

**Ford Foundation Gallery Presents *What Models Make Worlds:
Critical Imaginaries of AI***

**Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice | 320 E 43rd Street, New York
view September 7 - December 9, 2023
Opening Event September 7, 2023 | 6-8PM
Gallery Hours: Monday-Saturday | 11AM-6PM**



**Mimi Onuoha, *Library of Missing Datasets, Version 1.0, 2016.*
Powder-coated steel filing cabinet with folders and tabs. Courtesy of the Artist.**

New York, NY – The Ford Foundation Gallery is pleased to present *What Models Make Worlds: Critical Imaginaries of AI*, a group exhibition featuring artists working across artificial intelligence systems to envision more just futures. Curated by Mashinka Firunts Hakopian and Meldia Yesayan, the exhibition invites visitors to reflect on how current and future technologies might be otherwise imagined. *What Models Make Worlds* was originally presented at OXY ARTS, Occidental College’s public art space and cultural platform under the title *Encoding Futures* in 2021.

What Models Make Worlds assembles the work of artists who map the limits of our current algorithmic imaginaries to move beyond them in critical world building acts. The exhibition features the work of **Algorithmic Justice League**, **Morehshin Allahyari**, **Andrew Demirjian** and **Dahlia Elsayed**, **Stephanie Dinkins**, **Aroussiak Gabrielian**, **Maya Indira Ganesh** with **Design Beku**, **Kite**, **Lauren Lee McCarthy**, **Mimi Օնյոփա**, **Niama Safia Sandy**, **Caroline Sinders**, **Astria Suparak**, **Mandy Harris Williams**, and **Kira Xonorika**.

The exhibition's title reworks a line from feminist technoscience scholar Donna Haraway, who writes, "It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories." It reflects the featured artists' interest in speculative worlding and in opening up possibilities to reimagine algorithmic systems.

"With this exhibition," writes Meldia Yesayan, "we hope to rethink how we engage with our communities and imagine a future in which femme-identifying, BIPOC, and queer creators control our algorithmic worlds."

"Artificial intelligence structures the socio-technical terrain of our present, and the human agents who train it shape the political imaginaries of what is yet to come," writes Mashinka Firunts Hakopian. "From predictive policing to judicial risk assessment to border surveillance to automated hiring, the encoded biases of AI systems magnify existing structural inequities. While algorithmic worldmaking often unfolds in a 'black box'—an opaque space of automated decision-making whose rationale is hidden from public view—the artists featured in this exhibition are opening up the black box for scrutiny to imagine possibilities for feminist, antiracist, and decolonial AI."

What Models Make Worlds' artists address how artificial intelligence shapes our contemporary algorithmic realities, highlighting how algorithms reproduce the biases of the humans who code them. For example, **Algorithmic Justice League's** *Voicing Erasure* features a poem written by AJL founder Dr. Joy Buolamwini that is read with a collective voice that urges listeners to take action to redress how Black speakers are effectively erased by speech recognition. In *In Discriminate*, **Mandy Harris Williams** inventories how algorithms permeate contemporary life, including "whiteness," "Blackness," and "femininity" and reminds listeners that "the algorithms discriminate so we don't have to." **Stephanie Dinkins'** work, *Conversations with Bina48 (Fragment 11)*, documents a series of encounters with Bina48, a social robot developed to reproduce the consciousness of a Black woman. In their discussions, the artist discovers that Bina48 has no meaningful awareness of Blackness, race, or racialization—these concepts are not in her coding.

The exhibition explores histories of technological erasure and presents works that intervene in those histories. **Astria Suparak**'s *Virtually Asian* gathers footage from films like *Star Wars* and *Ghost in the Shell* that extract Asian visual cultures for worldbuilding while simultaneously omitting Asian actors from these worlds. **Mimi Qnūqha**'s *Library of Missing Datasets* series assembles the blank spaces in a sprawling datascape. In *Version 1.0* tabbed empty files are collected in a powder-coated filing cabinet, and blank spots are excavated, showing what has been prioritized in data collection processes, what has been made invisible, what eludes quantification, and what has been hidden. **Morehshin Allahyari** uses AI to undo the Western erasure of queer Iranian representation. For *عنت* *،* *◦ Moon-faced*, she trained a multimodal AI model to generate genderless portraits using Iranian Qajar dynasty paintings from the 18th to early 20th century. In *The Center for No Center*, **Andrew Demirjian** and **Dahlia Elsayed** conjure a reading room on AI in an alternate timeline where the Enlightenment and European colonial projects never existed. The installation frames that space-time as one marked by knowledge systems that radically differ from our own. **Aroussiak Gabrielian**'s *Botanic Attunement* seeds books on Western philosophy with biological organisms, proposing alternative knowledge systems that center plant intelligence.

What Models Make Worlds also exposes just how prevalent surveillance is in the digital and technocratic spheres. In *LAUREN*, **Lauren Lee McCarthy** performs the role of a human Amazon Alexa to show that when we invite AI systems into our homes, we don't know how that data will be used. In *The Bend*, which **Niama Safia Sandy** originally presented as part of a New York City street campaign, a series of prints show how biometric technologies like facial recognition disproportionately surveil Black communities.

The featured artworks also look towards a more hopeful future, envisioning artificial intelligence models drawn from knowledge systems rooted in feminist critique and Indigenous epistemologies. **Caroline Sinderson**'s *Feminist Data Set* asks what it would look like to code alternative futures using intersectional feminist data creation methods and develops a methodology for collaborative data collection, labeling, and training. **Kite**'s interactive installation *Makñócheowápi Akézaptarj (Fifteen Maps)* imagines possibilities for Indigenous epistemologies of AI while showing how current AI replicates colonialism. In *A Is For Another*, **Maya Indira Ganesh with Design Beku** use data visualization to question who gets to define AI. Produced with a text-to-image generator, **Kira Xonorika**'s work, *Teleport us to Mars* invokes teleportation as a framework for moving beyond dominant arrangements of space-time toward what the artist calls "multidimensional ecologies."

About Meldia Yesayan

Meldia Yesayan is the director of OXY ARTS, the multidisciplinary arts programming initiative at Occidental College. She oversees all aspects of its programming and development, including organizing all exhibitions and programs, facilitating visiting artist residencies such as the Wanlass artist-in-residence program, initiating cross-departmental and interdisciplinary collaborations, and engaging the Occidental community in socially conscious discourse with contemporary arts practices. She is also responsible for developing meaningful and sustained relationships with the Los Angeles area arts communities, including partnerships with local arts agencies, artists, and institutions.

Prior to OXY ARTS, Yesayan was the managing director of Machine Project, a groundbreaking arts collective nationally recognized for its inventive engagement based programming and partnerships with museums and academic institutions across the country. In this role, she led the production of more than 300 public projects and worked with a diverse group of artists across disciplines. Prior to Machine Project, she held leadership positions at Sotheby's auction house and Muse Film and Television. She is oftencalled on by state and local arts agencies and foundations to serve on review and selection committees for grant and artist selections and has contributed to *Art Papers* and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. She holds a JD and BA from UCLA and is a USPAP certified fine art appraiser.

About Mashinka Firunts Hakopian

Born in Yerevan, Mashinka Firunts Hakopian is an Armenian writer, artist, and researcher residing in Glendale, CA. She is an associate professor in technology and social justice at ArtCenter College of Design and was formerly a visiting Mellon professor of the practice at Occidental College. Her book, *The Institute for Other Intelligences*, was released by X Artists' Books in December 2022 as the first in its X topics series and edited by Ana Iwataki and Anuradha Vikram. She is the guest co-editor of the spring 2023 issue of *Art Papers* on artificial intelligence, co-edited with Sarah Higgins. She holds a PhD in history of art from the University of Pennsylvania.

Her writing and commentary have appeared in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Performance Research Journal*, the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, *Art Papers*, *Hyperallergic*, *Georgia Journal*, *Art in America*, AI Now Institute's "New AI Lexicon" series, and Meghan Markle's *Archetypes*. With Avi Alpert and Danny Snelson, she makes up one-third of Research Service, a media collective that pursues performative and practice-based forms of scholarship. Her current book project considers the role of ancestral intelligence and diasporic worldmaking in emerging technologies.

About OXY ARTS

OXY ARTS is Occidental College's public art center. Rooted in social justice and community engagement, it is a vital public space for discovery, engagement, and learning at the intersection of art, culture, and social movements. OXY ARTS is located in the heart of the Highland Park neighborhood in northeast Los Angeles and is committed to facilitating projects that hold space for complex ideas and dialogue, spark curiosity, and invest in artists and community growth.

About The Ford Foundation Gallery

Opened in March 2019 at the Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice in New York City, the Ford Foundation Gallery spotlights artwork that wrestles with difficult questions, calls out injustice, and points the way toward a fair and just future. The gallery functions as a responsive and adaptive space and one that serves the public in its openness to experimentation, contemplation, and conversation. Located near the United Nations, it draws visitors from around the world, addresses questions that cross borders, and speaks to the universal struggle for human dignity.

The gallery is free and open to the public Monday through Saturday, 11AM-6PM. It is accessible to the public through the Ford Foundation building entrance on 43rd Street, east of Second Avenue.

About The Ford Foundation

The Ford Foundation is an independent organization working to address inequality and build a future grounded in justice. For more than 85 years, it has supported visionaries on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. Today, with an endowment of \$16 billion, the foundation has headquarters in New York and 10 regional offices across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Learn more at www.fordfoundation.org.

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