

# THE CONCH #19

with

KUMBIRAI MAKUMBE

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**SLG**

# KUMBIRAI MAKUMBE

## A Motion for X.y.n.ing

X.y.n. (Verb),  
To X.y.n.  
X.y.n.ing, Present tense  
X.y.n.ed, past tense

Context: the intersection between identity politics and art & design practices.

To X.y.n. is to tend to. To support. To provide for. To foster. To move from critique to criticality and grasp the agency of latency. To repudiate the dominant order and its biased allocation of support.

The violence of The Dominant Order has left many with gaping, unhealed immaterial wounds. Inherited trauma from colonial atrocities. It has instilled fear, silenced and left many queer bodies mutilated. Imperialistic endeavours have left the displaced and the diaspora longing for a 'home'.

The manifestations of these incapacitations find themselves in even the more intimate domains of life; sexual racism and diminished self-worth. Accompanied is the disproportionate distribution of privilege that comes to light when a black body is stopped by a police car.

The Dominant Order's obsession with the accumulation and hoarding of power, assisted by acts of violence, has left many to yearn for someone to X.y.n.

It's being demanded.

To X.y.n., one would adopt the act of assembly as a sovereign act. To X.y.n., one would build upon the act of care's attentiveness towards pain and suffering but also its inability to dream up a world with lack of this. You'd transcend the act of 'caring' and comprehends its place as the foundation of a mode of operating with even greater agency for change. A site of potentiality.

You wouldn't wait for the state, party, union or boss to correct what is evidently broken but ask it from one another. You'd have the potential to significantly oppose the subjugation of marginalised groups and cause counter-effects within our socio-political landscape.

'We' could assemble the infrastructure to support and provide for ourselves through X.y.n.ing. As those hierarchically above have not, are not and probably not going to.

X.y.n.ing isn't only about the action, it's an engagement with the act of caring.

# EMILY MULENGA

## with thanks to Kate McIlwee

KM: After *The Conch*, I asked you and the other artists how you felt about support in the creative industries... it led to us speaking about the advice you received on Twitter when the platform was first becoming popular. Do you think the community you found on Twitter has influenced your practice?

EM: Beginning to use Twitter several years ago and following certain accounts definitely helped to shape my perspective on contemporary issues around race, gender and other social issues. Study of these topics wasn't something that was prioritised on my undergraduate degree, so my work would not be the same without having had this social media education.

In your work there often seems to be a sensuality and feeling of empowerment, but also hints of anxiety, maybe even vanity. Would you agree?

The key themes in *Orange Bikini* are empowerment and agency. There may be hints of vanity, but I see it more as a celebration of the self. I created the utopias in *Orange Bikini* as a reaction to the anxiety and trauma many women deal with in their daily lives. With *Now that we know the world is ending soon...* what are you gonna wear? the bunny figure is a sensual, feminine emblem, yet the glamour she embodies is cut through by a sense of anxiety, stress and mundanity.

At *The Conch*, you showed *Now that we know the world is ending soon...* what are you gonna wear? and I thought you got a lot of laughter from the audience. Is humour something you use a lot in your work?

Yeah... In a lot of my earlier work I used to parody a lot of the type of people you find on the internet. I always like to include humour in my work because A) It might be cliché, but it is a good vehicle for delivering a message and B) I just think of what I would like to see if I was watching a piece of work, and what would entertain me? It is a way for me to keep it fun and not boring.

I think it is quite reflective of how our generation communicates what's going on in our lives as well, with online humour and memes?

Yeah, there is a lot of dark humour on the internet. Memes have actually been called a form of Neo-Dadaism. So it reflects how young people are responding to the absurdity and futility of life at the moment.

What made you want to use the pink bunny avatar in these works?

She is a generic video game character in a way. She is a character

anyone can kind of project themselves onto. You're not looking at me or a real person. She can apply to a lot of people.

In *Electric Lady Land*, you used her digitally, but with *Now that we know...* you brought her into the real world. What made you want to continue using the pink bunny avatar, and this time in a different environment?

I guess we had unfinished business. I wanted to explore more what she could do and what she stood for. With the digital characters, there's this kind of inherent perfection. Whereas, in the real world it's just me tottering around in a wrinkled morph suit with a cardboard bunny mask on.

I think that's what I found so funny about it, was that planned?

Yeah, I knew it was never going to be super slick like the digital. That happens when you take things out of the screen. It was what I wanted, and what worked as well.

How do you choose the music in your moving image work?

Music has always been a really important part of my video work. I think it's just as important as the visuals. A lot of it is old video game music and music that feels nostalgic for me. Or maybe even a song that really resonates with me at that time and it feels kind of pertinent to use it. When I use a piece of music it's kind of sacrificing it in a way. After, that piece of music will always be associated with the piece of work. I won't be able to see it any other way after that.

How do you feel about seeing your work, which is so virtual and online, in a physical institutional space like a gallery?

I like it. I like seeing it kind of off-screen and, you know, seeing it bigger than I'll ever see it in my room. It's one thing seeing it on your computer screen, and another seeing it projected massive on a wall for an audience. I think a lot of digital and internet art wouldn't maybe work outside of that, in a gallery or museum context. I think my work has been quite successful in making the transition.

What is next for you? What are you working on/thinking about going forward with your work?

I'm continuing to think about ideas around the millennial experience and conditions of crisis, as well as nostalgia and how past forms of popular culture interact with the present and the future.

# TANOASASRAKU

ACT 2

SCENE 1

ENGLISH CLEARING – EVENING

Lying beneath the canopy, PIERROT MULLATO awakes. A handful of real sycamore seeds are scattered on the ground around her.

A strong gust of wind stops blowing suddenly as PIERROT squints her eyes open and looks upwards, contemplating the setting Sun in confusion. She plants two hands down either side of her slumped body and studies the ground around her.

PIERROT plucks a single sycamore seed from the spread of seeds around her and inspects it. Her expression is confused. Her makeup is neutral.

CUT TO CLOSE-UP OF BELLS  
JINGLING ON HARLEQUIN JACK'S  
LEFT SLEEVE  
SUBTITLES: \*Jink! Jink!\*

PIERROT is still holding the sycamore seed in front of her face, her mouth is now downturned, ajar and she is staring down the lens in cold shock.

SCENE 2

CUT TO CLOSE-UP OF BELLS  
JINGLING ON HARLEQUIN JACK'S  
RIGHT SLEEVE  
SUBTITLES: \*Jink! Jink!\*

HARLEQUIN JACK jingles bells on right sleeve again, at half speed

SUBTITLES: \*Jink... Jink.\*

HARLEQUIN JACK jingles bells on his right sleeve at a rapid rate

SUBTITLES: \*Jit-jit-jit-jit-jit-jit!\*

JACK is hopping on his left leg, whilst leaning his left side down at an angle, shaking his right wrist. PIERROT is on the floor behind JACK to the POV left, cowering.

JACK stops hopping and stands - heel to blade of foot – head raised valiantly.

HARLEQUIN JACK

To camera, subtitled:

\*JACK's facial expressions alter between paranoid, sympathetic and highly amused throughout delivery\*  
I'm berry much afraid of late,  
Dis jumping be no good.  
For while de Jack is dancing-  
De blacks will saw de wood!

JACK angrily, turns to glare at PIERROT after uttering this line, before looking immediately back to camera.

HARLEQUIN JACK

To camera, subtitled:

\*JACK's facial expressions alter between paranoid, sympathetic and highly amused throughout delivery\*  
Now my broddar Niggars,  
I do not think it right,  
Dat you should laugh at dem,  
Who happen to be white.  
Kase it is our misfortune,  
And we'd spend eb'ry dollar,  
If we could only be  
Gentlemen of colour!

JACK immediately whips round and stalks over to PIERROT, who is still on the ground and leans over her.

SCENE 3

JACK produces a Sun-shaped mirror and holds it over PIERROT, so that she can see her reflection.

PIERROT's mouth suddenly switches from neutral, to down-turned and her eyebrows become wobbly.

PIERROT holds up a hand to shield her mirror image from her view. She looks over her shoulder away from the image of herself and JACK, in pain.

JACK whips the mirror away to his side in faux-outrage.

JACK cocks his head in faux-sympathy at PIERROT.

HARLEQUIN JACK

To Pierrot, subtitled:

\*Delivered to PIERROT in a sanctimonious tone\*  
Oh, Pierrot...  
From shore, to shore, to shore,  
Thy choisest gifts in store.  
Our loved dominion bless,  
With peace and happiness!

To sing with heart and voice,  
The godly gift of choice-

JACK, eyes remaining on PIERROT – who is still, arm raised, looking in the opposite direction – slowly crouches and picks up the Harlequin pocket watch from the ground.

JACK takes PIERROT's palm and turns it, so that it is laying flat. JACK firmly places the pocket watch in PIERROT'S hand and closes her palm around it.

JACK looks from PIERROT's hands, up to PIERROT, intimidatingly.

To Pierrot, subtitled:

\*Delivered to PIERROT in a measured, firm manner.\*  
True to thineself and thee,  
United, loyal, free...

PIERROT, in shock, looks from JACK to her closed hand.

Excerpt from the script of O'Pierrot, 2019 by Tanoa Sasraku