London College of Fashion in conjunction with Victoria & Albert Museum presents:

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DESIGN FUTURES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: POST-WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

A network of design and material culture theorists, technological innovators and museum professionals from six different cities - Dakar, Accra, Nairobi, Cape Town, London and Oxford – come together to investigate new design typologies emerging from the African continent, their sites of production and the means by which they can be communicated and displayed both within Africa and in Europe.
Principal Investigator: Cher Potter, LCF/V&A Research Fellow

We tend to think about our world's future as being *discovered* in the high-tech laboratories of American scientific research institutes, or *debated* in elite business and political forums held in the Alps - but less often in the West, do we think about our future as being *designed* by local tech communities in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In what is being called a transformative Digital Revolution, the African continent now hosts one of the fastest growing tech hubs in the world (the East African 'Silicon Savannah'), a Pan-African robotics network (AFRON), burgeoning space programmes and a proliferation of digital innovation hubs.

The symposium analyses two major forces shaping the 21st century – innovations in digital technology and the 'rise of Africa' – through the lens of material culture and its interpretation. It also marks the official launch of an international network 'Design Futures in Sub-Saharan Africa' lead by Cher Potter, developed through a core partnership between London College of Fashion and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Some of the questions that will be examined are:

• What challenges and opportunities do a 'digital revolution' combined with unprecedented city and population growth on the African continent present for designers today?

• How is the combination of computer coding and digital fabrication resulting in new typologies of design in Sub-Saharan Africa?

• What composite communities are organising themselves around these new digital models?

• Are gaming environments based on local history and folklore heralding a wider move from European/US-centric worldviews to local ones?

• How might technology open up new ways for reading and categorising objects, both ancient and contemporary?

• How might we describe and test the term 'postwestern' in the context of design and curating?

Project Partners:

University of the Arts London, UK
Victoria & Albert Museum, UK
University of Oxford, UK
University of Nairobi, Kenya
Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa
Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Senegal
Ashesi University College, Ghana

Symposium Speakers:

Mugendi M'Rithaa
Mugendi M'Rithaa is Professor of Industrial Design at Cape Peninsula University of Technology and the President of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (Icsid) - the world organisation for Industrial Design. His research interests include Participatory Design which incorporates the needs of end-users/clients; Universal/Inclusive Design; Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability; and design's potential in promoting equity and quality of life in Africa and beyond. He has coordinated workshops on 'Designing a Prosperous Nation' (Gaborone, 2004), and 'Designing for New Realities' (Helsinki, 2012).

Jonathan Ledgard
Jonathan Ledgard is Director of the Afrotech Initiative at the Swiss Federal Institute for Technology, Lausanne, established to help pioneer advanced technologies in Africa. He is a leading thinker on risk, nature, and technology in near future Africa and spent the last decade as the Africa correspondent for The Economist, reporting extensively on Africa's mobile phone revolution. A founder of The Economist's Baobab blog, covering politics, economics and culture on the continent of Africa, he continues to contribute to the paper as well as to The New Yorker and other journals.

Ayorkor Korsah
Dr Ayorkor Korsah is Head of the Computer Science Department at Ashesi University College and Co-founder of the African Robotics Network, a community of institutions, organisations and individuals engaged in robotics in Africa. She is a graduate of the Carnegie Mellon Robotics Institute and Dartmouth College. Her research interests include design at the intersection of algorithm design, artificial intelligence, and robotics; educating technologists for development in Africa; information, computing, and communications as keys to sustainable global development.

Kristina Van Dyke
Kristina Van Dyke is an independent scholar and curator. She was Director of the Pulitzer Arts Foundation in St. Louis from 2011 to 2015 and Curator for Collections and Research at the Menil Collection in Houston from 2005 to 2011. She curated the exhibition 'Kota: Digital Excavations in African Art' currently on display at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, which examines nearly 50 Kota guardian figures using a new digital database created by Belgian computer engineer Frederic Cloth to study and reveal the hidden histories of Kota reliquaries.

Wesley Kirinya
Wesley Kirinya is one of the first games developers in Africa and founder of Leti Arts gaming studio in Nairobi and Accra. As such, he operates within one of the world's fastest growing tech and design hubs, the East African 'Silicon Savanah'. He is pioneering the use of local African history in digital gaming environments, and developing a toolbox of African superheroes based on characters from African mythology – heralding a potentially wider move from European/US-centric worldviews to local ones.

Paula Callus
Paula Callus is a Senior Lecturer in Computer Animation at Bournemouth University and is completing her PhD at SOAS on Digital Animation in Sub-Saharan Africa. As an advocate for the role of Sub-Saharan animators within the broader history of 'moving' image, she has delivered papers on 'Reading Animation through the eyes of anthropology' at the Animation Studies Symposium 2010; 'Locating Sub-Saharan African Animation within the 'moving' image' at the Film and Television Screen Studies Conference 2013; and curated the Africa in Motion animation programme in Edinburgh.

Cher Potter
Cher Potter is V&A/LCF Senior Research Fellow. Her research interests include contemporary design on the African continent, and 'post western' models of curating and research. Prior to joining the V&A, she curated the 2013 European Impakt Arts Festival which explored 'post western' futures; and lead global cultural research at WGSN, the world's largest design and fashion trends bureau, coordinating research into design tendencies across 22 countries including 8 African capitals. She was recognized as one of twelve 'Future Visionaries' by the 2013 Wellcome Trust Visioneers series.

Chairs:

David Pratten
Dr David Pratten is a Professor at the University of Oxford, specialising in the Social Anthropology of Africa. He was Director of the African Studies Centre from 2009-2013, one of the world's leading centres for African Studies. His research interests include West African issues of youth, democracy and disorder; contemporary models of sociality, and colonial history. He is Co-Editor of 'AFRICA: Journal of the International African Institute' Cambridge University Press, which is the premier journal devoted to the study of African societies and culture.

Bill Sherman
Professor Bill Sherman is Head of Research at the Victoria and Albert Museum and Professor of Renaissance Studies at the University of York. He has published widely on the history of books and readers, the interface of word and image, and the relationship between knowledge and power. At the V&A, he is leading the development of the V&A Research Institute (VARI), which is testing new models for collaborative research that draws on history, theory and practice, and new ways of using collections to bring together the museum, the university and the creative industries.

Jane Harris
Dr Jane Harris is Associate Dean of Research at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London and Professor of Digital Design and Innovation. An advocate for the role that creative and transdisciplinary research in HE can play in the development and advance of design, science and industry, her own practice navigates physical material and technology interfaces. A recipient of the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts Fellowship (NESTA) her pioneering CGI work has been internationally exhibited and publications include the co-authored book Digital Visions for Fashion+Textiles: Made In Code.

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Design Futures in Sub Saharan Africa: Post-Western Perspectives

Launch Symposium

Presented by University of the Arts London, London College of Fashion in conjunction with Victoria & Albert Museum

WHEN

Saturday, 28 Nov, 2015

TIME

10:00 a.m. – 4.30 p.m.

WHERE

Rootstein Hopkins Space East, University of the Arts London, 20 John Prince's Street, London W1G 0BJ

STAFF CONTACT

Cher Potter
Principal Research Investigator and Organiser
c.potter@vam.ac.uk

Rama Dieng
Research Network Facilitator
r.dieng@arts.ac.uk

Agenda

Welcome
10.00   Cher Potter
     LCF/V&A Research Fellow; P.Investigator for 'Design Futures in Sub-Saharan Africa'

Part 1: Designing for New Realities
10.15   Mugendi M'Rithaa
     President of World Design Organisation / Professor Industrial Design, CPUT
10:45   Jonathan Ledgard
     Director, Afrotech Initiative at the Swiss Federal Institute for Technology, Lausanne
11:15   Tea Break

Part2: Digital Object Typologies
11:30   Ayorkor Korsah
     Professor, Computer Science, Ashesi College, Accra / Co-founder, African Robotics Network (AFRON)
12:00   Kristina Van Dyke
     Independent Scholar, Co-Curator of 'Kota: Digital Excavations in African Art', New York
12:30   Q&A
     Chair: Bill Sherman, V&A Head of Research, London

12.45   Lunch Break and Eval

Part3: Tactical Narratives in Digital Media
13:45   Wesley Kirinya
     Founder, Leti Arts gaming design studio, Nairobi
14:15   Paula Callus
     Senior Lecturer, Computer Animation, Bournemouth University / SOAS PhD(abd), Digital Animation in Sub-Saharan Africa
14:45   Q&A
     Chair: Jane Harris, Associate Dean of Research LCF
15.00   Tea Break

Part 4: Networks and Communities
15:15   Cher Potter
     LCF/V&A Research Fellow; P.Investigator for 'Design Futures in Sub-Saharan Africa'
15.45   Panel discussion
     Chair: David Pratten, Professor Social Anthropology of Africa, University of Oxford
16:20   Thanks and Conclusion

16:30 - 17:30   Drinks Reception (with thanks to Sejuiced - sejuiced.co.uk)