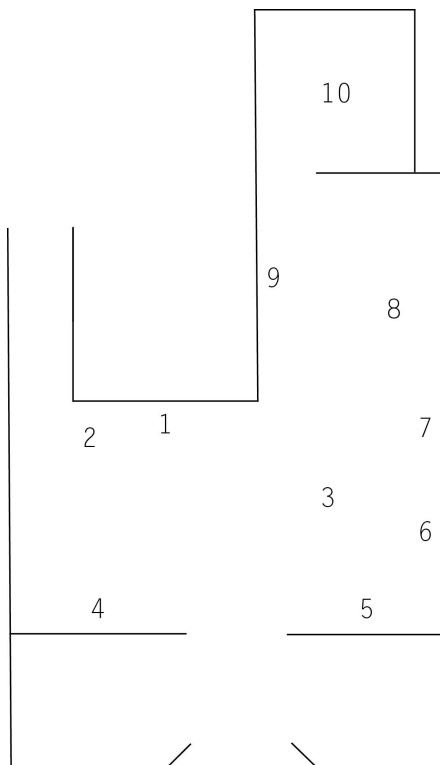


Nolan Oswald Dennis
overturns
January 22 – April 13, 2025

1ST FLOOR



1. *Black Liberation Zodiac (Kgositsile's Folly)*, 2022-ongoing
Wallpaper, bowl, water, cowrie shell
Courtesy of the artist

2. *Approximations (1)*, 2021
Video, conference stand
11 min 31 secs
Courtesy of the artist

3. *model for endless column (braced)*, 2021-24

Compound PET globe model, synthetic stone finish, black primer, steel rod
Courtesy of the artist

4. *further notes 4 a planet (nine-dash)*, 2024

Digital print on board, hanging hardware, letter beads
Courtesy of the artist

5. *Articulated globe (pair)*, 2024

PET globe, synthetic stone finish, black primer, cowry shell veil, steel armature
Courtesy of the artist

6. *untitled (for Achebe)*, 2021

Ink drawing on altered map
Courtesy of Ronan Grossiat

7. *untitled (schema)*, 2021

Ink and pencil on paper
Courtesy of the Jessica and Kelvin Beachum Family Collection

8. *Isivivane*, 2023-ongoing

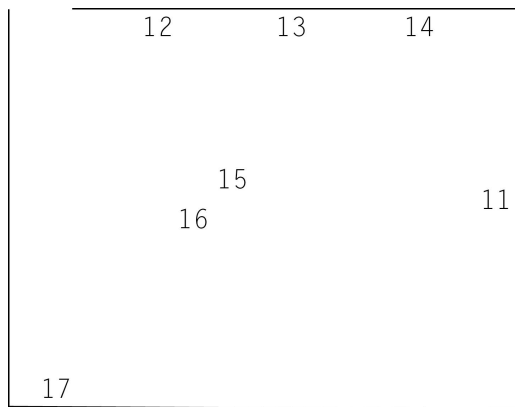
3D printer, MDF truncated pyramid, steel shelving, prints, clipboard, reproduction protocols
Courtesy of the artist, developed with the support of INSITE

9. *after-all (field)*, 2021

Ink, pencil, labels on paper
Courtesy of Michael Krichman and Carmen Cuenca

10. *Specifications for a Reverse Archeology*, 2022-23
 Single channel film, lightbox diagram, vinyl illustration, viewing rocks, soft seat
 Courtesy of the artist and Collection Hartwig Foundation. Promised gift to the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed / Rijkscollectie

2ND FLOOR



11. *recurse 4 a late planet (lush)*, 2024
 Wallpaper, notebook pages
 Courtesy of the artist

12. *biko.cabral (time/place) [prototype]*, 2020
 Thermal printer, microcontroller, shelf
 Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery

13. *biko.bambara (who/now)*, 2024
 Two thermal printers, two microcontrollers, two shelves
 Courtesy of the artist

14. *biko.shabazz (al.ways/means)*, 2019
 Thermal printer, microcontroller, shelf
 Courtesy of Rhemé Sloan

15. *discreet bookrest (ii)*, 2024
 MDF, steel plate, paper, magnets, first ed. *Astrodynamics Vol. 1* by Samuel Herrick
 Courtesy of the artist

16. *discreet bookrest (i)*, 2024
 MDF, steel plate, paper, magnets, first ed. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire
 Courtesy of the artist

17. *a systems vocabulary*, 2021
 Pencil on paper
 Courtesy of Annasue and John Wilson

ARTWORK DESCRIPTIONS

Black Liberation Zodiac (Kgositsile's Folly), 2022-ongoing
Wallpaper, bowl, water, cowrie shell

Approximations (1), 2021
Video, conference stand
11 min 31 secs

All courtesy the artist

Beginning in 2017, *Black Liberation Zodiac* is a long running series in Dennis's practice, with the latest iteration presented at SI. In this body of work, Dennis remaps the night sky across the ecliptic plane - an imaginary plane representing the Earth's orbit around the Sun - from the position of an observer located in the southern hemisphere. Due to the Earth's tilt, and its orientation towards the Milky Way galaxy, there are more observable stars in the southern hemisphere than in the northern hemisphere. This work considers how the night sky, like land, was violently transformed by colonial cartographic practices when European explorers travelled southward from the northern hemisphere and named the 'new' constellations they encountered as the southern equivalents of their Eurasian Zodiac constellations. Noting how the Zodiac constellations have now become the basis of modern astronomical science and its coordinate systems, Dennis's work unsettles Western scientific objectivity and exposes its mythic, culturally contingent determinations.

Black Liberation Zodiac further substitutes the Zodiac signs with iconography drawn from a global archive of militant, anti-capitalist, and abolitionist Black liberation struggles. Some of these symbols specifically reference the Azanian People's Organization, the Black Panther Party, and uMkhonto we Sizwe. The substituted symbols, which historically have appeared in various political contexts in the southern and northern hemispheres, akin to star constellations that are only visible at particular times of the year, collectively constitute an ongoing semiotic study and critical counter-mythology. Presented as a monumental infinity curve, which may suggest theatrical and studio backdrops as well as the curved space of planetarium domes, Dennis's work invites associations between notions of virtuality and rehearsal and the speculative production of anti-colonial liberatory possibility.

This iteration of the work is presented alongside a water-filled black bowl with a cowrie shell resting at its crevice (a reference to the Venda divining bowl) and *Approximations (1)*, a video featuring Dennis's interlocutors from different disciplinary backgrounds (a writer, an astrophysicist, and an architect) who each are asked to reflect on their relationships to the night sky. One of these interlocutors alludes to traditions of Black astronomy by recalling historical figures such as Harriet Jacobs, a Black American abolitionist, who famously used the North Star as a navigational tool to escape slavery in the 19th century. In these ways, *Black Liberation Zodiac* and *Approximations (1)* offer up the celestial sphere and its representations as maps to uncharted futures. This version of the work is also named after Keorapetse Kgositsile, a South African poet who became involved with the Black Arts Movement in New York in the 1970s, bridging continental African and Black American cultural movements.

model for endless column (braced), 2021-2024

Compound PET globe model, synthetic stone finish, black primer, steel rod

Articulated globe (pair), 2024

PET globe, synthetic stone finish, black primer, cowry shell veil, steel armature

All courtesy the artist

Dennis considers their works as models, prototypes, and iterative propositions rather than finished artworks. Both these works model the structural antagonisms between the racialized, propertied modern world and plural liberatory imaginaries that abound in past, present, and future articulations of Black and Indigenous thought and action, from the earliest slave rebellions to the anti-colonial liberation struggles of the mid-twentieth century to global resistance movements in the twenty-first century. Dennis considers the standard globe - marked by nation-state delineations and a totalizing, disembodied view from outer-space - as aesthetically integral to the systemic reproduction of the dominant world order. Dennis challenges these universalizing techno-scientific representations with the creation of opaque, blackened planets, which symbolize the unceasing, indeterminate, and potentially disruptive presence of historically subjugated and socially eclipsed shadow worlds.

Dennis's works condense numerous cultural, scientific, and philosophical references from across the African diaspora. For instance, the cowry shell veil covering the black globe in *Articulated globe (pair)* both cites the shekere percussive instrument - invoking West African indigenous cosmologies that wed the creation of the universe to sonic and rhythmic phenomena - and the writings of the Black American thinker W.E.B. Du Bois who metaphorically deploys the notion of the veil to describe regimes of racialized exclusion and what he terms "double consciousness." In previous installations, Dennis has also made direct references to the cover of Public Enemy's 1990 album, *Fear of a Black Planet* - a notable visual influence on this body of globe-focused works.

untitled (for Achebe), 2021

Ink drawing on altered map

Courtesy of Ronan Grossiat

This work is inspired by the late Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, who once stated "if you're an African, the world is upside down." Here, Dennis engages Achebe's remark, which alludes to the psychological, economic, and ecological valences of disorientation produced by Africa's violent entanglement with the making of the modern world. In this work, Dennis cuts out and inverts the position of the African continent on a two-dimensional world map. This act of inversion recurs in many of Dennis's other works presented on the ground floor. Through this gesture of re-orientation, Dennis questions the colonial structures that legitimate modes of knowing and being from the Global North at the expense of those from the Global South.

further notes 4 a planet (nine-dash), 2024

Digital print on board, hanging hardware, letter beads

Courtesy of the artist

This work forms various relational configurations between gridded sets of textually invoked worlds. Engaging Dennis's interests in the long history of games, the power of language, and the notion of the counterfactual - a form of thinking that allows one to consider potential alternatives to what has already happened - the work allows viewers to imagine shapeshifting networks of other possible worlds beyond and against the racial capitalist present. The poetic verses articulated by the lettered bead chains connecting these signified worlds are taken from the South African poet, Keorapetse Kgotsitsile (also referenced in *Black Liberation Zodiac, (Kgositsile's Folly)*), who bridged continental African and Black American cultural movements.

Occasionally, worksheets will be presented on the floor that complement the work's reflections on the possibilities and impossibilities of world-building. Viewers are free to take one with them.

Viewers are also welcome to gently interact with the work.

untitled (schema), 2021

Ink and pencil on paper

Courtesy of the Jessica and Kelvin Beachum Family Collection

after-all (field), 2021

Ink, pencil, labels on paper

Courtesy of Michael Krichman and Carmen Cuenca

a systems vocabulary, 2021

Pencil on paper

Courtesy of Annasue and John Wilson

These works are both demonstrations and critiques of drawing and diagramming practices that appear in scientific, architectural, and cartographic disciplines. As visual annotations to and poetic reflections of Dennis's research and art making, these drawings illuminate the intuitive processes, systematic categories, and conceptual interrelations that inform the various works shown across the exhibition's two floors. In these works, language becomes a malleable compositional material, untethered from schematic certainty and logical necessity, and contrasted with ambiguously oriented yet finely rendered representations of plant roots, topographic fragments, and planetary (or potentially sub-atomic) forms.

Isivivane, 2023-ongoing

3D printer, MDF truncated pyramid, steel shelving, prints, clipboard, reproduction protocols

Courtesy of the artist, developed with the support of INSITE

Developed in conversation with geologists and geology museum curators, *Isivivane*

intervenes into discussions on restitution by creating digital and physical simulations of rock samples drawn from various geographical contexts of land dispossession, including Australia, the United States, Palestine, and South Africa. The 3D printed rocks accumulate on the neighboring steel shelves over the course of the exhibition, displayed in proximity to a series of annotated images that detail the textures of rock surfaces and the accumulated temporalities they contain. “Isivivane” is an isiZulu word meaning a cairn - a pile of stones marking a significant location in a landscape - and is also the word for working together.

Specifications for a Reverse Archeology, 2022-23

Single channel film, lightbox diagram, vinyl illustration, viewing rocks, soft seat
Courtesy of the artist and Collection Hartwig Foundation. Promised gift to the
Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed / Rijkscollectie.

Specifications for a Reverse Archeology continues Dennis’s interweaving of Black and Indigenous political frontiers through technological counterapproaches that focus on a sacred landscape in Southern Africa known as Mapungubwe. The remains of this ancient civilization have been subject to the extractive gaze of archeological practices, leading Dennis to imagine an alternative science of the Earth that acknowledges the site’s still-present spiritual ecologies. The work centrally features a film which traverses this charged landscape in physical and virtual realms and shows a group of young Black South Africans involved in a partly constructed, partly improvised dialogue. The self-reflexive film orchestrates parallels between the penetrative optics of the cinematic apparatus and the prospecting devices of archeology, considering their historical and ongoing roles in establishing and reproducing regimes of settler colonial land dispossession. Foregrounding the political contingencies of perception, the film contrasts scenes that theatrically emphasize the mechanisms of cinematic representation with other scenes that challenge such mechanisms, for instance, through disorienting inversions of land and sky or the use of surreal visual effects. Functioning like a movie poster at a film theater, an illuminated diagram on the viewing room’s exterior wall enumerates multiple, intersecting forms of temporality, some of which are verbalized in the film.

Visitors are encouraged to experience the installation with a viewing rock, which inverts the moving images on the screen, and rest on the custom pillow seating – what the artist calls a “soft rock” – which is inspired by digitized renderings of the site in question.

recurse 4 a late planet (lush), 2024

Wallpaper

Courtesy of the artist

In this newly commissioned wall diagram, Dennis brings together a range of representational models and meaning-making systems to explore a series of earthly and extraterrestrial rocks. Simultaneously contending with scientific and socio-political valences of apocalypse and catastrophe, the work focuses on 99942 Apophis, a near-Earth asteroid, whose possible future collision with the Earth has led to its official designation as a “potentially hazardous object.” Akin to *Black Liberation Zodiac (Kgositsile’s Folly)*, Dennis interrogates the conventions of

scientific naming, exposing their mythical underpinnings. Apophis is the Greek name for the ancient Egyptian deity, Apep – a deity of chaos, uncertainty, and darkness. Drawing on the spatialized associative logics of concrete poetry, this work playfully unfixes the linearity of scientific diagramming. A dense array of incorporated references including African fractal geometries, mythological symbols, astronomical illustrations, and lyrical annotations come together to form a multi-scalar meditation that connects hand-thrown stones and near-Earth asteroids, political Blackness and cosmic blackness, decolonization and the end of the world.

biko.cabral (time/place) [prototype], 2020

Thermal printer, microcontroller, shelf
Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery

biko.bambara (who/now), 2024

Two thermal printers, two microcontrollers, two shelves
Courtesy of the artist

biko.shabazz (al.ways/means), 2019

Thermal printer, microcontroller, shelf
Courtesy of Rhemé Sloan

This body of works stages imagined dialogues between Steve Biko (anti-apartheid activist and leading figure in the South African Black Conscious Movement) and other historical Black radicals, including Amílcar Cabral (Bissau-Guinean and Cape Verdean anti-colonial revolutionary, poet, and agronomist), Toni Cade Bambara (feminist and anti-imperialist novelist, filmmaker and organizer) and Malcolm X (political revolutionary and activist, also known as Malik el-Shabazz). Each of the works contains a microcontroller that is programmed with a word-search algorithm. This algorithm sifts through the texts and speeches of these figures for a specific pair of key words (evoked in the respective work titles) and stitches together a poetic conversation based on found phrases containing these words.

A recent addition to the series, *biko.bambara (who/now)* uses two thermal printers instead of one, creating moments of textual illegibility in the printout when Bambara's words overwrite Biko's words. Here, Dennis highlights the gendered antagonisms within the Black radical tradition, particularly Black feminism's critique of the hetero-masculinist tendencies reproduced in certain strands of twentieth century anti-colonial thought.

Grounded in the materiality of the anti-imperial archive yet indeterminately reconfigured by the speculative activity of poetic computation, the resulting live printed dialogues reorganize insurgent thinking from disparate geographical contexts to ruminate on past, present, and future tactics and strategies of decolonization and Black liberation.

Viewers are welcome to gently pick up and read the piled printouts on the floor.

discreet bookrest (i), 2024

MDF, steel plate, paper, magnets, first ed. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire

Courtesy of the artist

discreet bookrest (ii), 2024

MDF, steel plate, paper, magnets, first ed. *Astrodynamics Vol. 1* by Samuel Herrick

Courtesy of the artist

These modular custom bookshelves, respectively featuring a landmark text from the sciences and the radical humanities, are inspired by Dennis's ongoing interest in pedagogical objects and practices. Using the tools and stationery below, viewers are welcome to add written reflections of the exhibition and accompanying public program to the bookrest units, which each contain a magnetic surface. These notes, as collectively authored annotations, accumulate over the course of the exhibition.