

## Programming Im;passivity: Digital Launch Notes

As intended with the physical launch, the digital launch of this project can be categorised into three spheres: spatial, curatorial, and programmatic. Detailed in the table below is the contents of each sphere, now accessible in a digital format online, rather than physically through the installation. The table also illustrates how, by adapting the installation digitally, a number of opportunities to add to and interrogate the initial research behind the project arose.

<i>Sphere</i>	<i>Installation</i>	<i>Digital</i>
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Physical Installations in the Remise Room and Cubicle</li> <li>- Workshops with local groups</li> <li>- Material research in the Remise Room</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visual representations of the installations</li> <li>- A handbook for users to follow material processes at home (and in the space)</li> <li>- A set of visual and typographic typologies that connect the representation of the spheres with the further research</li> </ul>
Programmatic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A programme of invitations to the space for the duration of the exhibition</li> <li>- A shorter programme of events/performances/talks in the space.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A digital platform of invitations (currently available as a mock-up)</li> <li>- Invites to digitally contribute through comments, reflections, or re-interpretations.</li> </ul>
Curatorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A physical library of influential work into Amo's context and the concept of 'Doubleness' in global Black diasporas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A digital library of influential work into Amo's context and the concept of 'Doubleness' in global Black diasporas.</li> </ul>

Thus, the digitalised offering of this project contains 5 main components:

1. [Spatial] The lead image(s) and the materials handbook
2. [Curatorial] An online reading list with digital links and a codified representation of each text for accessibility
3. [Programmatic] A digital booking system (currently available as a mock-up)
4. [Spatial] The preparatory studies for the lead image
5. [Spatial/Curatorial] A vector library of black figures extracted from European paintings between the 16<sup>th</sup> and late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries

These are articulated graphically by a set of visual and typographic typologies developed for the digital offering. These weave the digital project together, reflecting and augmenting the auto-ethnographic historiographical method that initially kickstarted the research behind the physical installation. This is described in detail below.

## Visual & Typographic Typologies in the Digital Project

### *The Black Figurative*

We sought to visually represent the process of situating ourselves *within* the life and work of Amo through the use of figures whose contexts were comparable to that of Amo's and whose depiction also offered powerful moments of reflection for the contemporary Black diaspora in Europe. The figures represent a growing and non-exhaustive index of Black figures depicted in European paintings between the 16<sup>th</sup> and late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>, with a special attempted focus on figures depicted within *Ancien Régime* courts<sup>2</sup>. Each figure has been carefully extracted from this context and placed in a vector library, from which we have drawn upon in the lead image, the materials handbook, and the digital platform. The purpose of the context extraction is twofold. The first was to perform a reciprocal motion to our research method of self-situation, juxtaposing the imaginative insertion of our own diasporic lives, cultures, and beliefs into a 17<sup>th</sup> century European context with the clinical extraction of historic (and historically obscured) Black diasporic figures from their European contexts. The second was in order to build new visual contexts that centre Black European bodies, expressions, and movements in the representations of our prospective space and in illustrations for the material handbook. In doing so, we hoped to remove these figures from frequent aesthetic, albeit representative of actual, conditions of servitude, exotification, and White European orientation, and reimagine them with their own liberty and subjectivity.

Furthering this, in the vector library they appear against names rather than the details of the painting or painter, which are temporarily obscured, visible only on the individual image files. This act of naming, often with the figures' actual names but also with fictitious names where this was unavailable, builds on methodologies present in the work of Lubaina Himid and Kehinde Wiley where naming and the appropriation of context respectively play important roles in emphasising the importance of the lives behind the paintings.

### *Asafo-style Symbols*

Throughout the digital project, the use of Asafo-style icons to codify certain processes brings apparently disparate facets of the project into aesthetic continuity. The icons are derived from Asafo flags<sup>3</sup>, called *Frankaa*, which are a Fante tradition<sup>4</sup> and often depict historical occasions or important social events and processes. The relevance of the flags' style was the centrality of appropriation to their aesthetic. Though the content is often uniquely Fante or more broadly reflective of Akan culture, the vexillological influence of these flags and the

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<sup>1</sup> Further relevant writing/work on this topic includes [Holland Cotter's article 'A Spectrum From Slaves to Saints'](#), ['Balthazar: A Black African King in Medieval and Renaissance Art'](#) exhibition at the Getty Center Museum, [medievalpoc.tumblr.com](http://medievalpoc.tumblr.com), and Vinson & Spicer's, *'Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe'*. See forthcoming Olivette Otele's *'African Europeans: An Untold Story'*

<sup>2</sup> For more on this topic see Anne Kulhmann's *'Ambiguous Duty: Black Servants in Ancien Regime Courts'* in Honneck, Klimke. & Kulhmann's *'Germany and the Black Diaspora: Points of Contact, 1250-1914'*. Available also at the project's digital library.

<sup>3</sup> See the collections of Barbara Eyeson of *Asafo Flags* in Benjamin Orlow's *'Asafo Flags'* in Migrant Journal Issue No. 6, Jyni Ong's ['Asafo flags embody cultural meanings and narratives from Ghana's Fante people'](#) and Alix-Rose Cowie's [piece for WePresent](#).

<sup>4</sup> Fante people live to the west of Accra, Ghana, namely in fishing villages such as Anomabu, Saltpond, Mankessim, Elmina and in the town of Cape Coast.

frequent appearance of the Union Jack in these flags signal a powerful counteraction of the colonial gaze. Borrowing from a tradition of repositioning (West) African subjectivity and history at the centre of an either implicitly or explicitly colonial discourse, our icons more straightforwardly depict processes that aid in explanation or demystification. However, behind this immediate didacticism lies a message of playful reinvention and the alluring promise of re-organising knowledge to abandon oppressive and obscuring norms.

### *Blackletter vs Roman Typology*

The digital launch's central, public-facing documents are written in a mixture of Blackletter and Roman family fonts throughout. To an extent, the dual usage, often incorporating the Fraktur Blackletter font for names, titles, categories, or emphatic mentions, aims to reflect the style in which Amo's *Apatheia of the Human Mind* was originally written and the tensions of the time it captures as a both a document and an artefact. Alluding to the identification of Germanic states with Fraktur during a period of Catholic – and thereby Roman typographical – dominance in Europe<sup>5</sup>, Amo's document presents all German words in Fraktur, distinct from the main body of text which is written in Latin and with Roman script.

However, we also aimed to incorporate this semiotic process into the project's documents as an exercise in auto-ethnographic reflection. In Amo's work, typography was an unassuming, and yet deep rooted, signifier of the context in which he had found himself. Though not used purposefully or indeed significantly, its quotidian use signposts the wider inherited academic traditions and canonical knowledge that Amo operationalised in order to convey his disciplinary aptitude and ultimately, we believe, fundamentally anti-racist position expressed through his Dualist philosophy. Our incorporation of this style is both the acknowledgement of this and our own position as Black diaspora operationalising and often attempting to appropriate European traditions, institutions and disciplines toward a fundamentally empowering and emancipatory message. It is, however, a relationship that binds. Just as operationalisation expresses the desire to reinterpret and redefine space and language for the empowerment of marginalised groups, it also powerfully communicates our own unwitting entrenchment in these practices.

### **Digital Project Component 1: Lead Image & Handbook**

The lead image is a composite image and collage describing the spatial possibilities of the material processes we have detailed for the Remise Room. It shows the four processes of our 'Commercio Wheel' in play in the construction and activation of the space but using the Black figures from European paintings to do so. The wall treatment alludes to a process of tearing and flypapering that we had planned to use on the space as a further exposition of '*the attention to knowledge in the mind via the senses*'<sup>6</sup>. The process incorporates old recycled documents from the Kunstverein with photocopied pages of important texts within the space.

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<sup>5</sup> See the podcast 99% Invisible's [episode on 'Fraktur'](#)

<sup>6</sup> From Anton Wilhelm Amo's '*The Apatheia of the Human Mind*', page 84: "There is nothing in the intellect which has not been in the senses previously".

## **Digital Project Component 2: Online Reading List**

The online reading list has been codified and represented as a visual image, which should lead the representation of the curatorial sphere of the project. As an interactive element, we would also like the list to be public via an open Google Sheets document (that can also be added to) where people can digitally access all available materials or find out where to purchase them.

## **Digital Project Component 3: Digital Booking System**

A representation of a digital platform we had planned to use to organise between invited persons, open invites, and reserved periods of (in)activity in the installation space. This should lead the representation of the programmatic sphere of the project.

## **Digital Project Component 4: Preparatory Studies**

An insight into how the space design was initially formulated but also then translated digitally for the lead image. A process of appropriation and extraction was used for forms and settings to constitute this lead image, attempting to invert the European 'centring' in the process. These studies can be presented as an annex to the project's spatial sphere.

## **Digital Project Component 5: Vector Library**

See explanation under *Visual & Typographic Typologies in the Digital Project: The Black Figurative*. This study can be presented as an annex to any of the project's spheres.