations, and pedagogical programming. Central to both his studio and curatorial practice is the exploration of how micro-utopias can be created, spotlighting underrepresented histories and contemporary narratives that challenge and critique prevailing power structures within Western society.

With thanks to Kaya Fraser, Mark Readhead, Michel Ange Quay, Patrick Chamoiseau, Moïse Togo, Thierno Seydou Sall.

Glossary

Epistemic justice: The concept of ensuring fair recognition and inclusion of diverse perspectives in knowledge creation and dissemination. It addresses issues of bias and inequality in who gets to produce and share knowledge.

Gentrification: The process by which urban neighbourhoods are transformed through the influx of more affluent residents and businesses, often displacing lower-income residents and altering the community's character.

Archipelagic thinking: A concept developed by Édouard Glissant, focusing on the idea that islands (and by extension, cultures) are interconnected and mutually influencing, promoting a view of the world that values diversity and relational exchanges.

Marxism: A social, political, and economic theory developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, advocating for a classless society through the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of socialism.

Decoloniality: Approaches that seek to challenge and dismantle the lasting impacts of colonialism on knowledge, culture, and power structures, advocating for the reclaiming and valuing of indigenous and marginalised perspectives.

Non-Aligned Movement: A forum of countries that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc.

If you would like to contribute to the exhibition, please get in touch by emailing mutants@cca-glasgow.com