

'SCARRED'

Revisiting the
body art tradition
in Africa.



PHOTO: ANIBAL BUENO

**November 29 to
December 1, 2019**
mae-africa.org







My deepest appreciation goes to each participating visual artist, guest speaker, performer, moderator and audience at 'SCARRED'.

Thank you to the **British Council** for supporting the participation of two vibrant, Nigerian, homegrown and rising talents.

My sincere gratitude to Deborah Marie of Maison Yaba for the brilliant execution of communication efforts and for always going over and beyond the scope of work.

Thank you to the SOAS Alumni Office, particularly Lucy Kauser and Marina Mannella, for the kind support since the early stages. Thank you to the **Hunterian Museum** in Glasgow for their gracious support in providing requested photographic collections that helped bring the vision of this exhibition to life.


Thank you to all those whom their wealth of knowledge and research has contributed to making the historical component of this event a success. Thank you to all of my friends – for the encouraging words, for the retweets, the likes, the shares, the bouncing off of ideas, and everything in between.

And finally, to my family, particularly my mother and my sister – words will never suffice.

Mãe Preta
Founder of Mãe Africa
and Curator of 'SCARRED'



PHOTO: TREVOR COLE



**“ART WILL REMAIN THE
MOST ASTONISHING
ACTIVITY OF MANKIND
BORN OUT OF STRUGGLE
BETWEEN WISDOM AND
MADNESS, BETWEEN
DREAM AND REALITY
IN OUR MIND.”**

—
MAGDALENA
ABAKANOWICZ



FOREWORD

My maternal grandmother had tattoos. The only thing more striking than the indigo ink was perhaps the inscriptions that adorned both thighs. One of them was her full name, including her parents' full names. The other was a quote in Yoruba which read: "Òlẹ̀ ń gbìyànjú sùgbòn apá òlẹ̀ òkà". Metaphorically translating as "your best effort is not enough, you need strength too". She had told me that the tattoos of her parents' names, also inscribed on her sisters, were to help them find their way home if they ever got lost. In my understanding, 'lost' was literal. Today, I can trace much of my fascination with traditional African body art to my early interest in and exposure to my grandmother's tattoos. It is her influence that also helped to give birth to Mãe Africa, for which the staging of 'SCARRED' is a first. The title 'SCARRED' with emphasis on the quotation marks is to underscore that the perception of body modification practice is subjective.

The presentation of this exhibit by Mãe Africa is no coincidence. Mãe Africa is a play on words, paying tribute to the Afro-Brazilian diaspora by using Mãe which

means mother in Portuguese (pronounced 'My') to say, "Mother Africa". For many years and as a college student, I conducted independent research to find contemporary representations of African culture in the diaspora and had spent a brief period in Cuba circa 2004. Along the journey, I discovered Salvador de Bahia in Brazil and fell in love with Afro-Brazilian culture. It was in that period I came across the 'Black Mother' monument by Julio Guerra.

The "Mãe Preta" monument was sculpted in the 1950s and is placed in the Largo do Piacandu neighbourhood of São Paulo. The black mother is a statue of an Afro Brazilian woman breastfeeding an infant child. As I later discovered, the sad, distant, sober look of the statue - which was received with mixed perspectives amongst Afro Brazilians - was deliberate. Mãe Preta (The Black Mother) Monument represents a distressing reality that was suffered by thousands of enslaved Afro-Brazilian women known as the "black mothers." From the colonial era leading up until the very end of the 19th century, it was common for slave owners to request African women who had just given birth to serve as

wet nurses and breastfeed the babies of the wealthy and middle classes. I read that the monument immortalizes the profound sorrow of these women who were robbed of their freedom and required to neglect their children, highlighting the oppression that they endured and reinserting their place in history. I remember speaking to my friend afterwards and saying, I want to be Mãe Preta, but in a different way. Rather than being silenced by oppression and helplessness, I want to have a voice, and rather than forcefully serving as a wet nurse, I want to take care of my own (African) children.

The time in Cuba and my fascination with Afro Brazilians was such a period of cultural reawakening that Mãe Preta became the pseudonym for all my writing. It was also on my MSN messenger before the introduction of smartphones – it became my Blackberry ID, and on most social profiles, it is still my preferred username. While the Mãe Preta Monument sought to immortalize the history of the struggles, resistance and contributions of Afro-Brazilian women to the society, it inspired me to pay more attention to the history of the African women that raised me and document the wider history, magnificence and cultural heritage of the African continent.

MÃE AFRICA AS 'MOTHER AFRICA' HOLDS A VERY SPECIAL MEANING TO ME AS THE M.A.E ALSO REPRESENTS THE INITIALS OF THE THREE AFRICAN MOTHERS THAT RAISED ME; MY GRANDMOTHER, MY MOTHER AND MY SISTER.



My grandmother, 'Maami' as my mom fondly called her, had been a young woman in the many shades of colonial Nigeria; serving as a Warden in *Her Majesty Prisons* was a job that she combined with being a caterer, hairdresser and a seamstress on the weekends and some evenings. She participated in a parade to mark the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 and she belonged to the category of those quarantined for visiting Lagos Island from the hinterlands.

From the stories she told and my discoveries in later years as an African Studies scholar, her experiences in colonial Nigeria were a micro-representation of the larger African colonial experience – a combination of partial and selective inclusion alongside strong reminders of her mere existence being considered a threat. Her body art, which I now know to be the 'Kolo' style was a blend of traditional tattooing and scarification. The names on her thighs

spoke to a communal expression of identity and the quote was intimately associated with her life experiences. In many ways, she was my closest and most tangible representation of a vintage Nigeria.

Body modification including body painting, scarifications, tattooing and body piercings are some of the oldest art forms across Africa. The depictions of body markings on rock art in Tassili n'Ajjer mountains of Algeria, textual records acknowledging the practice in ancient Nubia, intricate details of facial markings on culturally symbolic artistic works including the Bronze Heads of Ife and the Nok Terra Cotta, and the discovery of body painting dating back to 100,000 years ago in the Blombos Cave of South Africa, all point to evidence that the skin has long been used as a canvas on the African continent.

Across thousands of ethnic groups, including the Omo Valley people of Ethiopia, the Legendary Masai of Kenya and Tanzania, the Himba pastoralists of Namibia, Voodum devotees in the Republic of Benin, the Igbo, Tiv, Efik, Yoruba, Idoma, Igala, Nupe and Kanuri – to mention a few from my home-country Nigeria, the skin has long been used to convey information about identity, affiliation, personal history, lineage, status and aesthetic choices.

While red ochre, white chalk, soot and other natural pigments have traditionally been used to adorn the skin, many mainstream records tracing the history of natural cosmetics largely exclude or do not prominently feature or acknowledge African cultures. The closest reference to the use of make-up by Africans in my research has been the mention of Queen Nefertiti or the

use of khol and henna, both often linked to the advent and presence of Middle Eastern cultures across the continent.

Of all of these cultural expressions, tribal markings have become increasingly unpopular. In many countries across the continent, the practice has been outlawed mainly due to the mandatory and non-consensual nature of it as well as its potential for spreading blood-borne diseases through the process. In many ways, there are modern replacements for some of its functional uses such as the identification role being replaced by modern identity cards; curative role replaced by conventional medicine; and new belief systems and beautification replaced by modern cosmetics. However, many Africans still bear tribal markings.

Living as involuntary representations of ancient cultural expression, body markings today are often a source of stigmatization, ridicule, discrimination and exclusion, as the perception of tribal markings have been weathered by the colonial experience and modernity. Today, they are often associated with a barbaric, primitive and savage perception of indigenous cultural expressions.

MÃE AFRICA'S AIM WITH 'SCARRED' IS TO REVISIT THE ORIGIN AND IMPACT OF THESE EXPRESSIONS AND DOCUMENT IN HISTORY, THE VALUES THAT INSPIRED AND INFORMED THEM.

As symbolized through Mãe Africa's logo where the tree represents the connectivity of all Africans to one root, the blocks of the separated tree trunk acknowledging the diversity in how we represent our common



heritage and the branches representing the diaspora, 'SCARRED' aims to document the many ways that our connectivity runs deeper than skin colour. In curating this exhibition, I strived to make a connection between collections that you find in museums and everyday lives being lived.



By seeing the Bétamarribé woman whose facial scarifications are reminiscent of the Ife terracotta unearthed in Nigeria in the 1930s, to the commonality of lip tattooing between the Wodaabe of Chad, the Kanuri of Nigeria and the Kerma of Sudan, to the similarities of facial markings between the Igala and Oyo people for example, 'SCARRED' aims to show how culturally connected we are, in ways that we often overlook.

Perhaps, from attending the exhibition, there may be a reinforcement of the notion that African art is not confined to conventional art forms such as paintings and sculptures but also include some vanishing cultural expressions that have in the past enhanced the quality of people's lives. It may also help to enlighten audiences on, and possibly correct, the mainstream narrative that tribal markings originated

in the transatlantic slave trade era. More importantly, we aim to use it as a platform to highlight the importance of assent in body markings, the stigma and discrimination sometimes endured by those bearing these expressions and the many ways that the cultural expressions are being reinterpreted in contemporary art. Interestingly, some depictions on pottery and pipes from Afro-descendant communities in Brazil indicate some interpretations of body markings in material culture.

Body art as a theme for 'SCARRED' now holds a deeper meaning to me. In addition to honouring my grandmother's memory through my first ever curated exhibition, the struggle to forge through the repeated and often last-minute disappointments in putting this project together helped me to recognize that the quote on her body was not simply body art; she had a guiding message for me.

LIKE THE ELABORATE TATTOOS ON HER THIGHS STATED, MAKING THE BEST EFFORT TO ACTUALIZE A DREAM IS NOT ENOUGH – AS I WOULD COME TO FIND OUT IN THE PREPARATION FOR 'SCARRED', ALONG WITH FAITH, I NEEDED MENTAL AND FINANCIAL STRENGTH TOO.



KOMIAN WOMAN DURING A
CEREMONY IN ADJOUA MESSOUMA
KOMIANS INITIATION CENTRE,
MOYEN-COMOÉ, ANIASSUE, IVORY
COAST | PHOTO: ERIC LAFFORGUE

**FRIDAY 29TH
NOVEMBER, 2019**

5.30PM – 11.00PM

5.30PM

Press Preview

6.30PM

Cocktail reception and preview of exhibition

7.30PM

Opening remarks from Mãe Africa's founder, Mãe Preta and two British Council supported visual artists: Yusuff Aina and Nadine Ibrahim.

8.00PM

Screening of 'Marked' by Nadine Ibrahim

'Marked' is a 20 minute documentary that explores the different cultures in Nigeria and their reasons behind scarification. Traveling through 20 states in Nigeria, the short film documents the reasons behind markings and how they intertwine with identity, beauty and culture.

9.00PM

Performance by Bumi Thomas

Bumi Thomas is a British-Nigerian jazz-soul singer and songwriter whose sound is inspired by her multicultural lineage. It is a wonderful combination of jazz, high life rhythms, Afro-beat, reggae, blues melodies, infused with folk and delivered with soul.

11.00PM

Preview closes



SATURDAY 30TH
NOVEMBER, 2019

11.00AM – 9.00PM

11.00AM

Doors open

6.30PM

Spotlight Conversation & Presentations by Dr. Chuu and Ryan

The conversation with selected guests with a direct connection to scarification will explore perspectives on the use of skin as a canvas to convey information about identity, affiliation, personal history, lineage, status, spirituality, aesthetic choices, scarification and the Uli body painting art. Speakers include:

Dr. Chuu Krydz Ikwuemesi is a painter, art critic, ethno-aesthetician and currently an associate professor, Department of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Dr. Toyin Ajao is a feminist activist, writer, researcher and teacher. An award-winning international blogger and accomplished academic, she is also an alumna and an associate of the Africa Leadership Centre (ALC) King's College, London where she completed the ALC prestigious Women Peace and Security Fellowship and a Master's in Conflict Security and Development.

Anyango Mpinga is a kenyan eco innovator, designer activist and who has embraced the principles of circular fashion to explore radical systems in textile design and promote conscious consumption of apparel and accessories.

Ryan Ouellette is a body art professional with twenty years of experience and a Scarification Practitioner. He is recognized as one of the world's elite practitioners and has performed scarification in countries around the world including Japan, Germany, and the UK. His work has been published in the pages of multiple body art magazines as well as on the National Geographic website.

Nallah Sangaré is a creative in the Fashion, Beauty & Art industry, Nallah is a Makeup artist, Hair Designer, Stylist, Creative Director and Photographer who uses fashion and makeup to shares stories of and about Africa.

9.00PM

Exhibition closes





NAILA MEDIA

MARKED BY NADINE IBRAHIM
PHOTO: KHALID ABDULSALAM



PHOTO: ANITA BUENO

**SUNDAY 1ST
DECEMBER, 2019**

11.00AM – 7.00PM

11.00AM

Doors open

4.00PM

**Screening of 'The Self' by AFRONOIRE
followed by a conversation with
Laurence 'Moniasse' Sessou.**

'The Self' is a video editorial featuring Beninese, French-born and raised Laurence Sessou who reveals the personal story behind her scarification and tattoos through poetry and striking editorial photography.

Creative Direction: Melissa Zibi
Videography: Filmmaker, Jaha Browne

6.00PM

**Spoken Word Performance by
Benjamin Bennett**

Benjamin Bennett is a poet and producer from South London, known mainly for creating spoken word and live music showcase, Vocals & Verses. Benjamin has been performing since 2008 and has had the privilege of gracing stages across the country.

9.00PM

Exhibition closes



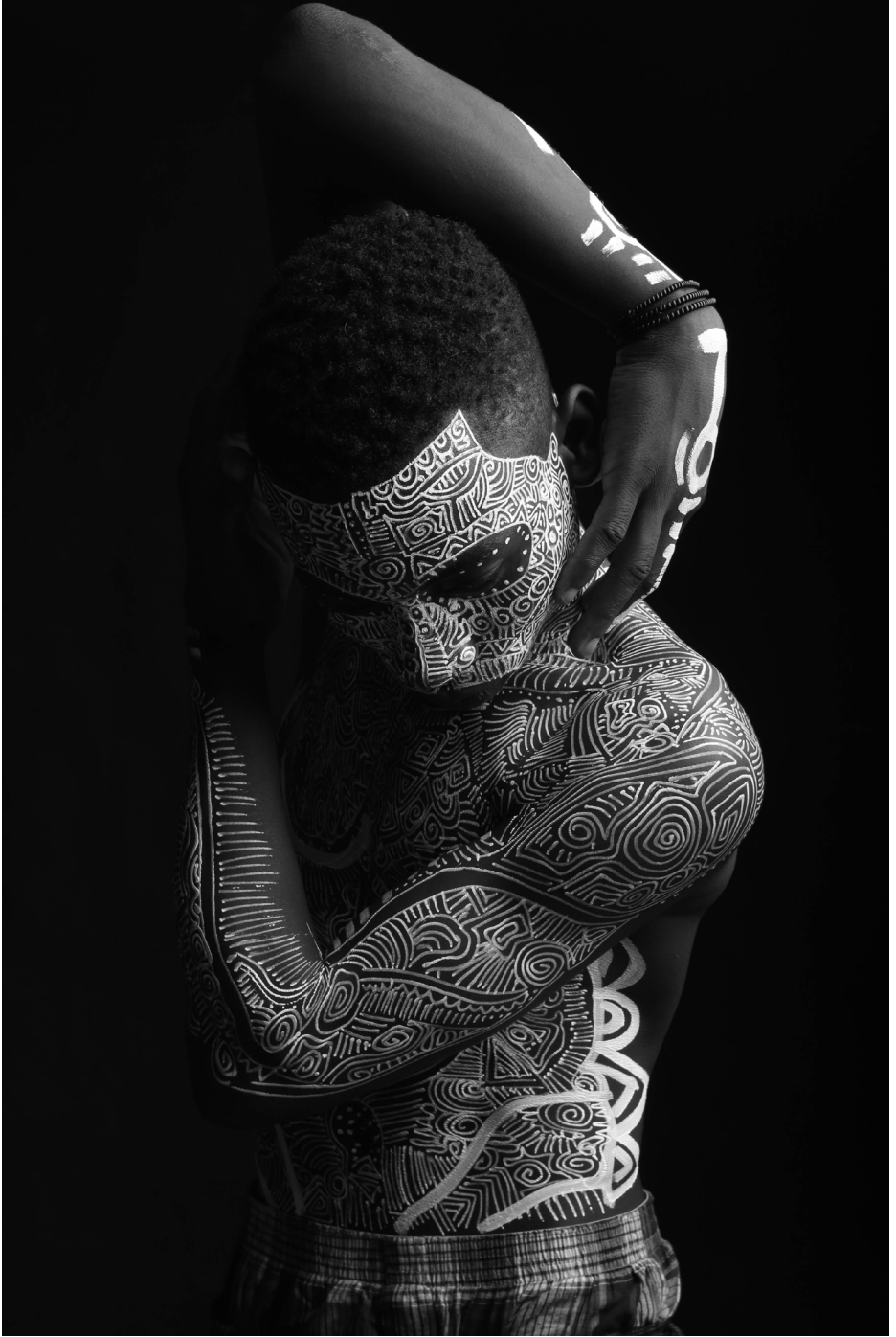


PHOTO: HANNAH LONGOLE



MEET THE EXHIBITING AND VISUAL ARTISTS AT ‘SCARRED’, WHOSE WORK DOCUMENTS THE VARYING ETHNIC GROUPS ACROSS AFRICA AND THEIR RESPECTIVE DISPLAYS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH BODY ART.

The exhibition showcases over 40 photographs from internationally acclaimed visual artists, Trevor Cole, Eric Lafforgue and dynamic talents including Nadine Ibrahim, Yusuff Aina, Anibal Bueno and Hannah Longole.



Yusuff Aina is a Nigerian multidisciplinary artist who works using a medium called Ainaism.

Derived from Aina, a Yoruba name given to a child born with the umbilical cord wrapped around the neck — this technique of creative lines, patterns and symbols illustrate the pressures a child faces in the womb, the freedom at birth and the journey through life.



Anibal Bueno is a Spanish travel photographer.

His interest in anthropology inspires his documentation of cultures across the world and their different forms of cultural expressions including body painting, tattoos, scarifications and dilatations.



Hannah Longole is a reputed Ugandan broadcast journalist.

Founder of the 'Ateker Cultural Center' (ACC), her photography and videography documents, promotes and celebrates Pastoralist traditional values and cultural heritage.



Trevor Cole is an award-winning and published photographer, “capturing inimitable moments today to reflect upon tomorrow”

His photography focuses predominantly on culture, captures people, landscapes and the interactions between them. His images reflect life's spatial and temporal journey and conveys a need to live in a more sustainable world.



Eric Lafforgue is an award-winning photographer whose portraits and landscapes positively highlights cultural diversity.

His works have been featured in the National Geographic, Der Spiegel, Le Monde, Lonely Planet, Times, Grands Reportages and several media outlets. Lafforgue's work on Papua New Guinea tribes was exhibited at the famous festival "VISA Pour l'Image in Perpignan", in France.



Nadine Ibrahim is a visual storyteller whose work explores various social issues in Nigeria society.

An award-winning filmmaker, her works include 'Through Her Eyes' which tells the story of a young northern girl affected by terrorism in Nigeria. Previewing at 'SCARRED', her latest production 'Marked' is a documentary exploring Nigeria's different cultures and their reasons behind scarification.



ULI PAINTING SESSION IN PROGRESS IN NRI, ANAMBRA STATE | COURTESY OF DR. CHUU KRYDZ IKWUEMESI



THEZELA NWOKEDI DRAWING ULI ON A LADY'S BODY. INYI, 2007 | COURTESY OF DR. CHUU KRYDZ IKWUEMESI

ANYANCO MPINGA | PHOTO: JOSEPH MANN



NALLAH SANGARÉ

'THE SELF' BY AFRONOIRE | PHOTO: RIO-ROMAINE



**MEET THE SPEAKERS AT
'SCARRED' WITH A DIRECT
CONNECTION TO BODY ART,
INCLUDING SCARIFICATION.**

Through special conversations, the exhibition will also explore perspectives on the use of skin as a canvas to convey information about identity, affiliation, personal history, lineage, status, spirituality, aesthetic choices, scarification and the Uli body painting art.



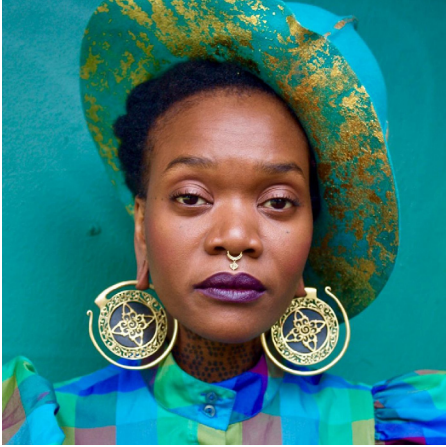
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Anyango Mpinga is a Kenyan eco innovator, designer activist who has embraced the principles of circular fashion to explore radical systems in textile design and promote conscious consumption of apparel and accessories.



Laurence 'Moniassel' Sessou is a London-based bodywork therapist, aromatherapist with over 14 years of practice and an artist muse, originally from the Republic of Benin. Her tattooing journey started when she was 30, and she has since broken the ground as one of the few black women with tattoos and scarifications in the modelling industry.



Ryan Ouellette is an American body art professional with twenty years of experience and a Scarification Practitioner. He is recognized as one of the world's elite practitioners and has performed scarification in countries around the world including Japan, Germany, and the UK. His work has been published in the pages of multiple body art magazines as well as on the National Geographic website.



Nallah Sangaré from Ivory Coast and Mali is a creative in the Fashion, Beauty & Art industry. She is a Makeup artist, Hair Designer, Stylist, Creative Director and Photographer who uses fashion and makeup to share stories of and about Africa.







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