

# bitforms gallery

**Mimi Qnqha, *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 Qnqha's first solo exhibition with the gallery, *Everything That Didn't Fit*. Qnqha 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 Qnqha

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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.

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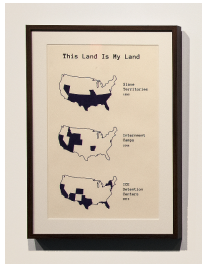
Mimi Onuoha | *Everything That Didn't Fit*  
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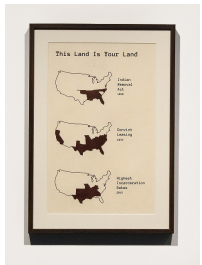
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Edition 1 of 3, 1 AP



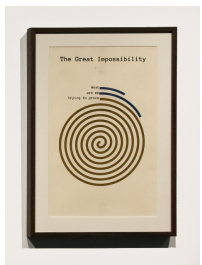
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Mimi Onuoha  
*The Library of Missing Datasets*, 2016  
Steel filing cabinet, folders  
22.5 x 20 x 16 in / 57 x 41 x 50 cm



Mimi Onuoha  
*The Library of Missing Datasets v 2.0*, 2018  
Powder-coated steel filing cabinet, folders  
22.5 x 20 x 16 in / 57 x 41 x 50 cm

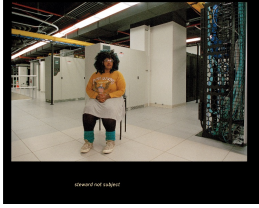


Mimi Onuoha  
*The Library of Missing Datasets v 3.0*, 2021  
Steel filing cabinet, folder  
18.5 x 15.4 x 19.7 in / 47 x 39.1 x 50 cm

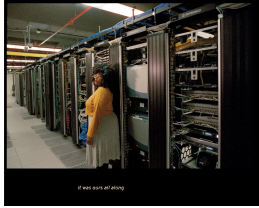


Mimi Onuoha  
*Natural: Or Where Are We Allowed To Be 1*, 2019  
Photograph mounted on sintra  
36 x 48 in / 91 x 122 cm  
Edition of 3, 1 AP





Mimi Onuoha  
*Natural: Or Where Are We Allowed To Be 2*, 2019  
Photograph mounted on sintra  
36 x 48 in / 91 x 122 cm  
Edition of 3, 1 AP



Mimi Onuoha  
*Natural: Or Where Are We Allowed To Be 3*, 2019  
Photograph mounted on sintra  
36 x 48 in / 91 x 122 cm  
Edition of 3, 1 AP



Mimi Onuoha  
*These Networks In Our Skin*, 2021  
Video (color, sound)  
Dimensions variable, landscape orientation  
5 min 47 sec, loop  
Edition of 3, 1 AP



Mimi Onuoha  
*The Hair In The Cable*, 2021  
Cables, table, hair, dust, spices  
96 x 28 in / 244 x 71 cm

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Video (color, sound)  
Dimensions variable, landscape orientation  
5 min 47 sec, loop  
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**Video Documentation:** <https://vimeo.com/672502622/321ec6f9f3>

*These Networks In Our Skin* depicts four women who work to rewire the cables that carry the information that powers the world. Surreal, familiar, and disquieting all at once, the short film draws from traditional Igbo cosmology to offer a dreamlike lexicon of what it might mean to recreate the Internet, starting from the values infused in the cables that make it up.

Film commissioned by Princeton University's Ida B Wells Just Data Lab. Production support provided by Nick Castle, Naliaka Wakhisi, Joti Desour, Georgetta Buggs, Julian Muller, Mathien, Noa Bricklin, Thor Foss, Chase Shamlan, Ahmed Nazim, Jessica Papayiannis, Brooke van Hensbergen, Daniel Orentlicher, Mia Walker, Elaina Castle

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Mimi Onuoha  
*The Library of Missing Datasets*, 2016  
Steel filing cabinet, folders  
22.5 x 20 x 16 in / 57 x 41 x 50 cm

*The Library of Missing Datasets* is an ongoing physical repository of things that have been excluded in a society where so much is collected. The installation consists of a filing cabinet with empty folders. Each folder is titled with the name of a missing dataset, taken from a master list that the artist has been collecting since 2015. A separate aspect of the piece involves the artist working with groups who are missing crucial datasets.

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Mimi Onuoha  
*The Library of Missing Datasets v 2.0*, 2018  
Powder-coated steel filing cabinet, folders  
22.5 x 20 x 16 in / 57 x 41 x 50 cm

*The Library of Missed Datasets v2.0* is a physical compendium of nonexistent datasets related to blackness. Second in the *Missing Datasets* series, the piece responds to the reality of Black folks being overrepresented as objects of datasets and underrepresented in the process of owning and collecting data. The installation consists of a filing cabinet with empty folders. Each folder is titled with the name of a missing dataset, taken from a master list that the artist has been collecting since 2015. The color of the cabinet speaks as much to value as to realities of wealth extraction.



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Steel filing cabinet, folder  
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The most recent edition to the series, the *Library of Missing Datasets 3.0* is filled with datasets that are private. These are datasets that hold information which is better for those featured within them to protect. The work complicates calls for inclusivity and openness by asserting a contextual protocol of security, whereby access is honor rather than right.

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*places where our information matters more than we do*

Mimi Ọnọgha

*Natural: Or Where Are We Allowed To Be 1*, 2019

Photograph mounted on sintra

36 x 48 in / 91 x 122 cm

Edition of 3, 1 AP

*In Natural: Or Where Are We Allowed To Be*, a Black woman makes her way through a data center that carries her own information. Surrounded by towers of server cabinets, she searches for answers to the question of what her relationship to the place should be.

Inspired by British-Caribbean photographer Ingrid Pollard's "Pastoral Interlude" prints that feature Black Brits asserting their right to be in the English countryside, in *Natural: Or Where Are We Allowed To Be*, Ọnọgha questions ownership over server rooms and data at large. She writes, "In data sets we appear as the perfect subjects: silent, eternally wronged, frozen in a frame of injustice without the messiness of

a face/accents/hint of refusal....When structural workings of racism meet the distancing power of quantification, both combine to freeze us in place."

This piece created with the support of Pavel Ezrohi and Tinuade Oyelowo.



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Mimi Ọnọha  
*Natural: Or Where Are We Allowed To Be 3*, 2019  
Photograph mounted on sintra  
36 x 48 in / 91 x 122 cm  
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*In Natural: Or Where Are We Allowed To Be*, a Black woman makes her way through a data center that carries her own information. Surrounded by towers of server cabinets, she searches for answers to the question of what her relationship to the place should be.

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*Natural: Or Where Are We Allowed To Be 2*, 2019  
Photograph mounted on sintra  
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Mimi Onuoha  
*The Hair In The Cable*, 2021  
Cables, table, hair, dust, spices  
96 x 28 in / 244 x 71 cm

*The Hair In The Cable* is a unique installation by the artist which focuses on cables and wires, the paths through which digital information travels. The installation is based on the kevlar and nylon strings that provide structural reinforcement and strength to the wires within certain cables. Detached as they are from the content of the information in the cable, these strings remain crucial to the maintenance of its flow.

In *The Hair In The Cable*, the artist treats these strings as metaphors for the ideas and values that prop up the sociotechnical systems that permeate our lives. Replacing those strings with artifacts that hold historical significance to Igbo culture is a gesture towards invoking alternative systems of knowledge, ritual, and promise.



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*In Absentia*, 2019

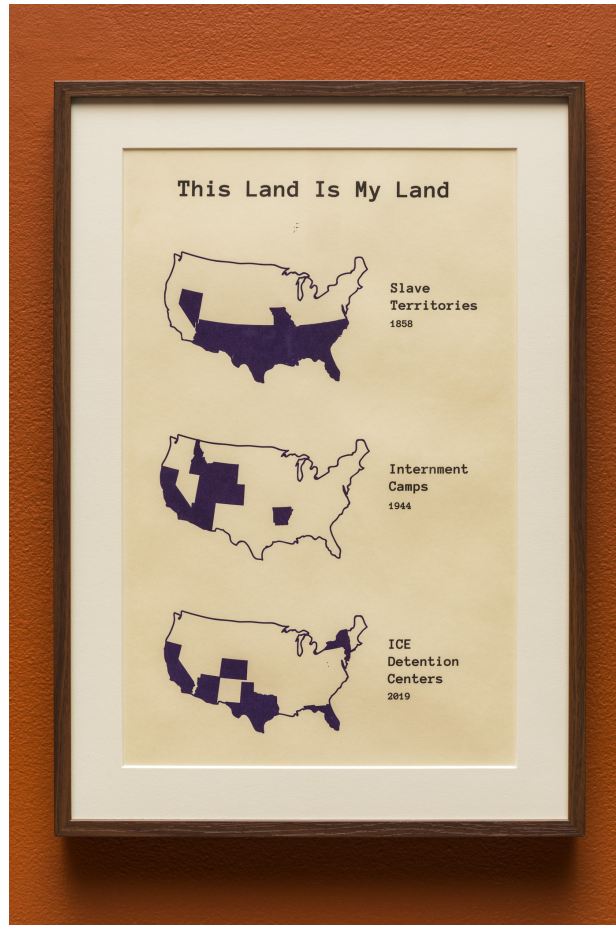
Set of six risograph prints on paper

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In the early 1900s, sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois was asked by the US government to conduct research on black rural life in Alabama. After conducting interviews with over 20,000 residents, he and his team of researchers spent months compiling a report filled with text, charts, and tables of data. The report was never published.

*In Absentia* begins from this absence and asks what happens when data is made to disappear by those who seek to obscure the intertwined workings of racism and power. The series of prints, which mimic Du Bois' graphics, complicate assumptions about data's veracity. Rather than striving for the goal of Du Bois and his contemporaries — which was to convince US society that Black folks were human and deserved fair treatment—the prints form a meditation on interpretability, questioning why such a fact should need proving.

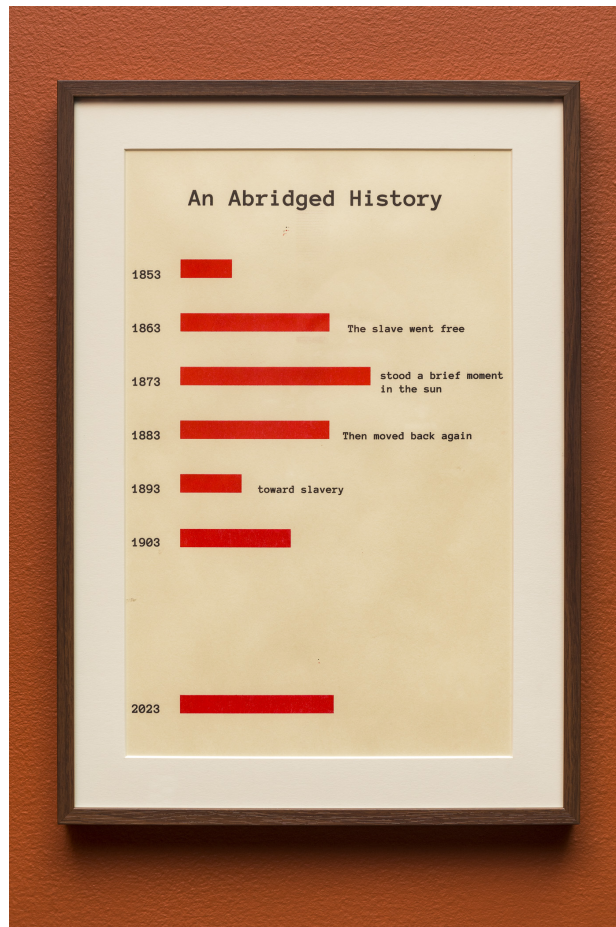


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*This Land is Your Land* charts the US by the violence that has colored its land.

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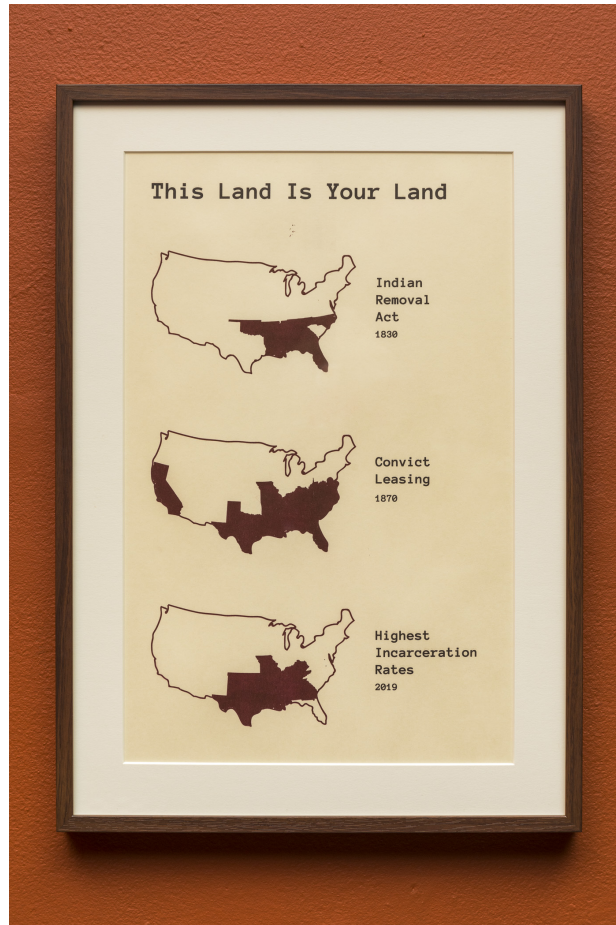
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*An Abridged History* treats W.E.B. Du Bois' quote about Reconstruction ("The slave went free, stood a brief moment in the sun, then moved back again toward slavery") as a bar chart.

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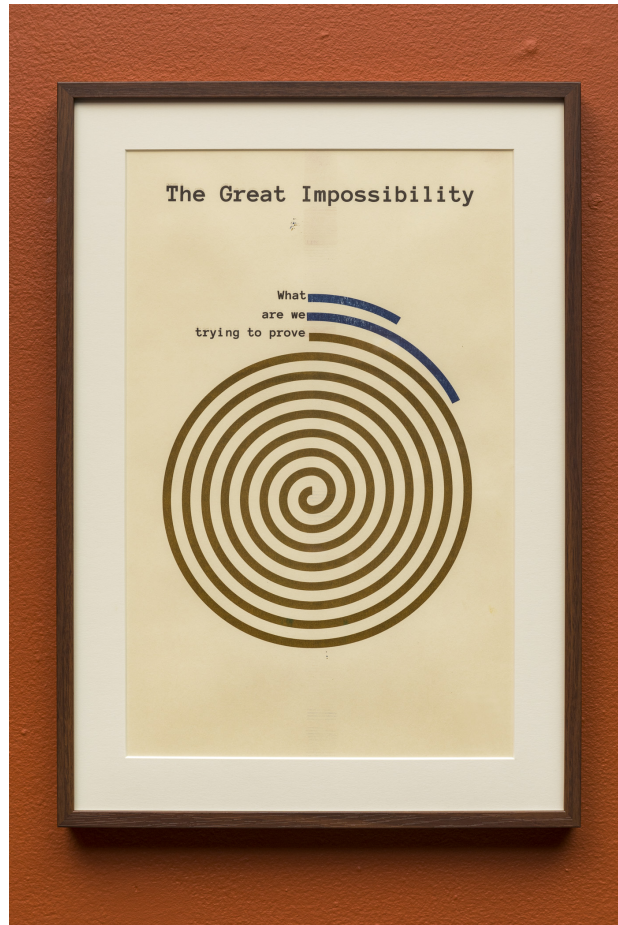


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*In Absentia* begins from this removal and asks what happens when data is made to disappear by those who seek to obscure the intertwined workings of racism and power. The series of prints, which mimic Du Bois' graphics, complicate assumptions about data's veracity in both presence and absence. Rather than striving for the goal of Du Bois and his contemporaries — which was to convince US society that Black folks were human and deserved fair treatment—the prints question why such a fact should need proving, and form a meditation on interpretability.

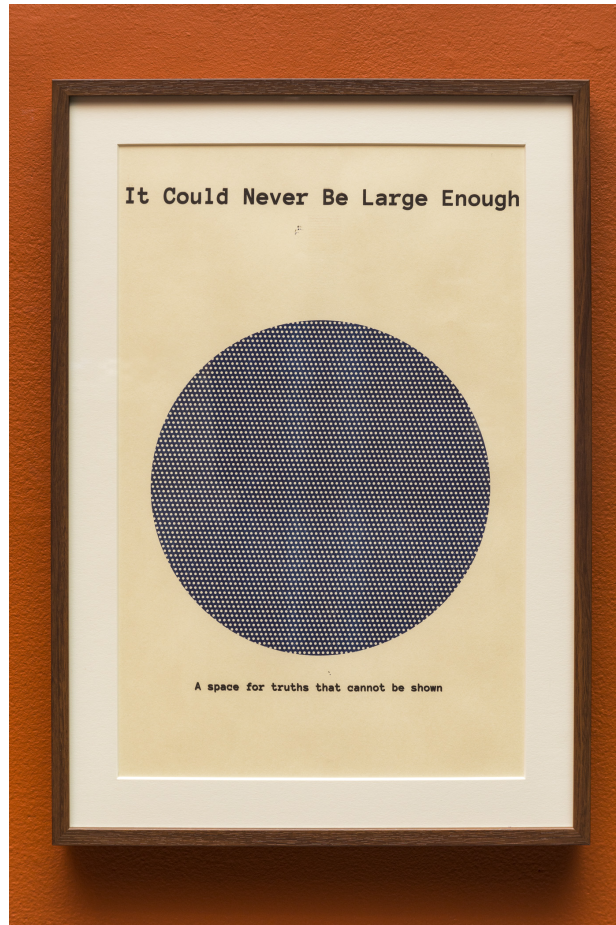


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Mimi Onuoha  
*Everything That Didn't Fit*  
Installation View  
bitforms gallery, New York  
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Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York. Photo: Emile Askey.



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**Everything That Didn't Fit**  
Mimi Qnūqha

In *Everything That Didn't Fit*, artist Mimi Qnūqha draws attention to the question logic of the technological, 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.

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