

# mirror

An exhibition by Katlego Phetlhe

24.11.21

# introduction

In the past two years of this pandemic, with less time spent away from and distracted from myself and my body I became aware of the processes and performances I would practise to merely exist safely and relatively happily in our society. Through this work I am processing the sudden attention and awareness I have of myself that has not come out of a need to protect or defend myself as most of my habitual ways of being would; but from having time and space to choose myself as my first responsibility.

My long-exposure photographs are the product of grappling with my own existence historically, as a dream or wish, as an idea, a plan, a manifestation through the people who have collectively birthed me. These prints are the record of performances that ask for periods of silence, concentration, physical stillness, timing, counting and tight planning. In between each exposure, I change clothing and props in the dark, quietly, to not wake the sleeping before illuminating the space again as I take the place of another imagined figure.

Both my video and photographic works are an archive exploring self-theology and strategies for self-care via my imagination which are expressed through visual media. Through recordings of patience and presence, I am giving time and attention to myself as an expression of self-love. The work is motivated and explored through themes of re-sensitising myself to my body and my time in efforts to re-connect with feelings of self-compassion and embodiment. I am also exploring my agency in matters of everyday liberation and self-determination.

Before this undertaking, it was difficult to understand and place myself within the greater Black joy and liberation project without understanding how it must unfold in my own life. By performing my multiple self-hood via personal and historic references, I begin materialising my imagination and affirming my intrinsic worth in the present.

# artworks on display

1 x video work

6 x photographic prints

(each will be presented along with notes, references and experiments as applicable)

# notes on the long-exposure photographs

The series of photographs are inspired by my need for affirming my different imaginings of self and community, which is characteristic of the practice of studio photography on our continent. Photographic works by Malick Sidibe, Seydou Keita and Samuel Fosso can all be understood as records of an exploration of choice and self-determination in the safe space that the studio creates. Multiple selfhood and self-speculation is performed from aspiration and imagination against patterned and painted backgrounds that give us a glimpse into personal and shared narratives.

What has driven the aesthetic appearance of the imagined prints as well as their conceptual anchor in history is a memory of some photographs I had seen when I was very young on visits to see family. Upon entry into spaces like the living and dining room, I would be looked upon from high hanging portraits on the walls. These ghostly, high-contrast, black-and-white photographs would often feature a married couple or church choir.

A more recent reference that has assisted in imagining and referencing my personal family archive is The Black Photo Album put together by the artist, Santu Mofokeng. The archive is a collection of family portraits, created between the years 1890 and 1950. The Non-common representations of the black families photographed during the colonial era is striking as it rubs against most truths, understandings and associations viewers may have about how Black people were photographed and looked during these times predating apartheid.



Reunion  
epson fine art paper  
71x56 cm

exposure time:  
1186 seconds



Mofokeng, S., 2013. *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me series*. [Art] (The Walther Collection, Tate).





Description: examples of some experiments









got your front and back  
epson fine art paper  
41 x 33.3 cm

384 seconds



Sidibe, Malick, 1975. *Les Trois Amis avec Motos*. [Art] (Yossi Milo Gallery).



- half black material on one side - ductape flat } second iteration - feels a bit literal  
 - how to stabilise bicycle?  
MATERIAL ON FLOOR??

- podcast set  
 A

- Shades for front facing.
- hardstyle, short masculine
- very formal clothing → black pants + shirt, jacket? Sausage Saloon jersey \$5
- white shirt + tie! formal shoes
- ↳ cream ribbed shirt   ↳ dark maroon polished
- Silver watch

- use a bigger background
- try using just the wall? with a backdrop on the floor only - dark clothes
- need to stay very still pls!
- get whole bike in, move into room dark way

Description: sketchbook spread





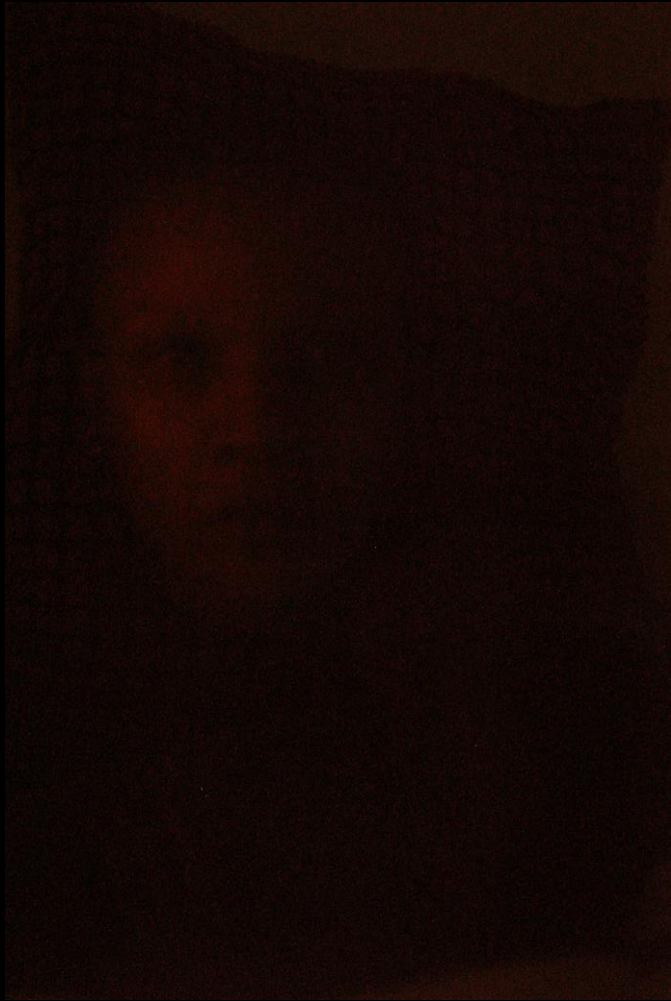






Guardian  
Epson fine art paper  
25 x 17 cm

62 seconds







Grand  
Epson fine art paper  
38 x 20 cm

1186 seconds





Midway through the creation of this work. My family, upon sharing with them what I was working on, shared photographs with me from the time of Santu Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album* investigations (1890-1950). The last pair of photographs are based on these.



Image from experimental residue of the *Bona* pair as seen in coming slides.





Bona I  
Epson fine art paper  
29 x 15.5 cm

248 seconds











Bona II  
epson fine art paper  
29 x 15.5 cm

277 seconds



relevant experiments & omitted works



*Untitled I (Mother and Child)*



*Untitled II (Looking Out)*



Description: sketchbook spread



FS: first shot  
SS = second shot

WAITING

- yellow light  
w edited to  
be more  
neutral  
brown  
- quite close  
+ from above!

- hair like normal, half + half tucked
- black cloth over shoulder
- ↳ white cloth over shoulder?
- white chair

wrapped in white

↳ FS: sitting on chair, neck long crossed arms  
 ↳ SS: sitting unrelaxed, hidden hand Fisted + supporting head  
 showing hand holding chair  
 cover chair in material  
 white head bracelet

Unknown, possibly mid-70s. *Mother and Child*. [Art] Available at: <https://www.zkhiphani.co.za/tbt-puzzling-pics-all-black-homes-had/> [Accessed May 2021].

↳ experiment w/ both swatch 4 expressions  
TAKE MANY + THEN CHOOSE FROM ONE ♡



rainbow scarf, red jersey puffs near  
 (makeup? strong eye brow  
 how headwrap? flat first, twist @ neck then tie up



- same pose, another hand through, comforting
- window into, lit close to + from above  
 ↳ drop eye, chest to camera, depth of field illusion
- affect, a nape movement from hands
- jewellery: twilight ring on ring finger, aquamarine silver ring on middle finger of opposite hand
- leaning on? table with radio
- ↳ moonstone earrings, tshedimoso or black
- ↳ hands in front of
- ↳ black watch, gold bangles

Keïta, Seydou, 1949-1951. *Untitled*. [Art] (The Pigozzi Collection)

Description: sketchbook spread



# notes on the video work

In my video work also called *Mirror*, a visual conversation with myself via video call, I use the two-feed format to watch myself as I question and explore my presence. I record the moments that I have spent time paying attention and experimenting with myself. The factor of time as it relates to the *loving eye* in all my work so far is the essential ingredient in developing my personal restoration practice.

In this work, I acknowledge attention and the practice of being present as a tool of expressing care and love towards myself. I use it as a strategy aiming to learn how I interpret and understand myself in relation to the moment, my time, my interests in my own physicality and how I read my body as someone who experiences both social and gender dysmorphia.

In watching and expressing myself from different perspectives simultaneously I am challenging myself, asking for more than a singular understanding of my physicality, my time spent with myself and how I later reflect on that recorded time. I am also exploring my curiosities about my size in relation to the rooms I inhabit and this world, and the different shapes and movements my body makes and how I read them. In the creation of this work, it is also quite positively affecting to have my own ominous and watchful eye over myself. I can always see all the space around me while also paying attention to inner processes and urges.

There have been three other iterations of this work before its final, continuously looping form. The final iteration is inspired by real time practises of watching and interacting with myself while I experiment with these different ways of seeing and interpreting self. All versions of this work have been made available via links in the next slides.



final looping iteration of *mirror* as seen on exhibit



accessible via:

<https://youtu.be/oHefjIcnT7U>



video works leading up to final iteration

iteration 1: experiment exploring presence, timing, transmission lag, looking through another feed, etc.



accessible via:

<https://youtu.be/WEcxhS6QtXA>

iteration 2: I braided the word 'now' into my hair in the time of about 1.5 hrs



clips accessible via:

<https://youtu.be/8gkbofyIKHO>

<https://youtu.be/6JfjbiRj74>

[https://youtu.be/mFjF6D\\_sTHg](https://youtu.be/mFjF6D_sTHg)

# Iteration 3: experimented with reflections/perceptions through playing invented games

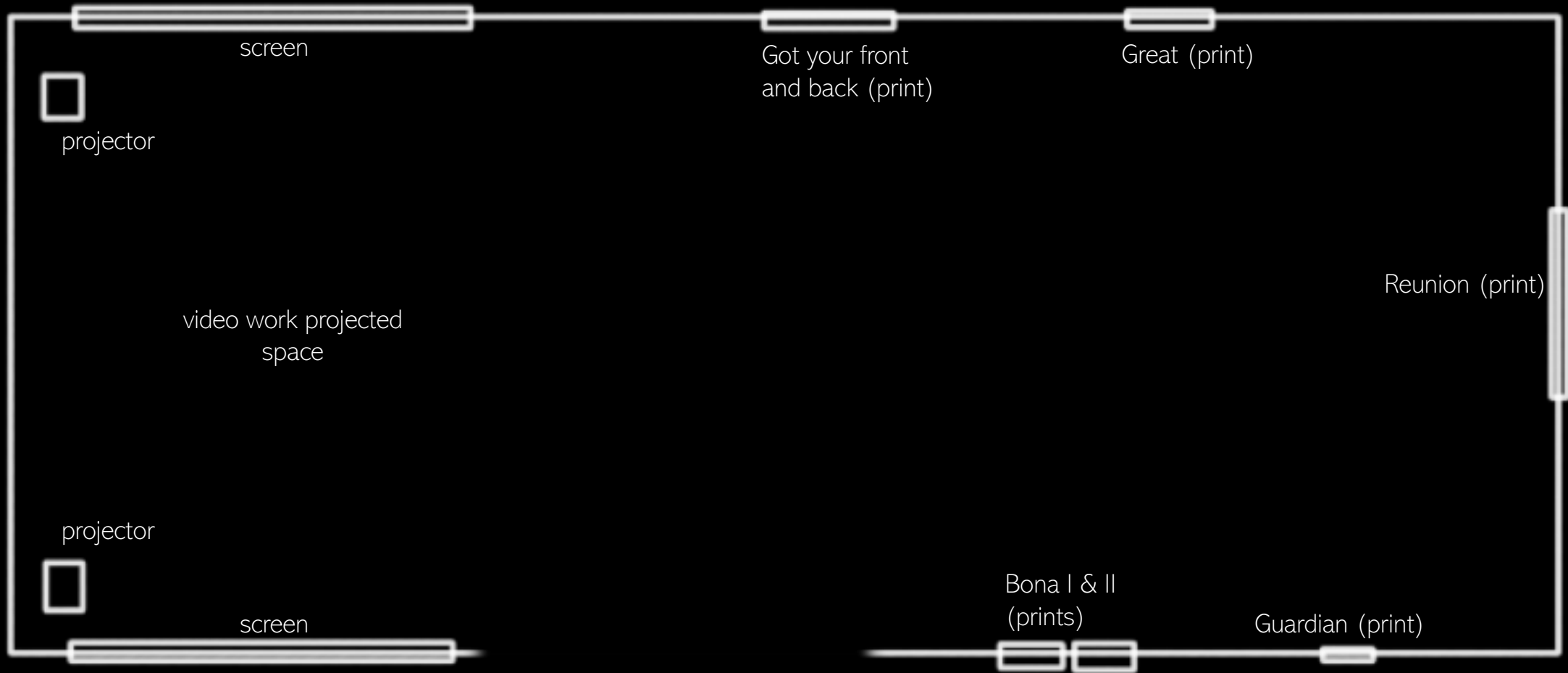


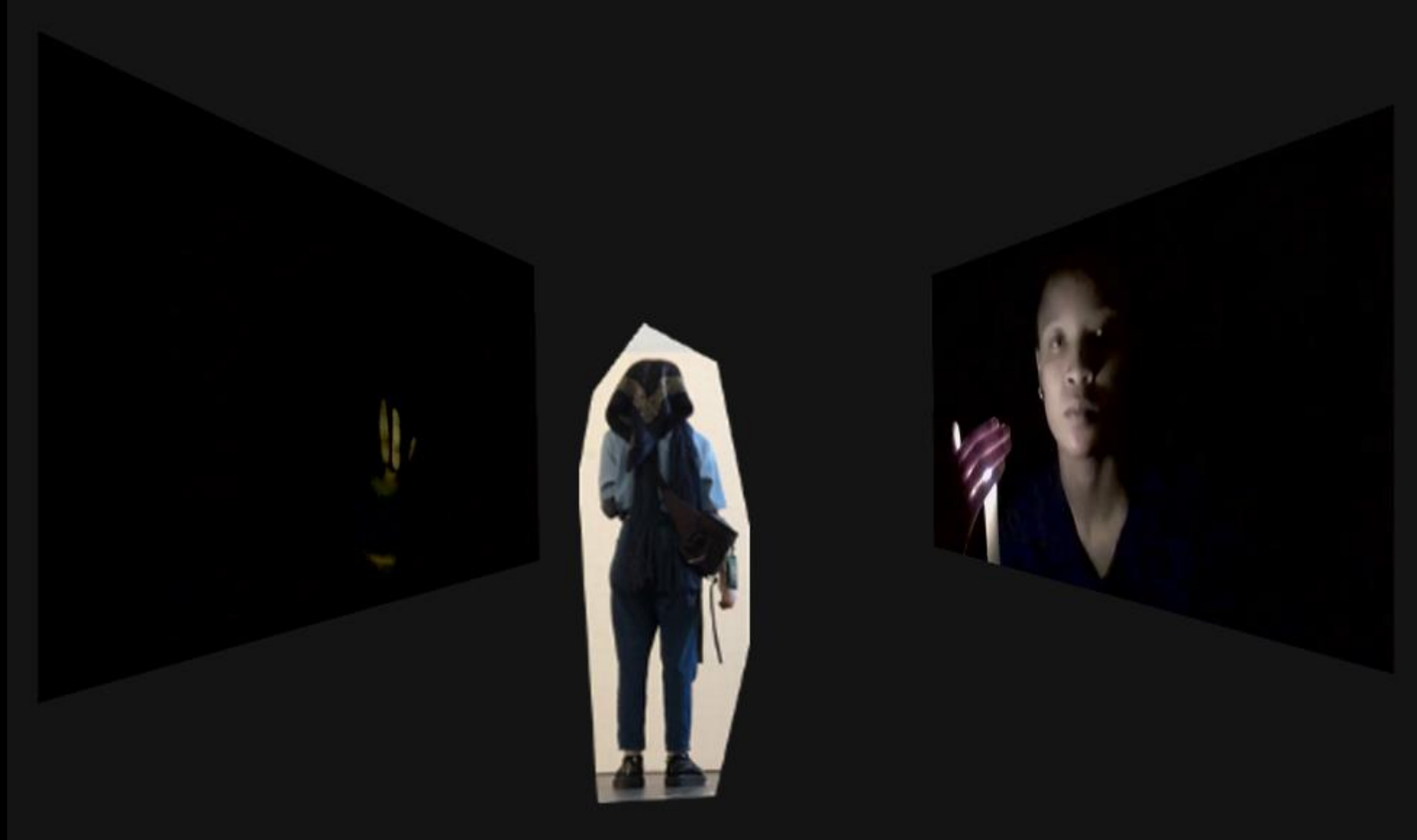
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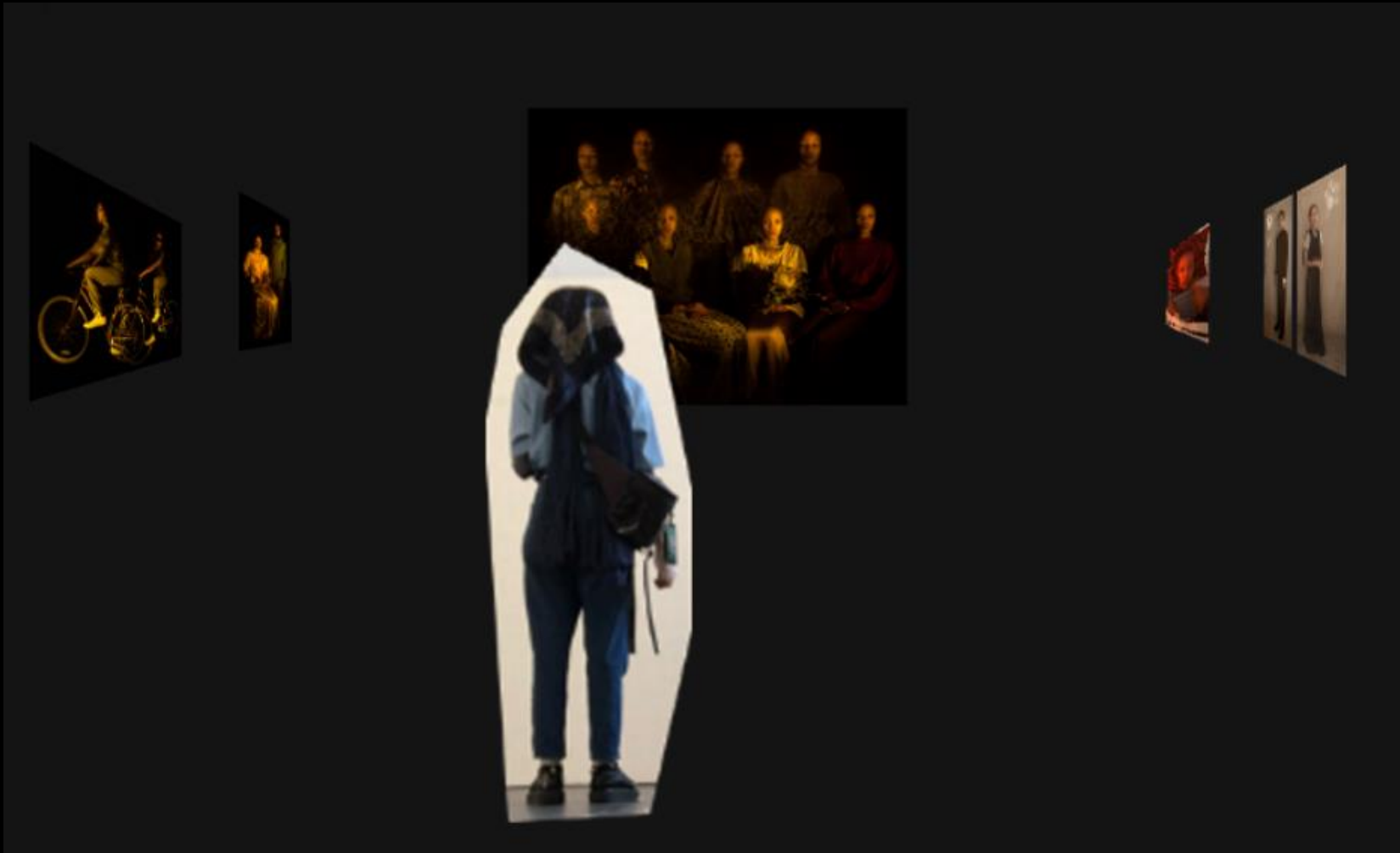
# exhibition layout – Upper Gallery







Installation view



Installation view

