

bitforms gallery

Mimi Qnqoha, *Everything That Didn't Fit*
February 3–March 5, 2022

Gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 11 AM–6 PM
Opening reception: Thursday, February 3, 6–8 PM

bitforms is pleased to present Mimi Qnqoha's first solo exhibition with the gallery, *Everything That Didn't Fit*. Qnqoha draws attention to the quotidian logic of the technocolonial, a logic that results in certain experiences, people, histories, and sensations falling outside of contemporary systems of digital data collection. In a society where that which cannot be documented, recorded, or proven does not carry weight, *Everything That Didn't Fit* is an ode to absence, and a call to undo and expand the categories of value that inform modern sociotechnical systems.

Artist Statement:

My first real art intervention was nearly a decade ago, when I spent a summer giving every man who catcalled me a slip of paper with a phone number on it.

In a sense, the phone number was mine. But it was also a number I had connected to a distant server and pre-programmed to respond to any messages it received with stock handcrafted replies. These messages ranged from maudlin to indignant, but in that time before bots and smart home systems, it felt liberating to program a computer to send words I couldn't bring myself to say out loud. As the summer went on, the words the men sent me in return—messages that were alternately apologetic and dismissive—stopped mattering. What became more pressing was the artifact that emerged from the project, a thing I had never set out to create: a list of all of my catcallers' phone numbers.

What appeared a simple list was so much more. That dataset held the sweaty dread that gripped me when I approached the men, the intimacy of watching halfway-programmed conversations with strangers spring to life before my eyes; the dark thrill of feeling like I finally had the upper hand by forming these men into a list I could pretend to control; the doubt in wondering if it was fair to have it in the first place.

And of course, the understanding that no one else would ever know the weight the dataset carried for me. To anyone else, it was just a list of numbers. To the men caught up in it, it was a grouping they didn't know they composed.

My work has evolved from that intervention, but I can trace so much back to it. My practice is about what it means for the world to be turned into data, whether by accident or intention. The experiences of those in the undercommons — we who are Black, brown, immigrants, or caught between categories — especially reveal the implications of data collection. Computation precision brings potentials and costs that are unequally shared. I'm examining a web of ever-changing relations, relations in and between social structures, colonial realities, the natural world, and the global order that modernity has ushered in. For me, to talk about tech is to talk about the facts of social relationships: that social systems maintain and undermine computational structures; that archives render labor invisible; that histories of violence manifest in banality.

I find the answers to these questions often lie in patterns of absences. They lie in things that have been lost, removed, and submerged. Most of my work begins with a foray into a historical/present-day site or moment—surfacing a story, creating a dataset, finding an archive—that results in diverse forms, prints, installations, videos, websites, text. The questions are not confined to one field, and nor are the outputs. I often create multiple versions of pieces, each iteration highlighting new threads. In searching for the gaps, I'm searching for traces that suggest a different way of living.

- Mimi Qnqoha

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Mimi Ọnụọha

b.1989, Italy

Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York

Mimi Ọnụọha is a Nigerian-American artist whose work highlights the absences that result from fitting the world into forms of data. Her multimedia practice uses print, text, code, installation and video to unpack the power dynamics that result in different groups' different relationships to systems that are simultaneously digital, cultural, and ecological.

Ọnụọha has been in residence at the Royal College of Art (UK), Studio XX (Canada), Princeton University's Ida B Wells Just Data Lab (USA), Eyebeam Center for Arts & Technology (USA), and Arthouse Foundation (Nigeria, forthcoming). She has exhibited and spoken internationally at venues like La Gaité Lyrique (France), FIBER Festival (Netherlands), Mao Jihong Arts Foundation (China), the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (USA) and Le Centre Pompidou (France), among others. In 2014 she was selected to be in the inaugural class of Fulbright-National Geographic Digital Storytelling Fellows, and in 2018-19 she served as the inaugural Creative-in-Residence at Olin College of Engineering.