

# SCENES! E R O M T H E PHENOMENOMICON!

by 

*“To compose a brothy, flavoured account of how black lives come to matter, one must risk straying away from the categoricity of history. To take black mattering seriously is to become fugitive, to touch rough surfaces, to eat up the offending thing. One must perform the kind of mutiny that denies history its absolute claims to exclusivity. One must disguise oneself, take on new forms, and travel with mispronunciation and misrecognition if one is to exit the plantation.”*

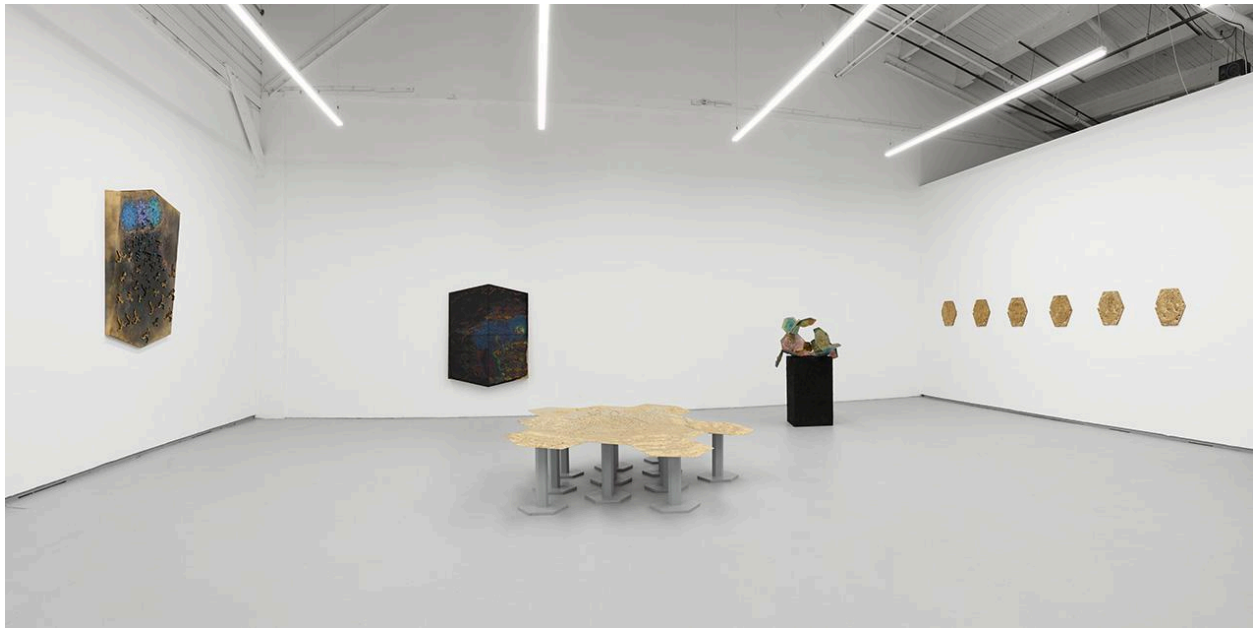
Báyò Akómoláfè, *Black Lives Matter, But to Whom?* (2023)<sup>1</sup>



*Contacting Lens (Eroded)*, 2022. Sand, glue, gold spray. 16 x 16 inches

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.democracyandbelongingforum.org/forum-blog/black-lives-matter-but-to-whom-part-1>



*Scenes! <sup>f</sup><sub>r</sub><sup>o</sup><sub>m</sub> Phenomenicon! Exhibition shot.*



*Scenes! <sup>f r o m</sup> <sub>t h e</sub> Phenomenicon! Exhibition shot.*



*Scenes! <sup>f</sup>r <sub>t</sub>h <sup>o</sup>m <sup>m</sup> Phenomenomicon! Exhibition shot.*

COMMITTEE

hiba ali (Chair)

Anya Kivarkas

Tarrah Krajnak



SCENES! UNEARTHING, 2023. Detail.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... 9**

**VISUAL ART: INTRODUCTION..... 10**

**SCENES! UNEARTHING..... 11**

**SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE..... 17**

**CONTACTING SERIES!..... 22**

*LENS*..... 23

*ARRAY*..... 28

*ANACACUYA*..... 32

**CONCLUSION..... 37**

**creative writing: introduction..... 39**

**black forest honey ham..... 40**

**excerpt! *f r o m* first voyager!..... 42**

**search 🌟 party..... 43**



*Contacting Anacacuya, 2024. detail.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

thanks, Mom. the encouragement, patience, and grace you've given me has guided me to much love in this world. and to my Brother. much of what i make – will make – is a gift to you. to the Ramirez family. y'all are silly. and to Nick, what a beautiful father figure you are. love you.

thank you to my committee: hiba, Anya, and Tarrah. you are also very silly. thank you for joining me on this adventure.

thank you Reanna! i hope they give you a raise and more vacation time.

thank you Joie. i'm so glad i get to share this world with you again. you too, Chelsea, my love. to Richard, Kate, and all my dear friends across space and time: thank you for giving me some words. thank you for keeping my breath warm. i love you, too.

see you soon

## VISUAL ART: INTRODUCTION

This paper<sup>2</sup> is divided into two sections, each composed of three parts. Section one discusses five artworks that feature in the terminal exhibition titled *SCENES! FROM THE PHENOMENOMICON!*. This research writing, titled in *ALL CAPS* to reflect the overarching voice throughout this practice, will note concepts, intentions, and symbols present in the visual artwork, and will draw connections to its formal decisions and references. Section two is composed of an introduction and three short creative writing vignettes – stories developed while working on the visual artwork which serve as open ended lore. The creative writing, written and titled in *lowercase* to reflect a contemplative subjectivity, plays speculatively with the themes presented in the visual artwork: *colonial contact*, *migration*, and *mutation*.

### SECTION ONE: RESEARCH WRITING

In *SCENES! UNEARTHING*, *colonial contact* is explored in the relationship between ancient Taíno graves and Afro-Latinx futurism.

In *SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE*, the theme of *migration* is drawn in relation to the concept of “panspermia”, a hypothesis on how life spreads and grows throughout the universe.

The *CONTACTING SERIES* discusses three sculptural works: *Contacting Lens*, *Contacting Array*, and *Contacting Anacacuya* and their relationship to *mutation* through *unification*, *distance*, and *permutation*. References are made apparent between sculptural works and their space-faring and/or mythological inspirations. Formal and conceptual connections between these works are explored.

### section two: creative writing

In *black forest honey ham*, siblings Azúcar and Jamón are visited by aliens.

In *excerpt! from the first voyager!*, we peek at the colonial origins of Azúcar and Jamón’s homeworld, and then towards the future.

In *searchparty*, Azúcar reflects on the what it may mean to explore the heavens.

## SECTION ONE:

---

<sup>2</sup> Hi. I’m going to use these footnotes to point to references, or to engage in digressions more casually. (I love how adrienne maree brown does this.) This paper functions in two contexts: to provide an immediate interpretation of the work for *you*, and to serve as a memory guide or journal for *me*. As an artist, I enjoy showing my hand. As a writer, my voice is my hand. But I still haven’t found the “right” voice(s) yet. So, I’m playing with it. Much like how this paper is divided into research and creative writing, it is also divided between formal and casual speech. K bye.

## *SCENES! UNEARTHING*



*SCENES! UNEARTHING, 2023.*

*Color pencil and graphite on black paper. 4 ft x 5 ft x 5 in.*

In this *SCENE!*, we're introduced to three figures huddled under a spotlight in a dark world. Their bodies are green in the light, and fade from purple to black where the light doesn't touch them. The head of each figure is surrounded by a mane of curling blues. The leftmost figure looks off frame. The rightmost figure looks off too, though different in expression. The center figure looks down into a pit between the three. They're gathered around a pile of golden bones, with the left figure holding a skull. The space around them is fractured into geometries that hold moments of orange and red gradation, loosely resembling mounds of sand. As we move further away from these figures and into the dark field around them, these colors move from orange to red, red to purple, and purple to black.

Materially, this *SCENE!* is a simple drawing on paper. This paper is mounted to a hexagonal board that hangs one inch from the wall at the top, and five inches from the wall at the

bottom. When hung low, the viewer looks downward into the *SCENE!*, in perspectival accordance with the illustrated figures. The sides are textured with sand, and colored in relation to the *SCENE'S!* lighting.



*SCENES! UNEARTHING, 2023. Side detail.*

This artwork, and the artwork throughout the entirety of this body of work, operates under a color palette I created called *Baroque Tropicália*. In merging the *Tropicália* movement's ideas of community and life-as-art, and tropical aesthetics as a subtle vessel for revolutionary ideas, with a *Baroque* sense of darkness, revelation, material, and space, typically associated with divine narratives, the emerging palette resembles a high contrast tropical explosion and symbolizes contact between different cultural ideas of color and space.<sup>3</sup>

*Colonial contact* is the first major theme in this body of work, and is represented through *SCENES! UNEARTHING*. This artwork was made in response to an article titled *Discovery Of*

---

<sup>3</sup> While *Baroque Tropicália* was initially inspired by the combination of two of my favorite periods in art history, there is a clear formal analogy to images taken by the James Webb Space Telescope, which will be discussed later in the *CONTACTING SERIES*.

*113 Ancient Taíno Graves In Guadeloupe Sheds Light On A Lost People*<sup>4</sup>, in which European archeologists unearthed a series of graves belonging to an ancient people indigenous to the Caribbean, the Taínos. The drawn out title drew me in with its light. What is a discovery? What does it mean to shed light? Colonialism brands its incursion on other bodies and lands as a discovery. Discoveries are elucidations. “To shed light” is another way of saying “to bring forth a truth”. This truth, to me, feels as though it was conjured by a violent and godly ego. *Colonial contact* is violence. Colonialism imposes truths that it itself has conjured to fill a void made by erasing the cultures and bodies of previously occupied land. In this way, I interpret this article not as a story of how ancient graves were found, but as colonialism's recurring resurgence onto bodies it has once brutalized. It is a story of colonialism's continued conquest. Here, it is the conquest of those who have escaped its ego, the *lost people*.

And what are *lost people*? I have two interpretations. The first is that *lost people* are the ones who have passed away in the light of *colonial contact*. The second reflects, perhaps paradoxically, those who have slipped through the cracks and escaped into the void.



“Burial No. 60, positioned with contorted and layered limbs that fortuitously prevented the acidic soil from eroding the bones.”

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://allthatsinteresting.com/Taino-graves>



*SCENES! UNEARTHING, 2023. Detail. "Burial"*

*UNEARTHING* sees three *lost people* within a void, communing around a pile of bones. These figures are based on the likeness of my close family members, specifically elements from my sister and nephew. To be able to recognize *lost people*, and find kin in them, is to establish a heritage or familiarity in the void – to find a home in the darkness.

My family is from the Dominican Republic. Similar to how my *lost people* are drawn as verdantly green folk amidst a sea of tessellations, the Dominican Republic is a vivacious island cradled in tropical waves. The Taíno people of the Caribbean were of the first *lost people* in the West – that is to say, of the first to be colonized. As Dominicans, we share their blood. To be in lineage with *lost people* is to understand that people do not stay *lost*, they change. Though colonial contact scorches through erasure, we are still here. Changed, but here.

The original trajectory of our lineage shifted due to *colonial contact* by the first voyagers from Europe. This *colonial contact* led to a violent discovery, a disturbance that eventually resulted in a widespread *migration* around the globe, and the change, or *mutation*, of pre-colonial bodies. The *migration* and *mutation* of pre-colonial bodies is how this work interprets *diaspora*. Generations removed, the repercussions of *colonial contact* still reverberate throughout time.

The first of these repercussions is the dissociation of the body from its ancestral home through movement to other lands. The second is the resulting transformation of that body.

While working on the artwork presented in *SCENES!*, I reminisced on the tensions in my family's diaspora story. Of my family, only my grandmother, mother and sister are from the DR, with my grandmother being the only one to have lived there in any permanent way. Our distance from our original home<sup>5</sup> grows with every generation. Our language shifts, our bodies change. This work came from that distance.



*SCENES! UNEARTHING, 2023. Detail. "Los Tres Magos"*

*SCENES! UNEARTHING* is an intentional shift in trajectory, one that reinterprets the unearthing of graves as a fateful reunion of ancestors and descendants. By replacing the figures of the archeologists with figures of the deceased's descendants, the *SCENE!* shifts perspective away from a colonial legacy and towards an ancestral continuation. Narrative agency returns to

---

<sup>5</sup> My grandmother started calling it *her* home, recently. She said it once while I was making this body of work and it caught me off guard. I did this to get closer to my ancestral home, and to hear my grandmother's perspective of the generational divide in a single word was challenging for me. Questions I have for people in a similar position: how do you claim that home, when you aren't from there? How do you claim a home that someone chose to leave for a very good reason? Is what I am doing claiming home – or a connection to it – or am I *changing* that home? Hm.

the *lost people* unearthed and their descendents. It is up to the figures in the *SCENE!* to decide what will become of what remains. Their thoughts are rendered opaque. The light that shines upon them is not one that reveals, but accentuates the darkness – their suspicions, speculation, and dreams.



(from left to right)  
*SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE, 2024.*  
*SCENES! UNEARTHING, 2023.*

**SECTION ONE:**  
***SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE***

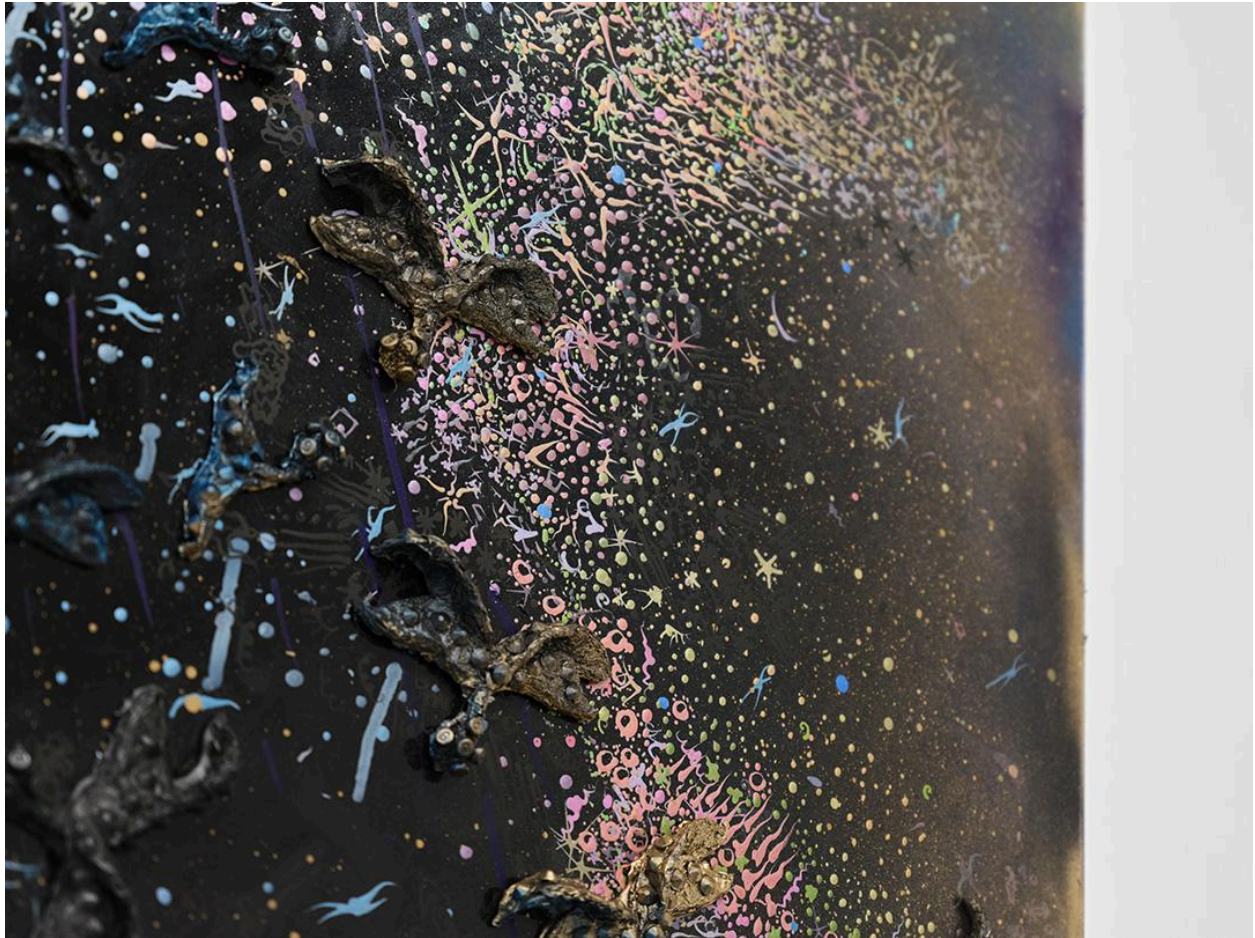


*SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE, 2024.*  
Ink, epoxy resin, and spray on black acrylic. 4 ft x 5ft x 5 in.

We pass through and beyond the vignette: the gold, blue and purple nebulous clouds. Against a deep black backdrop, celestial curtains part ways, revealing a *SCENE!* among the stars. The universe is presented as a rich accumulation of intricate, abstract, little gestures and colors that build and evaporate into a vast cosmic expanse. On the upper left, three halos of blue curls emanate streams of color and mayhem. Silhouetted against this mayhem are representations of dandelion seeds that gain color and scale as they fall closer to and over the cloudy vignette.

This *SCENE!* is a radical material and methodological departure from its counterpart, *UNEARTHING*. The earthy paper, colored pencil, and graphite is transformed into a gaseous and heavenly atmosphere. Swashes of metallic gold, blue and purple spray paint create a gaseous

field that is both opaque and reflective. The looseness of its application pollinates the *SCENE!* with a faint dust that twinkles like the night sky. Gestural pearlescent ink stands in graphic contrast against the mesmerizing and reflective black acrylic, creating the effect of an endless abyss, texturally rich in high energy lights.

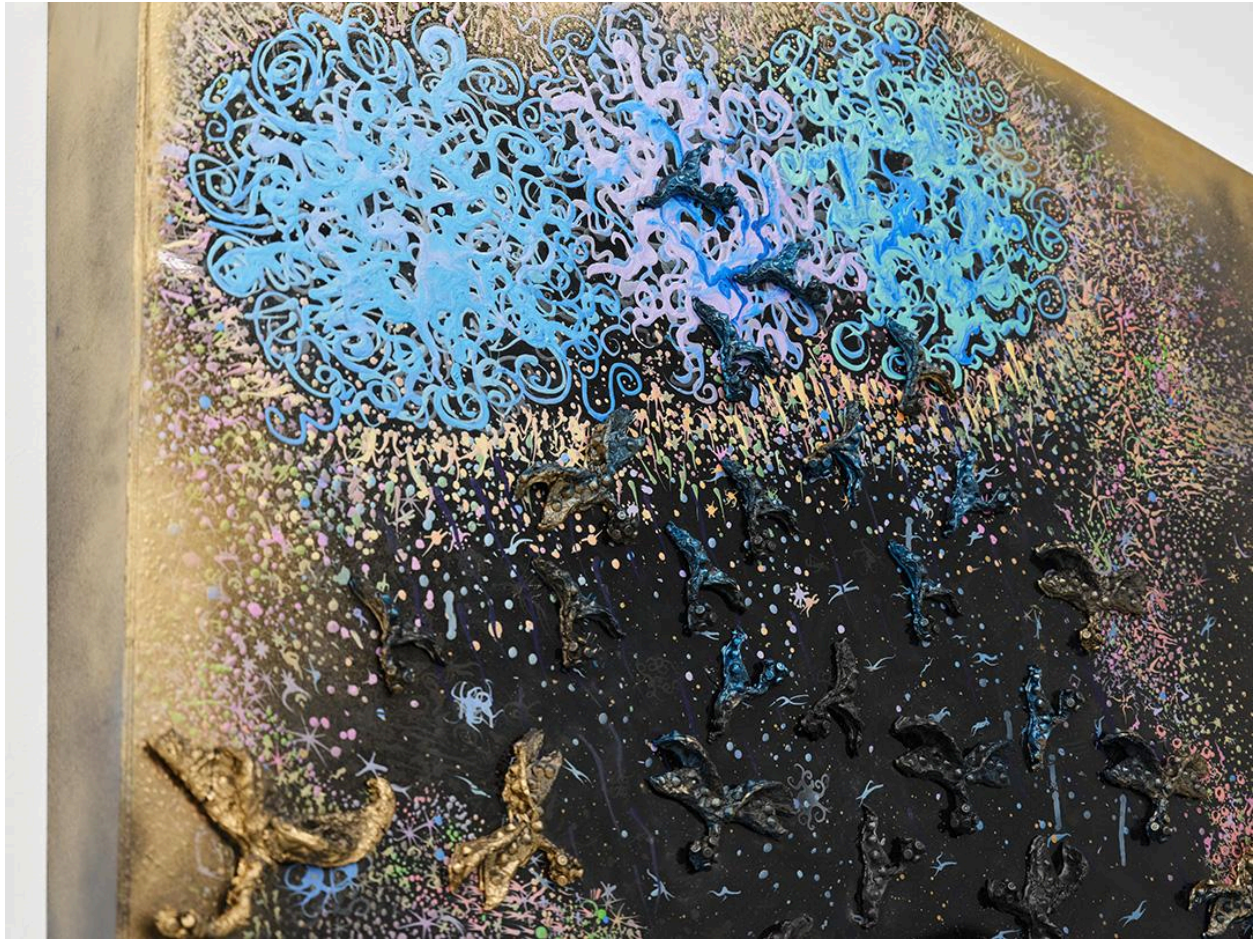


*SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE*, 2024. Detail.

I refer to the textural gestures that compose the sweep of galactic sparkles throughout the drawing as *particulates*, a term we'll see again in the *CONTACTING SERIES*. Improvisationally, each color is assigned a tiny gesture that is repeated to create a field. These gestures are overlaid with other gestures, which sometimes blend or transition into new colors. When fully accumulated, these particulates create a sweeping, dynamic gestural color field that swims in the void like a mass of amoebas.<sup>6</sup> This accumulation represents a universe filled with high energy, complicated and improvisational relationships, and a lively texture.

---

<sup>6</sup> If I could afford the room, I would talk about Joan Miró, children's drawings, Carl Jung, doodles as a gateway to the subconscious, or modernist chicken scratching. There is an introspection and deep subconsciousness inherent to drawing freely. I can see this most obviously in my developmental sketches for these projects. *PROMENADE* uses automatic/free drawing to find a sense of freedom in space. I suppose this footnote is a seed for later.



*SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE*, 2024. Detail. “*Los Tres Magos*”

Though *SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE* is materially and methodologically distinct from its partner, it does take visual motifs presented in *UNEARTHING* and carry them forward. The blue curls that wrap around the figures’ heads in *UNEARTHING* appear again, this time as colossal planetary bodies that radiate energy in the dark sky. The blue curl motif acts as a celestial genealogy, established through curl patterns.

Where *SCENES! UNEARTHING* explores and reinterprets a moment of *colonial contact* and ends on a newfound narrative agency for an Afro-Latinx diaspora, *SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE* continues the narrative by taking this agency throughout the stars. Concerned with *migration*, this scene visually illustrates a method of *panspermia*. *Panspermia* is “a philosophical thought that life migrates naturally through space [and] states that the seeds of life exist all over the Universe and can be propagated through space from one location to another.”<sup>7</sup> Here, the panspermic seed takes the form of a futurist dandelion. Dandelion seeds are often used

---

<sup>7</sup> Panspermia link, article about extremophiles. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-95717-5.00009-8>

on Earth as a vessel for granting wishes. Here, the wish is for a long lasting diaspora rooted not in violence, but reunion.



*SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE, 2024. Side view.*



Contacting Lens Timeline, 2024. Detail GIF.

## SECTION ONE: ***CONTACTING SERIES!***

The *CONTACTING SERIES!* is a group of three artworks made in relief and/or modular sculpture. The *SERIES!* is inspired by two space-faring projects that represent mankind's eagerness to communicate with distant worlds, and the lengths they'll travel to get there: Carl Sagan's *Golden Record* (1977)<sup>8</sup> and the *James Webb Space Telescope* (2021)<sup>9</sup>.

The *Golden Record* was a time capsule of images, voices, and sounds intended to represent the story of mankind for extraterrestrials. Launched aboard the *Voyager 1* and *2*, the capsule is currently edging away from our solar system and into interstellar space. The inscriptions on the surface of the record provide instructions for accessing its contents, as well as path to return to Earth. The *Golden Record* serves as the base inspiration for *Contacting Lens*, the primary artwork of the *SERIES!*. In the context of the creative writing, *Lens* is a fictional tool referred to in *black forest honey ham* as a communication device.

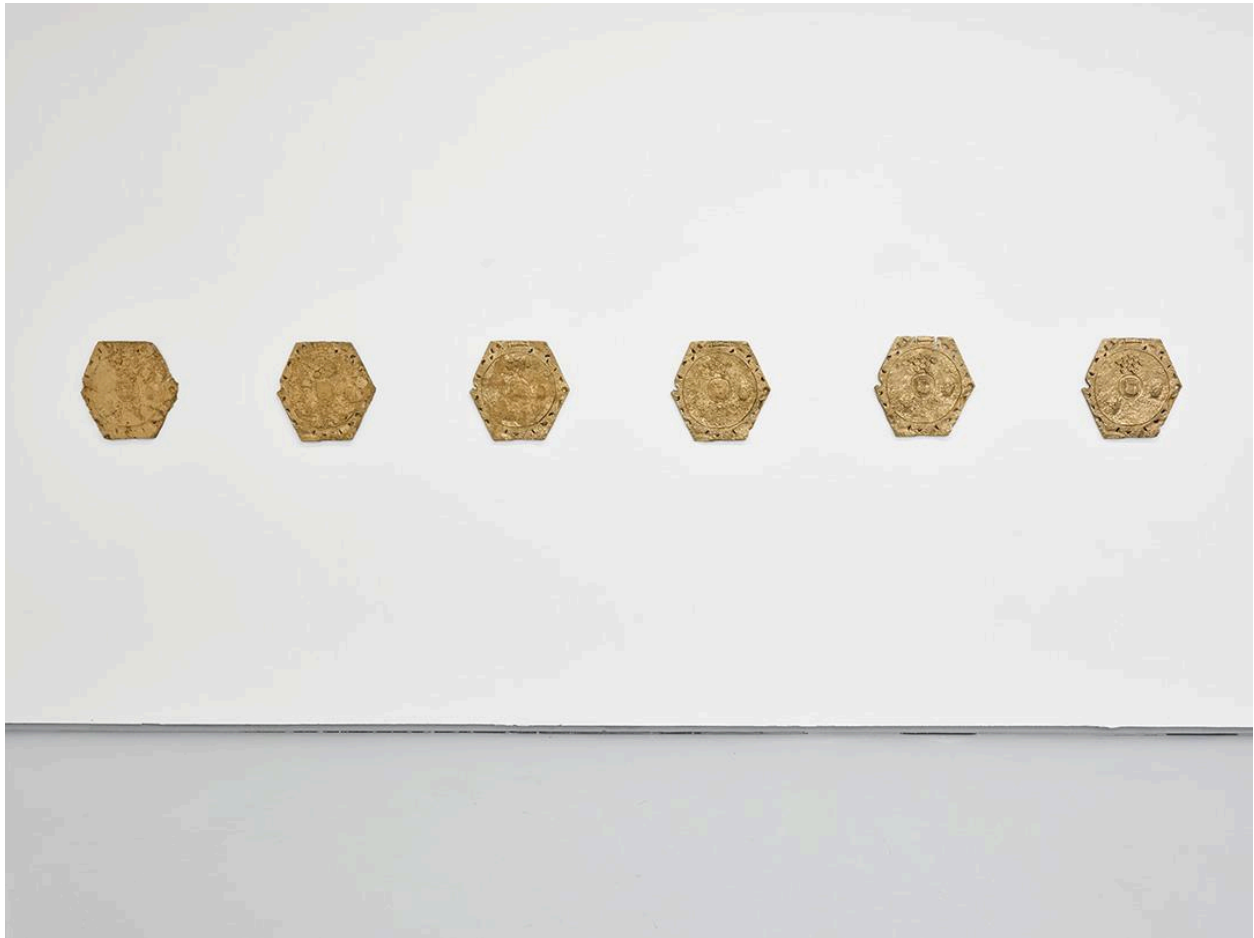
Aboard the *James Webb Space Telescope* is a series of golden, reflective hexagons referred to as its mirror array. Using this array, researchers are able to peer deeper into the universe than ever before – allegedly far enough to witness the Big Bang. All works in this project are hexagonal, in reference to this mirror. In mirroring this form, my intention is to depict these *SCENES!* and *SERIES!* as reflections of what may already be out there, in the void. The *JWST's* mirror array unfolds like origami once the telescope finds its resting destination in space. This unfolding became inspiration for the modular sculptural works *Contacting Array* and *Contacting Anacacuya*.

*Contacting Lens*, *Array*, and *Anacacuya*, represent the final major theme: *mutation*. After the *migration* depicted in *SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE*, the seeds of life sprout across the universe. Cultures grow, and begin to change. The rate of mutation is slow, but distinctions begin to accumulate. The following relief and sculptures are reflections of diasporic accumulations across space. Though these fictional artifacts share much in the way of form and concept, referencing their shared ancestral roots, their permutations and materiality reveals a diversity in thought and feeling.

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/golden-record/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://webb.nasa.gov/>



*Contacting Lens Timeline, 2024. Aluminum epoxy, sand spray paint. Variable dimensions.*

On the surface of a golden hexagon are gestures of dashes, linked chain forms, letters and waves. Protruding from the surface of this tablet are symbols carried across the vastness of space. Turtle shells along the bottom left and center right, a strange configuration of smaller hexagons that mimic the form of the tablet at the top, and in the center a text that seems to read “NOWS THE IM PRK”.

This *Contacting Lens* was made using an open faced mold. The process begins by making a blank model out of clay. After pressing objects into the surface of the clay, and embedding it with various materials, the object is surrounded in silicone, which then becomes the mold. The mold is then used to cast the same form repeatedly, with the potential to use different materials. The materials that composed the original model were personal artifacts and indices<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> In the future, I’d like to work with archives and indices. I currently understand an index as a log of information for something that has since vanished, while an archive may typically include an index, its source, its contextual history, etc. For this practice, moldmaking acts as an indexical catalog – a way of retaining information for something that has been *lost*. How does that relate to the idea of *lost people*?

of common toys or improvisationally gathered hardware. The turtle shell was cast from *Cornelius*, a toy turtle that would sit on the dashboard of my first car and ensure safe passage on my journey home. Mold-making is a method of reproducing objects with extreme fidelity. In my practice, I also utilize mold-making as a unification process. In unifying personal artifacts and commonplace materials, I'm extending the metaphor of *particulate migration* in *SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE* into the realm of *mutation*. By merging the personal into the ubiquitous, the accumulation of what is small and common becomes a more significant moment. This is *mutation through unification*.



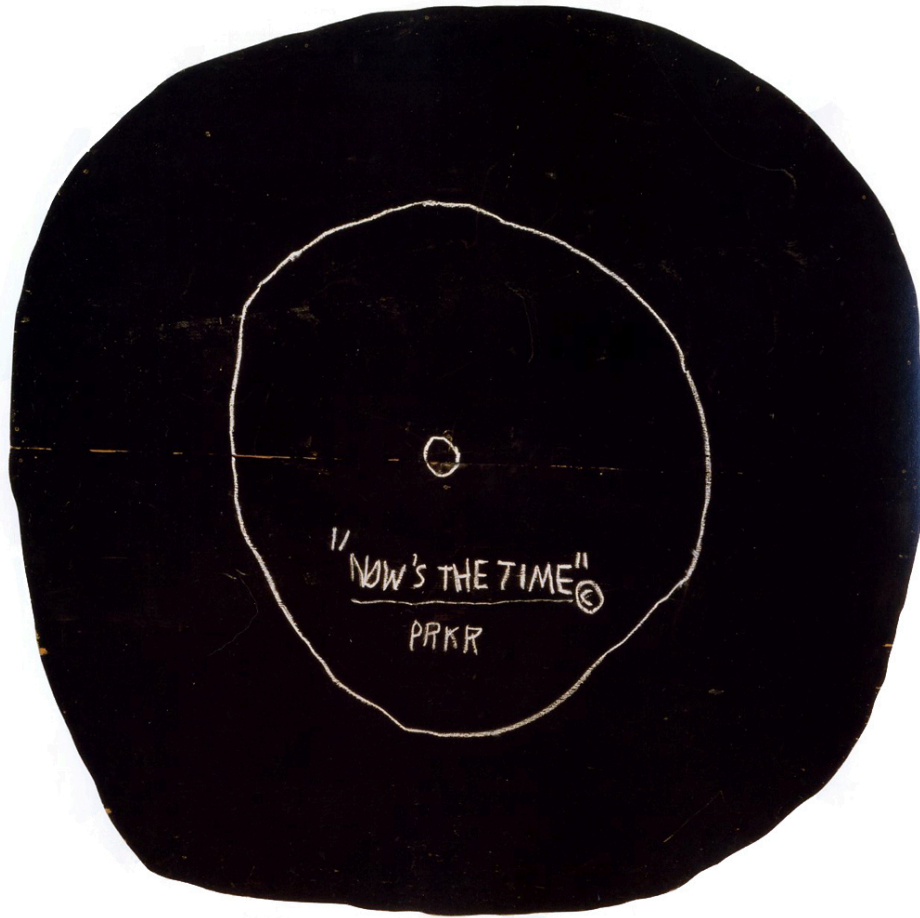
Studio Shot of *Cornelius*, a toy turtle, playing in the *Contacting Lens* mold.



*Contacting Lens, 2022. Detail, "The Constellation of Cornelius"*



*Contacting Lens, 2022. Detail, "Keypad"*



*Now's the Time*, Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1985<sup>11</sup>

Just as the *Golden Record* flies through space awaiting contact<sup>12</sup> with other life forms, the *Contacting Lens* was meant to drift along the stars. Its message, however, is not meant to be universal. The message of the *Lens* is coded in a fluid language of symbols, meant to be understood as specific, or personal, and inaccessible to those “not in the know”.<sup>13</sup>

*Lens*, echoing the *Golden Record* at the root of its inception, contains music from our world. Stamped into the center of the *Lens* is a reference to Charlie Parker’s *Now’s the Time*. The title, which primarily alludes to Parker’s famous Bebop track, is one often used explicitly by artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat or implicitly as a rallying cry for social change from activists such as Martin Luther King Jr. In this work, repetitive letters are removed from the text, a cheeky way of saying there won’t be other chances. *Now’s the time*.

---

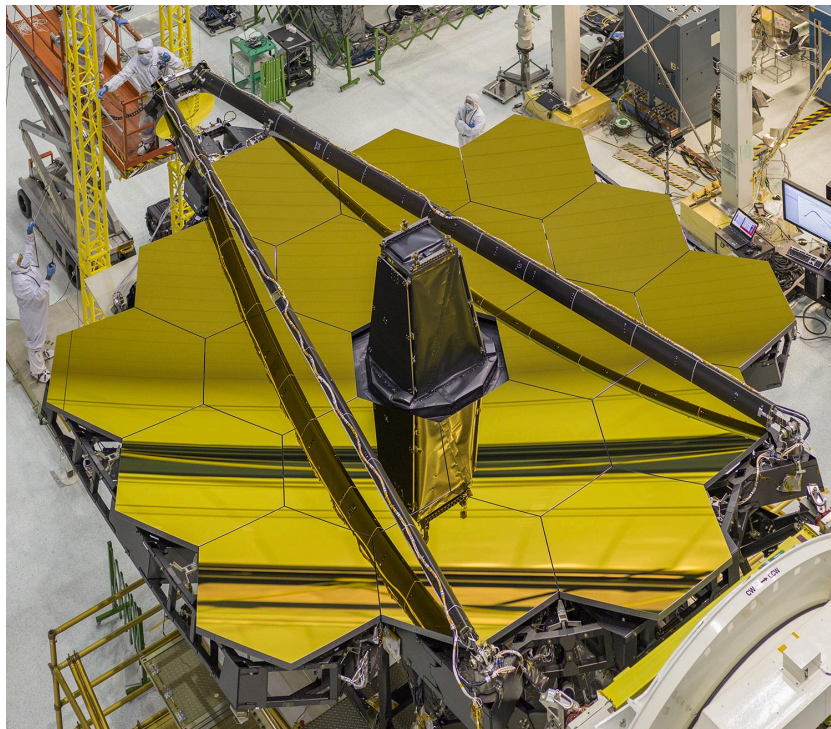
<sup>11</sup> I’d been thinking of a way to reference this artwork since 2019. This is a perfect artwork. Its simple, iconic, organic, hand written, musical, thematic, and narrative. I only wish it had more color – but I guess it wouldn’t be the same.

<sup>12</sup> *Contact* (1997) dir. Robert Zemeckis is a fantastic movie. Unrelated, but I always get Jodie Foster and Sigourney Weaver confused. Unrelated again, Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan (the record’s creative director) met and later married once the project was over, making this... a love story!

<sup>13</sup> Welcome aboard, lol.



*Contacting Lens, 2022. Detail, "The Array"*



*James Webb Space Telescope (2021). Detail, "Mirror Array"*

## ARRAY



*Contacting Array*, 2024. Aluminum, mixed materials, gold spray paint. 6 ft x 8 ft x 2 ft.

The *Array* is a stage where *SCENES!* of the universe unfold. It is composed of 11 golden hexagons, each resting on a short gray pedestal on an incline. On its surface is a high energy collision of textures that culminate in an abstract landscape. From the upper left extremity to just above the lower right, golden sand and foam stretch across the plane. Stripes in the center of the composition give the *Array* a shimmering graphic edge. The stripes drift off in the upper and right hand panels, giving way to three circular symbols.

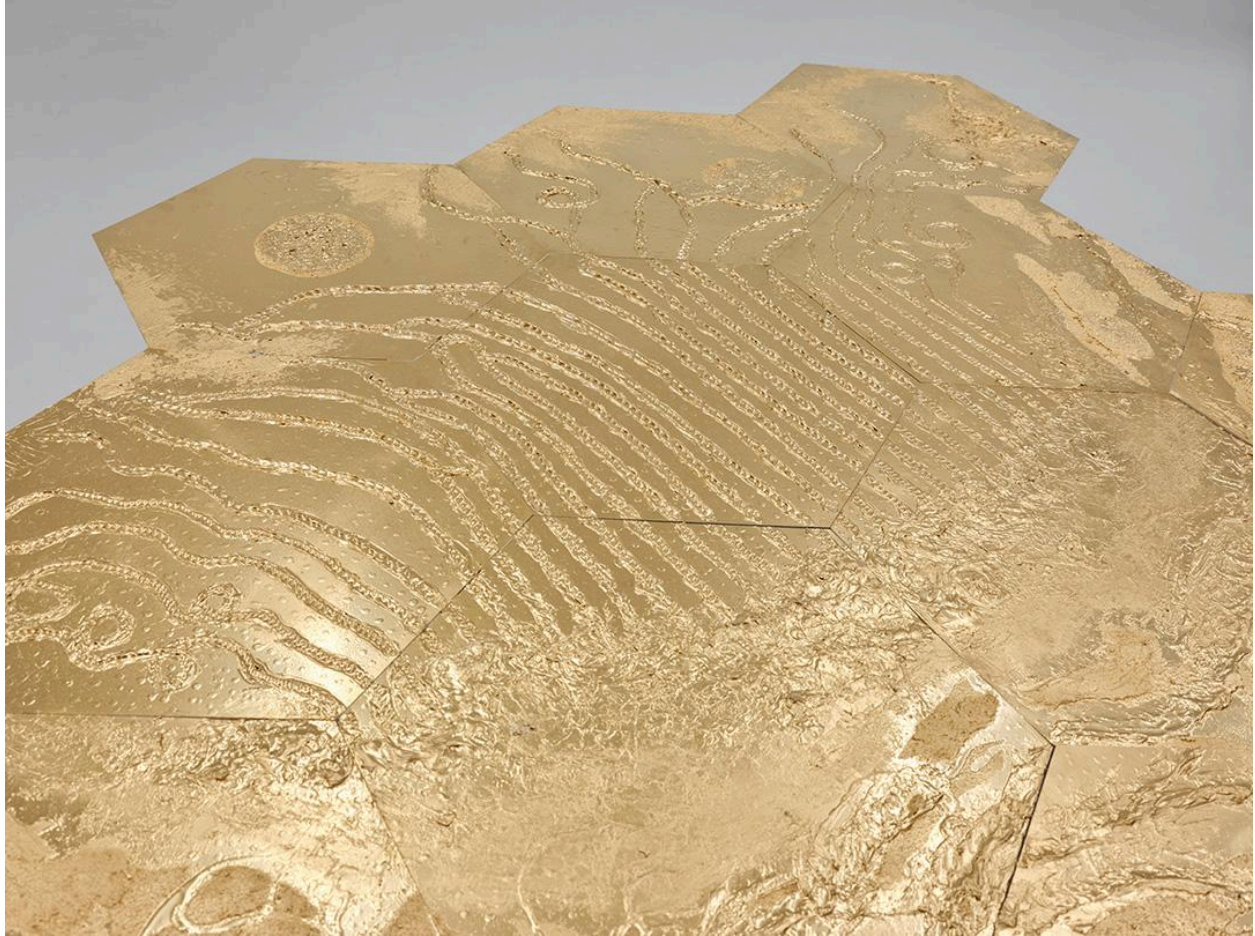
Previously, the form of the *Array* was referenced as an iconic element in *Contacting Lens*, establishing an explicit communication between the works. This clues the audience into the idea that this is a technology meant to send or receive information. As the immediate successor of *Lens*, *Array* works to imagine a view of multiple *Lenses* in concert – though intentionally more distanced from personal or cultural symbolism. Directly representational forms, like the *Constellation of Cornelius* or the *Keypad*, are removed, in favor of a more open ended abstraction. This *distance* through abstraction allows for further room for the audience to project

their own meaning onto the work, rather than attempt to decode opaque meaning as in the case of *Contacting Lens*.



*Contacting Array*, 2024. Detail.

Audience participation through room for interpretation in this way is crucial. In the *JWST*, light is reflected off of the gold mirror into a smaller, singular lens, which then reflects light into a computer for processing. The mirror array appears unphased – a neutral, or objective party. This is not the case in *Contacting Array*. When light hits this gold surface, it accentuates the details and physicality. The image captured by the *Array* emerges on its surface, implicating itself or drawing attention to our means of observation. This allows the audience to see *SCENES!* from outer space not only as an image, but through tactility, sensory subjectivity, and presence. In this way, *mutation through distance* ironically brings people closer to the subject matter through direct bodily confrontation... Like being in the presence of a true alien.



Contacting Array, 2024. Detail.

Still, there are broad references to other works and ideas. The overall form of the *Array* is humanoid, and typically documented as oriented with two legs pointed downward, and arms spread open wide.<sup>14</sup> It's horizontal, but tilted, which could imply the “figure” is rising or lying down. Configuring the *Array* into a humanoid form implies that there are people in the landscape depicted – that the body and the environment are one.<sup>15</sup>

The three circular forms in the upper right hand panels relate to the trio forms throughout the work – the *lost people* of *SCENES! UNEARTHING*, the blue celestial bodies in *SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE*, and the base three modules that form *Contacting Anacacuya*. In the *Array*, these three circular forms are phases of planetary change. The panel which stands in for the head of the *Array* represents the first stage, where the crust contains liquid. The second stage, which could be seen as the shoulder, is the liquid cracking through the crust. The third,

---

<sup>14</sup> I took a different path to get to the *Array*'s humanoid form, but sometimes I think of this splaying of body parts as a reference to Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*. Seeing the two works in conjunction offers me a dry laugh – because they're essentially two sides of the same coin.

<sup>15</sup> This theme appears subtly throughout the work, but is not necessarily the main focus and thus has no more space in this tiny paper. I have a lot to say about this, but it requires future research, writing and artwork for me to feel I can share more. So, here I am planting a seed. Future me: how has it grown?

which is noticeably different in texture and relief, acts as the liquid hardening around the crust, which then becomes the core. One could interpret this sequence as the event which takes place within the image of the *Array* at large.



Contacting Array, 2024. Detail.

## ANACACUYA



*Contacting Anacacuya*, 2024. Epoxy resin, spray paint. Variable scale.

Color rolls over the surface of these small modules. Each module is a collection of tiny textural galaxies, like a tidepool. These little moments are connected at the side by brackets that send each plane into every direction in space, forming a core, or shell-like structure.

*Anacacuya* is materially and methodologically consistent with *Contacting Lens*. Through mold-making, a model is made out of common and personal materials, then unified into a module. Where *Anacacuya* stands on its own is in the arrangement of these modules into improvisational compositions using clear polycarbonate brackets bent at varying degrees.



*Contacting Anacacuya, 2024. Detail.*

Color-wise, *Anacacuya* uses *Baroque Tropicalia* through the gradation of tropical metallics to create an artwork that feels at home both in the past and the future, of nature and of the spiritually ephemeral. And fittingly so, as it, like *Contacting Lens*, continues to visually reference elements of Sagan's *Golden Record*, a futurist object with warm geometry that houses history and societal myth. The myth contained in *Anacacuya* expands and contracts in degrees between personal and cultural magnitude via the inclusion of a Schrödinger's<sup>16</sup> seashell.

---

<sup>16</sup> I'm being silly here. This term isn't real. It is in reference to Schrödinger's cat, "a famous thought experiment that demonstrates the idea in quantum physics that tiny particles can be in two states at once until they're observed."



*Contacting Anacacuya, 2024. Detail, “The Magic Conch”*

On two separate occasions, I was given a seashell. One was a gift from home, from the mythical beaches of the New Jersey shore. The other came from my ancestral home, the Dominican Republic. The shells were identical to each other, and after one was misplaced I couldn't tell which shell I had, or where it was from. For me, this Schrödinger's seashell symbolizes a *unification* of personal and ancestral home, a clash of *distance*, and a *permutation of meaning*.



*Contacting Anacacuya*, 2024. Detail. “*The Sea*”

The decision to include this seashell surrounded by a disk is in reference to the Taíno myth of Anacacuya<sup>17</sup>, a man who is pushed into the sea while looking at a conch. After Anacacuya plagues the local islands with famine, the currents whisk him into the stars, illustrating the source of seasonal hurricanes – and establishing the cyclical connection between sea and sky. This merger is symbolized by two rainbows, one arch below and one arch above. By illustrating mythology through the use of a personal artifact and common materials, I’m repeating a merger of high and low while aligning my personal narrative to a placemaking cosmology outside of the Western norm or canon. Furthermore, in improvisationally constructing this archway out of modules and attachment nodes, attention is drawn to a playful approach to the construction of complex narratives and identities, an approach I call a *permutation of form*.

---

<sup>17</sup> Typically, Anacacuya is associated with “the underwater” and Polaris – the north star. But my interpretation follows a writing called *Cave of the Jagua: The Mythological World of the Tainos* by Antonio M. Stevens Arroyo, in which Arroyo identifies Anacacuya as Orion’s belt. This three star constellation is also known in the Caribbean, and by my grandmother, as *Los Tres Magos (The Three Wise Men)*. As a teen, she told me this was her favorite constellation, because she could see it from Jersey and the DR. I loved that. And I was happy to find an ancestral story for my favorite constellation. To myself in my studio, I refer to the figures in *UNEARTHING* and all trio forms as *Los Tres Magos*.



*Contacting Anacacuya, 2024. Detail, "The Sea Bed"*

## CONCLUSION

*SCENES! F R O M T H E PHENOMENOMICON!* is a shelter in the distant cosmos. It plays with personal and cultural mythos by merging autobiographical, historical and mythological figures and events to present a glimmer into a fictional world. This world is built through the connections established between the artworks and their creative writing counterparts. Visual languages and motifs are born from thoughtful imagination and references to personal, mythological, and futurist mythmaking and expanded upon through colorful and material spontaneity. Across a variety of hexagonal drawing-sculpture hybrids, whose forms owe gratitude toward Carl Sagan's *Golden Record* and the *James Webb Space Telescope*, which symbolize a quest to establish contact with life from far away, the heavens and its inhabitants are stumbled upon in dazzling darkness and cosmic color both large in scale and intimate in detail.

Concerned with the effects of colonial contact, and how these effects could propagate into the deep future, this work begins by reinterpreting what it means to engage with people and place. *SCENES! UNEARTHING* takes what was a moment of *colonial contact* and remixes it, reuniting buried ancestors with diasporic kin. From there, *SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE!* shoots off, showing us how this kin has begun to *migrate* and flourish among the stars. The sculptural works presented in the *CONTACTING SERIES!* play with how kin have *mutated* over time by looking at variations on a singular motif.

The word *phenomenomicon* is a makeshift carrier bag<sup>18</sup> – a shelter I've constructed to hold the feelings, dreams, and people of a little world I wanted to share with you. It is a portmanteau of the words *phenomena* which means a speculative person, thing, or event, and *Necronomicon*, in reference to a fictional book of evil gods found in the science-fiction subgenre of cosmic horror. Thus, the stage upon which these *SCENES!* are set is a speculation that hides us from the horror of the cosmos.

What is this horror? It is not the cosmos itself. Not while wishes are cast from comet tails. Not while the moon rhymes with an ebbing tide. *Here*, too, the explosions of colorful mayhem and gasping lights and whirling plasma storms appear in their terrestrial form, the tumultuous waves that breathe glittering foam and curl around my ankles and pull me deeper into the sand. Just as how gravity pulls me into the stars. This is not horror. This is home.

The true horror must be the destruction of this home. Once, the evil gods dreamed of connecting islands in the sea like constellations. And in doing so they ravaged the world. When they finished, they found that the real constellations are made of islands in the sky. The history of colonization is thus a prophecy of cosmic horror. Is it fate, then, that when the next explorers

---

<sup>18</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin's carrier bag theory of fiction.  
<https://stillmoving.org/resources/the-carrier-bag-theory-of-fiction>

land at the doorstep of Mars or beyond, they will leave a path of horror in their wake as they make their way to further and further worlds, just as they had done before?

In this *phenomenicon*, we've detoured from a potential colonial future and found an oasis. We've seen that an alternative is possible. It will feel like ours in some ways, but over time, it will become its own – free to grow and change however it sees fit.

blessing the boats  
BY LUCILLE CLIFTON

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide  
that is entering even now  
the lip of our understanding  
carry you out  
beyond the face of fear  
may you kiss  
the wind then turn from it  
certain that it will  
love your back    may you  
open your eyes to water  
water waving forever  
and may you in your innocence  
sail through this to that

## **section two:**

### ***creative writing: introduction***

To *grow* and to *change*. When Octavia E. Butler writes<sup>19</sup> about growth and change, she's sure to describe how change can be as brutal as it is necessary. As beautiful as it is difficult. It can be primal, existential, harrowing, pervasive, yet also subtle, fluttering, and captivating. The phrase "butterfly effect" offers the appropriate linguistic magnitude. Change is atomically fundamental to the way things traverse the universe. Whether we like it or not.

The artwork featured in the visual section of *SCENES! FROM THE PHENOMENOMICON!*, when viewed separately from its written companion pieces, could be viewed as an open-ended and optimistic approach to *change* in an afro-futurist diaspora – a universe where Black and Brown and Green people may fly freely between worlds. Drawing inspiration from Latinx speculative fiction, a cultural subgenre of science fiction that aligns itself with themes of colonization, alienation, and migration, the visual work also rebels against colonial displacement and positively contemplates migration as a mode of adventure and celebration – and ultimately as a form of agency over narrative.

The purpose of this section is not to conflict with these goals. The following creative writing serves to add nuance, conceptual maturity and another form of openness to its visual sibling. The writing uses a soft worldbuilding strategy, which aims to provide an atmosphere through a subjectivity of the character of Azúlcar. To use an atmospheric subjectivity to create the world offers an experiential truth – that it is not possible to fully grasp the machinations of the world around you. A world is a psychic memory, an accumulation of little details that come together to form swashes of color and space, emotionally determined to be the world. Over the course of three short vignettes, Azúlcar will pontificate on change due to the alien intervention, allegorical to colonial interference, via the proboscises – the long flexible snout – of the alien Flybotomists.

In *black forest honey ham*, Azúlcar and his sibling Jamón are visited by aliens. Jamón undergoes a grotesque transfiguration. This transformation implies how *lost people* became green, as in *SCENES! UNEARTHING*.

In *excerpt! from the first voyager*, Azúlcar draws a parallel between the first moment of colonial contact of their homeworld, ■■■, and what's happening to Jamón. Azúlcar's description of the night sky aligns with our view in *SCENES! DANDELION PROMENADE*.

In *searchparty*, Azúlcar asks what it means to move across the sky.

---

<sup>19</sup> My favorite of hers is currently the *Xenogenesis* series, also called *Lilith's Brood*. In this story, Aliens arrive on earth after a nuclear fallout, repairing the planet with the intention to breed with the remaining humans they have preserved. Their method of propagation implies the *unification* of multiple species, the *migration* of the new brood, and its following *permutations*.

## *black forest honey ham*

### day

as the venom entered his wound, jamón clapped at his neck, smearing a deep scarlet blood onto his hand. the mosquitos favorite targets were promising little buds, and us honey-coated beanstalks blossomed in the molten air. we were molasses boys, and as we played our sweat fell like syrup, bonding our shovels to our palms in a sweet stick. with my free hand, i swatted away at the bloodsuckers in vain. before i could retreat behind my eyelids, dripping with sweet salt, i froze at the sight my brother. jamón had grown a million wings. twitching, twisting, fluttery scales erupted from his boiling skin. fear burrowed in through my eyes. it clawed into my mind and whispered to me that if he was not suffering from this biblical plague, it must be because he had become it. i did not dare disagree. he held out his red hand until the bloodsuckers hummed and drank from it. and that was when i learned how angels were made.

when jamón wilted over his shovel, i fanned him with my mine until his wings evaporated. many mosquitos had left the pores they'd dug wide open. jamón's body was slick with a deep red, oil-like blood. i'd never seen a shine so heinous. because his limbs were lost in the mountains of swelling bug bites, i had to roll him into our air conditioned home.

jamón's body glittered eerily in the low living room light. like a skinned nerve, the size of a boulder. for a brief moment i could sense his nerves drop in the comfort of our home. but his anxieties would soon fester again, and i was running out of ideas. his body was too warm for the nest of ice packs and trays, so the towels beneath him flooded ruby water. soon he would begin to rot. mom was at her earth job, or maybe her mars job – regardless, the distance meant messages from █████ would be delayed, even with our contacting lens. i could hear his cells bake like a potato. a faint ring from a fleshy bell.

### night

my clenched jaw clicked whenever i answered the flybotomist's questions. how long had i stared at them in simmering silence? i strained to see beyond the steam in my eyes. and they were already difficult to observe. their transparent bodies magnified the space behind them so intensely that, to avoid a migraine, you had to focus on their bubbling insides. in this way alone, we were not so different. i, too, was boiling. i held your hand the way fire holds light.

all they said before they began was that we were lucky. and while it is true that since they arrived your swelling had gone down and the blood you spilled had coagulated, i cannot hold my suspicions. when i look at your brow i infer that it is the mirror image of mine. the hand that rests in mine may have once been yours, the same that i pulled close to me when you were afraid. even the cadence of your breath, despite being swarmed by these otherworldly creatures, could be yours. it may be. but i do not recognize you anymore.

what have you become? when you were a mountain of pussing yellow and red flesh lying upon the kitchen table, i knew you then. but when they arrived... when they intervened... fluttering over you... with their proboscises siphoning red from your heart and flesh, filling it instead with the green that brewed inside *them*... i only knew the differences between us. these parasites worked on you until you became, in their eyes, purely transfigured... and in mine, so far away.

azúcar

*excerpt! <sup>f r o m</sup> <sub>t h e</sub> first voyager!*

then...

*“i must admit this planet is beautiful from above. under the sun, countless waves are dazzlingly iridescent. the many rainbow whirlpools that drift lazily across the surface of this land refuse to part with my gaze. the air, too, arrests me. the breath of this world is... an unfamiliar sweetness... calling me to run toward it. i hear chimes in the tide. the beauty of this land of sugar is beckoning... until i run my hand underneath the surface...*

*now behold, the truth behind the occultation: the seas are made of oil viscous enough to web between your fingers and toes. the only monuments in sight are the contorted, beastly, black trees that surround a lone blue island. under intense sun, this beautiful oil swells with darkness and beats monstrously against the sand until the island undergoes a hellish transmutation. i feel it peering into me, even now. an azure eye, surrounded by the curled lashes of a devil who's black body stretches around the globe. closer analysis shows that each lash is carbon-dense. a wick – thus a warning: beware, my sight seekers! let there be no light on █████!*”

excerpt from *the first voyager* expedition log

and then...

i can only tell where you are when your body blacks out the stars. still close. if i squint, i can see a jade crescent lining your side. if i hold out my hand, reach for you, and grab at the sky, would you unfold like a leaf in my palm? or perhaps, like the moon, will you slip away?

when the flybotomists took us to the edge of the stratosphere for our goodbyes, i couldn't tell if you would miss █████, miss home, miss me. you looked so resolute. last night, you were a mound of flesh crying in our living room. and then you were quiet – if that *is* you.

all around us, bodies curled upward in the air. you are not the first voyager, but you are of the first of many to leave. their words. in a sense, i'm glad you'll have company, since a life in the space between the stars sounds very cold. perhaps, with these new friends, you will find a home some millenia later, when it is your turn to mature. the flybotomists likened themselves to dandelions more than animal-creatures. they flow in the stars' rays as if it were the breeze. you share their fate now. i can sense it in you – that drive to leave. that look... that look.

when you look upon our scorched, desert world in your final pirouette away from home, reach out for a final time. i've thrown glittering sand. catch it, and spread it amongst the stars. they will be the new constellations.

*search 🌟 party*

there are many islands in the sea.

there are countless islands in the sea.

these two things are similar, but are slightly, and importantly, different. “many” is a disparaging word. “many” requires that you do all the work to imagine what is heard. it is short, vague, abstract, uncertain, overwhelming, stubborn and encourages futility. nooow, c’mon... *how* many? “countless”, on the other hand, implies confidence. when someone says “countless” it means there is no need to pry. trust, traveler, and allow yourself to be consumed by the astronomical, the maddening, the strange catharsis, the absolving and ultimately concrete knowledge that you do not need to trouble yourself with the effort. there is nothing to do. you cannot count them all. “countless” asks you to be content. to be complacent. to *stop*.

now, let’s say you tell us *how*. let’s say you do not *stop*.

there were many islands in the sea.

there were countless islands in the sea.

and that was not too long ago. but now a look, a casual search – a *glance*, really – will tell you that there are around nine hundred thousand islands. and once you count them, you will “find” *how* many. *stop*.

there were 900,000 islands in the sea.

there were 900,000 islands in the sea.

*a glance*. 1, 2, 3 [...] 900,000. each one, counted. now, if i say something is “many” and you “find” them all, you’ll claim power over imagination. *how?* now, if i say something is “countless” and you count them all, you’ll claim astronomical confidence as your own. *stop*.

now, there were many islands in the sea. *how?* now, there were countless islands in the sea. *stop. a glance*. there were 900,000 islands in the sea. once, there were dreams of connecting the islands like constellations. now, once they finally were, people found that real constellations are made of islands in the sky. if i said there were many, would you search for them? *how?* if i said there were countless, would you believe me? *a glance*. if i told you i’ve counted them all and gave you the number, 1, 2, 3, [...] nine gazillion trillion billion million thousand hundred, would that be enough? *stop*.

there are islands in the sky. there are islands. there are. *there*.

*there. how? a glance. stop.*

now, if i say nothing at all