



FUTURISM



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22 OCT - 29 NOV 2020

Co-curated by wāni

Featuring work by artists farhiya jama, Fatma Hussein, Gideon Wilonja, Ivy Mutuku and Peter Waples-Crowe.

New possibilities of hope and splendour.

European Futurism was an art movement which began in Italy at the beginning of the 20th century inspired by new technology, fast cars and speed. Bla(c)k Futurism is about creating art out of strength, pain, loss and successes. It is fundamentally rooted in being denied a full history and looking to the future to correct that.

FUTURISM explores innovation in the 21st Century and what possibilities arise for Intergenerational Bla(c)k artists today as they take on the challenge of looking to the future to create new possibilities and images of hope and splendour.

Wyndham City acknowledges the peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which Wyndham Art Gallery stands and we pay our respects to their elders, past and emerging.

Wyndham Art Gallery
Great Art. Deep West.

Image (Front Cover) : Gideon Wilonja - *Mwangaza* - 2020

Image (Left) : farhiya jama - *moon girl* - 2019



FUTURISM

Curator's Note by Dr. Megan Evans

Futurism is reimagined in this exhibition. The term was first coined by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1909. It heralded a fashion for the modern, the industrial and the technological. It was a movement that rapidly spread across the arts inspired by industrial inventions and generating a radical fracturing of images and words. It's negative associations were an anti-feminine bent and a later connection with Italian fascism.

FUTURISM upends that use of the word and through the work of intergenerational and intersectional black and Indigenous artists, examines how ideas of the future emerge in the 21st Century.

Image(Left) : Ivy Mutuku - *Riitho rĩĩa rĩranyona 4* - 2020

Afrofuturism explores the intersection of African diaspora culture with technology that has been developing since the term came into popular use in the 1990's through conversations led by Alondra Nelson, a leading scholar of science, technology and social inequality.

In an interview, Alondra Nelson explained Afrofuturism as 'a way of looking at the subject position of black people which covers themes of alienation and aspirations for a utopic future. The idea of "alien" or "other" is a theme often explored.'¹

farhiya jama is a Somali-Canadian artist whose work has been seen around the globe and her constructed worlds fit neatly into this narrative. She calls herself a visual storyteller and creates imagery that deconstructs the stereotypes too often used to represent Somali people. She is known for centering Muslim black women through her stunning images that describe a world in which they are powerful and have agency. In her words,

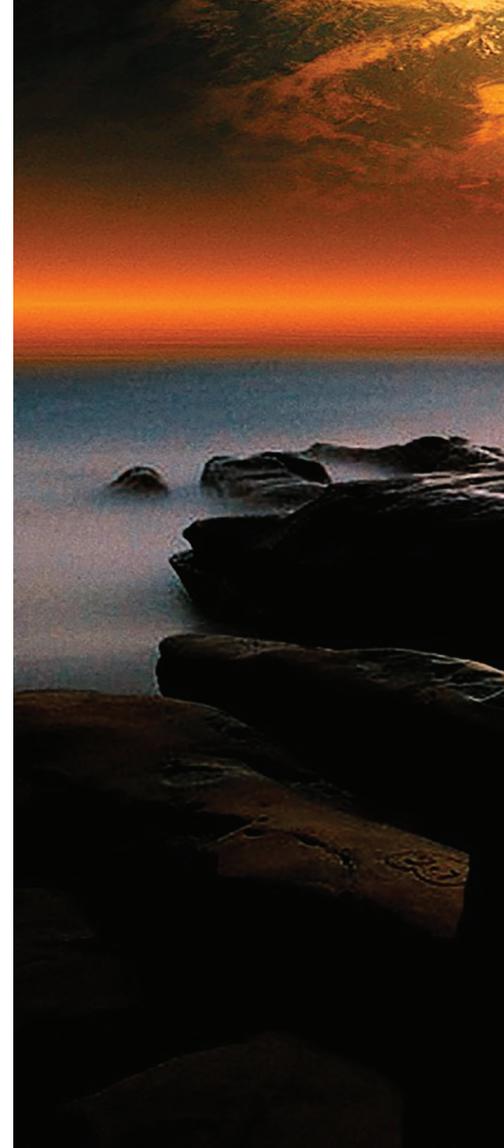
'When you Google Somali people, images of refugees, starving families, or pirates dominate the search engine. That breaks my heart because we are more than our pain and struggle yet that is all the world is shown.'

farhiya's work depicts figures in the landscape, either looking out at intergalactic landscapes or inhabiting them in their bodies. In, *their eyes were watching* 2019, we see three veiled figures with universes inside the veil subverting the limited and limiting perceptions that are held by people with no understanding of the Muslim faith, hinting at a universe of potential unexplored. *patiently waiting* 2019, shows the view of a shadowy figure in the foreground, that any young black aspiring artist could situate themselves inside, looking out at a new world. farhiya speaks about her intention to open the doors that were closed to her for young Muslim women of the future by creating images that speak to anything being possible.

Echoing farhiya's thoughts from across the other side of the world, Gideon Wilonja also speaks of his desire to inspire other young artists who will come in Gideon's wake, and how hard it has been to imagine their way out of the struggle narrative that can hold black people in a paradigm of pain, unable to create as yet unimagined possibilities. One could suppose that this is why the popular film *Black Panther* was so well received by black people across the world. It created a fantasy world where blackness provided an indisputable advantage instead of the disadvantage that whiteness imposes on it.

Gideon is a queer black person who is courageously and proudly presenting the gentle and feminine side of masculinity in a world that says this represents weakness. Over the past 40 years there has been a unique style of photography emerging from diverse African lenses that incorporates fashion as a means of resistance. Gideon's work is a new and gentle take on this, bringing his expertise as a fashion designer and actor to represent himself.

Ivy Mutuku also represents herself in a series of beautiful sensitive works that invite the viewer into an intimate relationship with the subject. *Riitho rīrīa rīranyona* meaning "the eye that sees me" in Gĩgĩkũyũ her mother tongue, shows the sheer beauty of blackness, something that Ivy claims for so long made her feel less. Her eyes are closed which alludes to the self-image she has had imposed on her from a culture of white privilege. She is looking in and at the same time we see her beauty presented in her own terms, not sexualised or even





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politicised in this context. Ivy, her youth, her pride and her courage to expose her vulnerability, is a form of resistance, however it is also an imagining of a future where this is normal.

Fatma Hussain deals with similar issues that are about escaping stereotypes of identity that are imposed from outside. A spoken word artist and storyteller working with Illustrator Nerea García-Minguillán Loarte and Motion Graphic artist Sonia Julián Corrochano, Fatma poses questions on poetry to us about how to step outside of the way other people see us and take agency of our own constructed identities. The character and imagined landscapes are filled with pink butterflies and magical birds with multiple wings and the wide-open galaxies seen in farhiya's works.

The elder of this group of artists, Peter Waples-Crowe provides an Australian Indigenous perspective. Peter's work slides between the present and the imagined future. His concertina books include images of corona virus alongside factories spilling waste into the atmosphere, as well as curious characters, birds

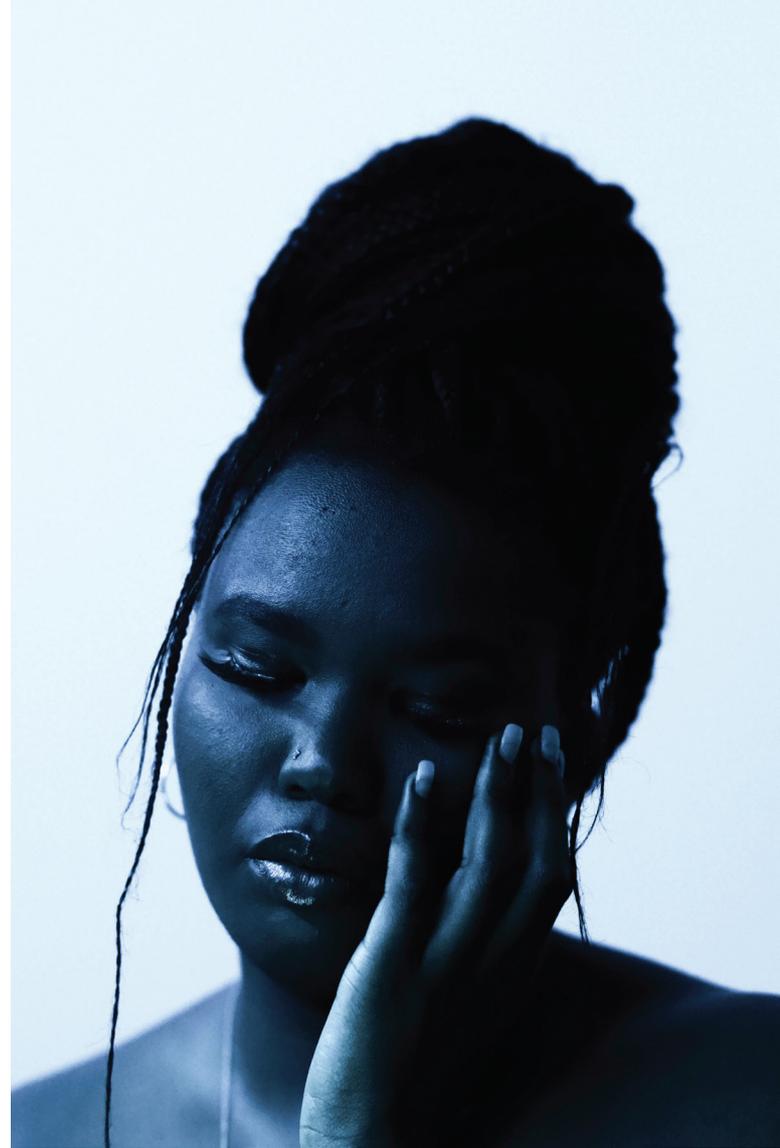
and insects and his iconic dingo. A proud queer Ngarigo artist, Peter's language was ostensibly lost due to the ravages of colonisation and the theft of cultural knowledge this engendered. The struggle to rediscover his mother tongue and piece back together what has been torn apart generations ago is reflected in his work which, in a very different way, echoes the fracturing of European Futurism. *Queer as Country 2020*, is a depiction of that piecing together and much of his recent work includes Ngarigo words.

Futurism brings together artists whose works punch holes in constraints of whiteness, opening up the canvas for new views to be imagined and new ways of being to be created.

1 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrofuturism>

Image (Left) : Fatma Hussein - *A letter meeting two worlds*. - 2020 (still of video animation)

Image (Right) : Ivy Mutuku - *Riitho riifa riranyona 2* - 2020



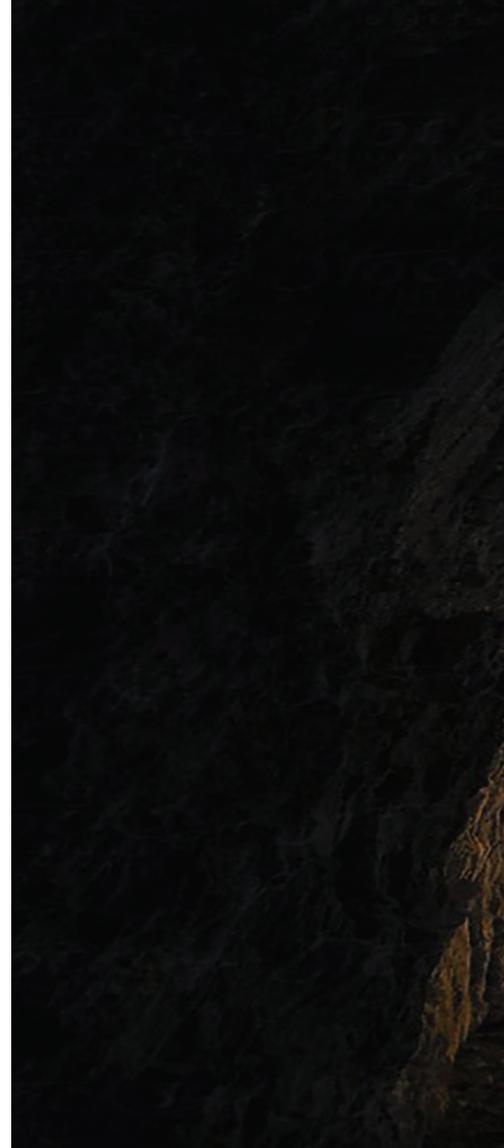
FUTURISM: Beyond a Cultural Aesthetic

Catalogue Essay by wāni

wāni is a Congolese-New Zealander writer, visual storyteller and award-winning performance artist and poet. His work is reflective of his pursuit to vital questions pertaining to Africans, Indigeneity, Afrophobia and the re-imagination of spaces.

In an essay titled 'Black to the Future', written by Mark Dury¹, the term Afrofuturism was born. Afrofuturism addresses the cultural issues of the Black African diaspora, through Techno culture and science fiction. It is fundamentally rooted in being denied a full history and looking to the future to correct that. At the root of Afrofuturism is Black Speculative Fiction. According to Alondra Nelson part of the resilience of Black culture and Black life is about imagining the impossible, imagining a better place, perhaps even a different world.

Image: farhiya jama - *patiently waiting* - 2019





farhiya ja

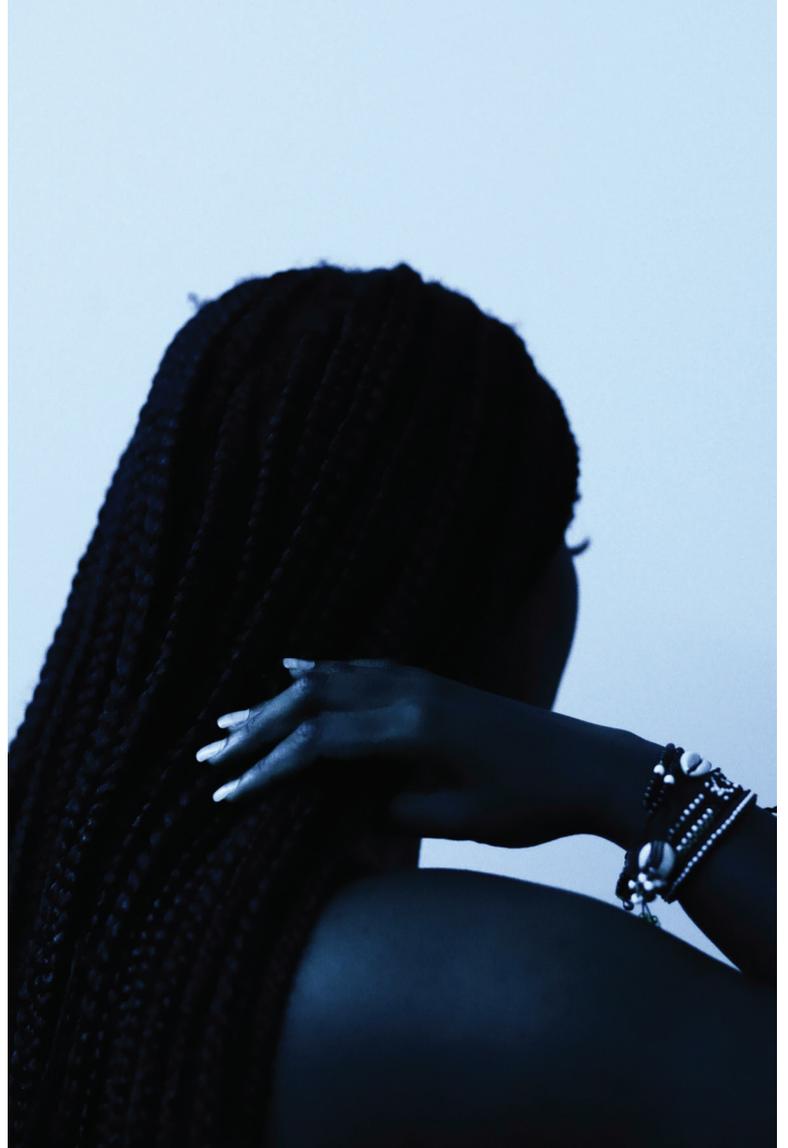


Image (Top): Peter Waples-Crowe - *Book 1* - 2020 (concertina book)

Image (Bottom): Peter Waples-Crowe - *Book 1* - 2019 (concertina book, other side)







In this conception, certain elements such as spiritual transcendence are re-imagined and transposed into a new cosmic legend, where the alienated becomes extra-terrestrial. Afrofuturist story tellers take the speculative nature of the genre by creating new worlds while also deconstructing the racial politics of this one.

One of the major criticisms against works like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaids Tale* or Suzanne Collins' trilogy; *The Hunger Games*, is that even in the worst of futures, there's no place for Black bodies to exist, they are either banished, killed or just disappear. In fact, in most Sci-Fi, we have been led to believe that there's a higher chance for magic, night creatures, zombies and aliens existing in the future, than there is Black people existing. Afrofuturism is about reclaiming our past and present in order to correct our future. This is being done by sound, story and forward-thinking creative's desire to see how our future could've evolved or can still evolve unhindered by colonial influence.

Although I don't have the African American Black experience that Afrofuturism is founded on, I've always felt a strong sense of resonance with the sentiments held within the ideals encompassed in Afrofuturism due to my understanding of the collective place I am situated in, as part of the greater diasporic globalised Black family who also endure many intersecting aspects of the Anti-Blackness, that has led to the creation of Afrofuturist imagining. But as a Black person living in the diaspora with strong connections to my own Indigenous roots, dislocated from American history, Afrofuturism has felt as liberating as it has alienating for me. Nnedi Okorafor, a Nigerian author who also rejects the term for herself, stating that she understands its necessity and value, but feels that it engages with one very specific lens of Western (Americanised) Blackness, which she does not write from.

Afrofuturism draws upon the feeling of alienation inherited from slavery amongst American Blacks, with its roots embedded deep within African American music (Sun Ra as an early example), a space in which African and other non-American Black Artists historically only exist as an afterthought.



Ngaya guruba
Ngaya bar
Ngaya bulabang
Ngaya gundal
Ngaya bar



However, over the past couple of years, efforts are being made by incredible artists and creatives throughout the global diaspora to shift this notion and change this narrative.

A new focus is made to ensure Black Indigenous Futurism is understood as a tool for self-healing and liberation, a liberation founded on accessibility, equity, justice and imagination; a future inclusive of the many different black bodies that make up the entire global Black family. Black Indigenous Futurism is a growing movement, a movement that dares to reimagine societal tropes, alternative histories and futures through imagination and the exploration of science fiction as well as its sub-genres.

farhiya jama is a Toronto based Somali-Canadian visual artist of Muslim faith. Her visual works explore positive affirmation for young black girls of diasporic identity and are grounded in the belief that representation is not something to wait for but to create. Her work *the seven heavens* explores the journey of the metamorphosis from a group of veiled women who were appointed to be the guardians of select portals to protect an unpredictable future from different realms.

What excites me about her work and practice is the very unapologetic nature of her visuals and subjectivity. There's a freedom about her art that infuses a very present sense of fun and carefreeness, yet each piece establishes this sense of we are here, we are present, we are Muslim Black Women and girls and we will continue to be, in our own time and on our own terms. You can't help but see the meticulous crafting that has gone into ensuring that the autonomy of those present in the work is always at the forefront of each image, so you get this sense of depth with each image that goes way beyond the image itself. It's almost as if you can see the stories and relationships, the images are built on within the framing of the images themselves. There's a clear insistence on visibilising oneself that goes beyond modern ideals of representation. There's almost a spiritual sanctity that comes from the playfulness and joy within the work that you know to be true, but a truth often only reserved within the safety of Black spaces and people. I think farhiya herself summed it up best when she said "Black joy is sacred in general, but specifically, Black



joy of Black women is holy. It's a miracle to witness in a world that actively tries to strip us of our beauty. Black Girl Magic is an aesthetic I try to live by on a daily basis".²

Peter Waples-Crowe is an artist whose work sits within its own space and spectrum. It has the type of sharpness that leaves you thinking about what it is you've seen and felt long after you're done seeing them. Peter's work is a perfect representation of what it means to understand time as a non-linear space as it infuses layers of Aboriginal history in a very present way. "Blak Futurism - I think the future is First Nations. I think the future is Queer. I think the future is Blak. In recent years I have been looking back on my life. Taking stock. The COVID pandemic has focused it in many ways this year. Now I am being, but I was always just being when I was a child too. I was happy in my imagination and painting my blakfulla things, before I was asked for proof or validity. That was all inside, in my spirit. It's Blak to the future for me."

Fatma Hussein has had such a generous public journey with her relationship to mental health, the

assumptions and stigmas associated to it, as well as the intersections one has to deal with when you are both visibly Black and Woman. I love the way she dabbles between realities informed by her love for science fiction, superhero culture, manga and varying forms of escapism. In this work she speaks about wanting to create something that is representative of her own mental health journey with a futuristic element meaningfully interwoven within it. It's like a mirror of the double and sometimes triple consciousness of the bodies we carry and have to move through. I love her insistence to challenge and question the things we think we know, as well as question the framing in which those understandings came to be.

Like most Black Futurists Gideon Wilonja speaks about the space in which his desire to create was first conceived. A space of isolation, where he didn't feel seen, heard or understood so his work began with a determination to create spaces and worlds for himself where he could belong. Not as a loud cry for external validation but rather a soft, vulnerable, agentic form of self-healing and preservation. A desire to literally write oneself

Image (Left) : Gideon Wilonja - *Hewa* - 2020

Image (Right) : Gideon Wilonja - *Maji* - 2020





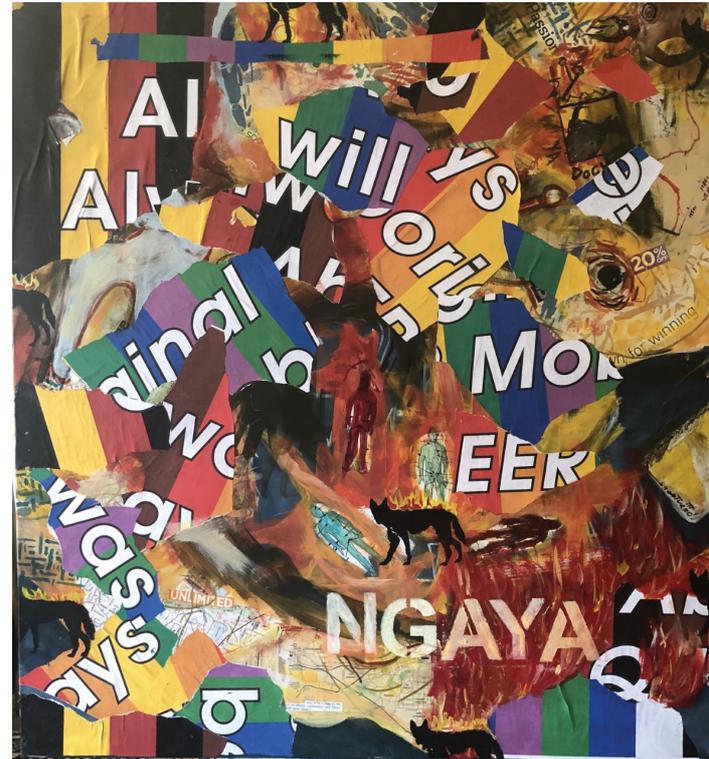
into worlds void of you, is a radical manifestation of Black love at its core.

“Knowing that a little unsure queer black boy might see my work and feel seen, beautiful, understood and know that the future isn’t a black and white canvas, but a place filled with a thousand rays of possibilities”

Ivy Mutuku’s photographs have the type of sensitivity you would come to expect from someone who’s taken the time to build deep meaningful relationships with the people in the photographs. At first the incredible delicacy in which she captures Black folk leaves you stunned, but then you’re reminded exactly why it’s invaluable for this type of work to exist, and why it feels as foreign as it does familiar. We’ve become so used to seeing two dimensional images of Black bodies, you’re almost shocked to see them represented as their full autonomous beings and this is exactly the type of emotional response you’re left with from Ivy’s work.

Martine Syms, in her piece *The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto*, sums it up best when she

says: “outer space will not save us from injustice and cyberspace was founded on a master slave relationship. While we are often othered, we are not aliens. While our ancestors were mutilated, we are not mutants. Post Black is a misnomer. Post Colonialism is a misnomer. The most likely future is one that we only have ourselves and this planet”.³



1. https://archive.org/stream/BlackToTheFuture/Black_to_the_Future_Interviews_with_Sam_djvu.txt

2. <http://www.griotsrepublic.com/farhiya-jama/>

3. <https://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/dec/17/mundane-afrofuturist-manifesto/>

Image (Left) : farhiya jama - their eyes were watching - 2019

Image (Right) : Peter Waples-Crowe - Queer as country - 2020

Go *Deeper:*

A series of experiences
that offer further insight into
the exhibition



Artist in Conversation

FUTURISM

farhiya jama is a Muslim, Somali-Canadian artist based in Toronto who uses her creative practice to explore positive affirmation for young black girls of diasporic identity.

Check back to the website after 5pm on November 12 to hear a discussion between farhiya and co-curator wāni as they discuss her digital works, composed of digital collage, photography and illustration; and delve into Afro-Futurism.

Offered as an audio recording, we encourage you to enjoy this engaging conversation on a daily walk or while viewing her works online.

This recording will be available on the FUTURISM digital exhibition from 5pm on Thursday, 12 November 2020.

farhiya jama

Image (Left) : farhiya jama - *edge of no return* - 2019

Image (Back Cover) : Gideon Wilsonja - *Nyota* - 2020



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