

# Unseen Amsterdam 2019 – cutting edge of art photography

Incorporating camera-less photogram techniques and embroidery as well as Photoshop and video art, these eye-catching highlights from the eighth annual photography fair find artists testing the boundaries of the medium

by [Arnel Hecimovic](#)

Window in time, from the series Interdimensional Landscapes, 2019. Photograph: Liz Nielsen/Black Box Projects

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**T**his year's edition of the avant garde photo art fair Unseen featured 140 exhibitors in total. There were 53 galleries from around the world showcasing artists, including 19 galleries exhibiting for the first time.





Beside the main exhibition compound, the fair spread to several venues throughout the town.



Promesas de Saliva, from the series Rage of Devotion, by Lisa Ambrosio

More than 60 female photographers were on show, and subjects ranged from globalisation and the climate crisis, via abstract and experimental photography, portraiture and body photography, to political and urban landscapes.



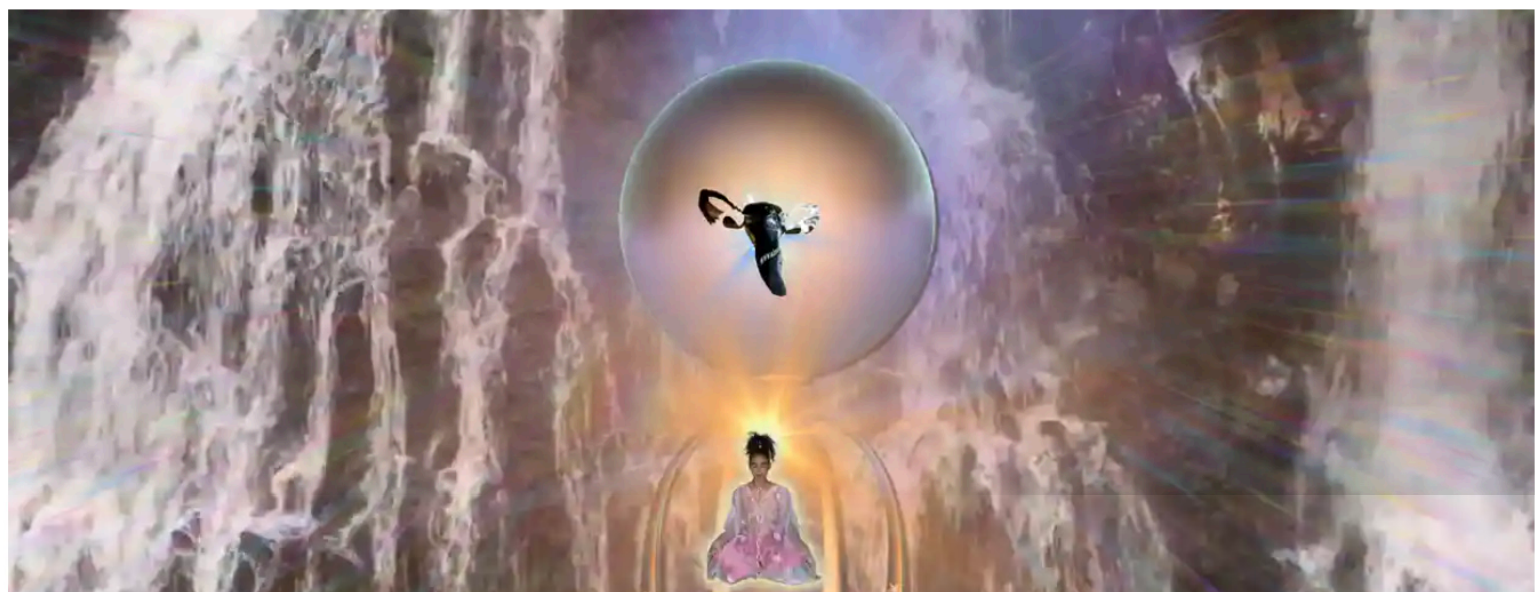
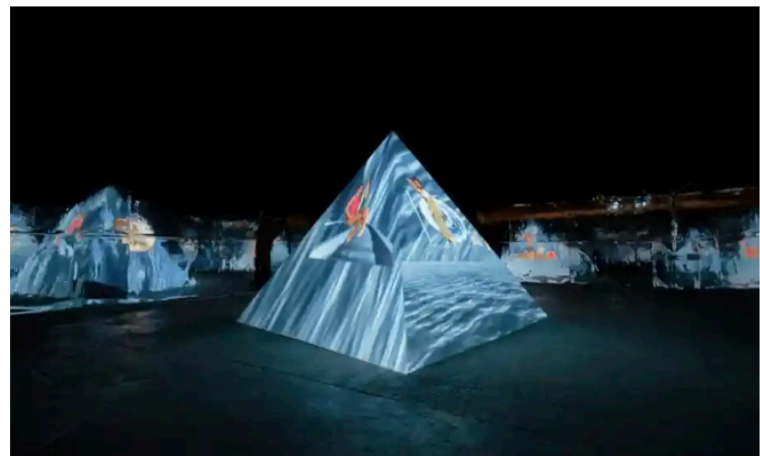




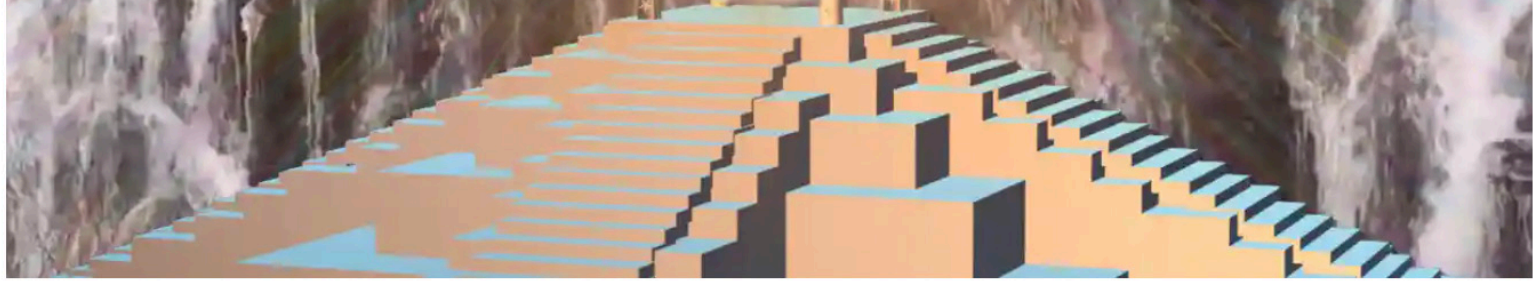
Skulz, from series The Years of Snake, by Delphone Diallo

The main difference between Unseen and other major fairs is its dual nature as both a high-end art photo fair and a contemporary photography festival. Artistic director Marina Paulenka said: “We want to bridge worlds and erase boundaries between high-end and make it accessible for everyone to appreciate contemporary photography.”

Paulenka, a native of Zagreb in Croatia, was on her way to the Venice Biennale in May when the call came through of her appointment by Unseen. She admits to being in tears. One of her first contributions was to bring French artist Tabita Rezaire, whose work is about decolonisation and has observed that today’s internet cables follow the slavery routes of old.







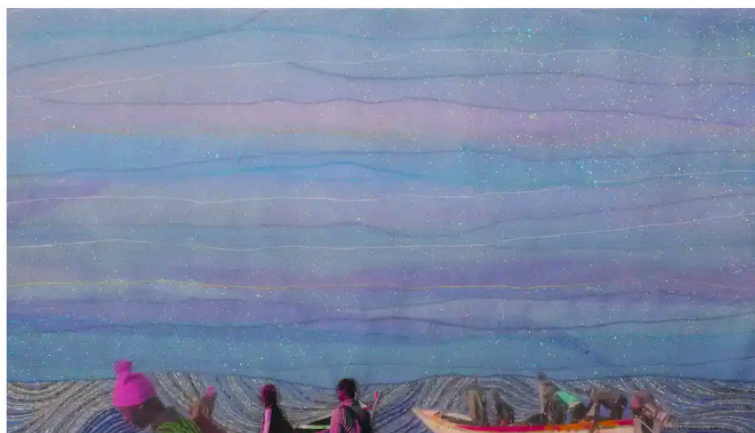
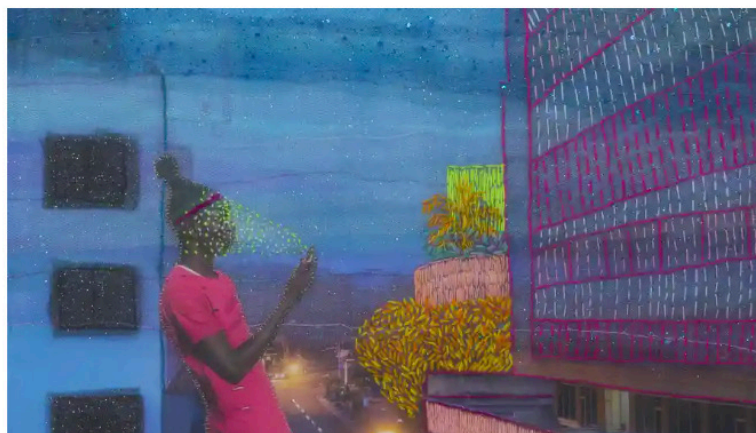
Clockwise from top left: Premium Connect; Recaptulation installation; Sugar Walls Teardom, by Tabita Rezaire, courtesy Goodman Gallery

When asked if it was a bit cheeky to showcase an artist who predominantly uses video installation, Paulenka's answered that photography was constantly evolving and pushing boundaries.



## Joana Choumali

Joana Choumali comes from Ivory Coast, and is exhibited by Gallery 1957 from Accra in Ghana. Her mixed-media photographs, overlaid with embroidered details in vivid colours, are truly a joyous spectacle.



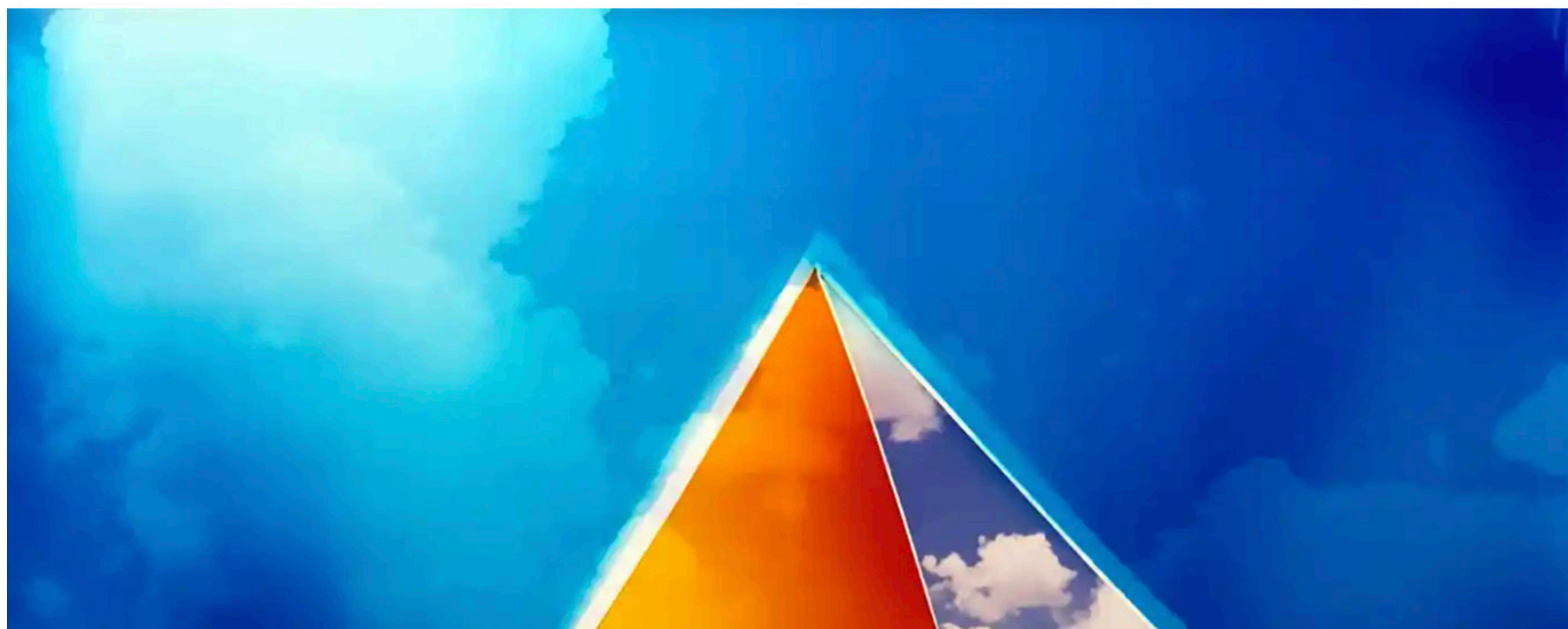




Trapped Soul (top), Waves Under My Eyelids and Eleutheria 2, from the series Albahian, by Joana Choumali, courtesy Gallery 1957

Her inspiration for this style came after a long and traumatic illness, during which she taught herself embroidery as a therapeutic exercise. It was the first light of the day whose colour Choumali wanted to capture.

Her work will also be exhibited at the V&A museum in London as a part of [Prix Pictet 19](#), which opens on 14 November.

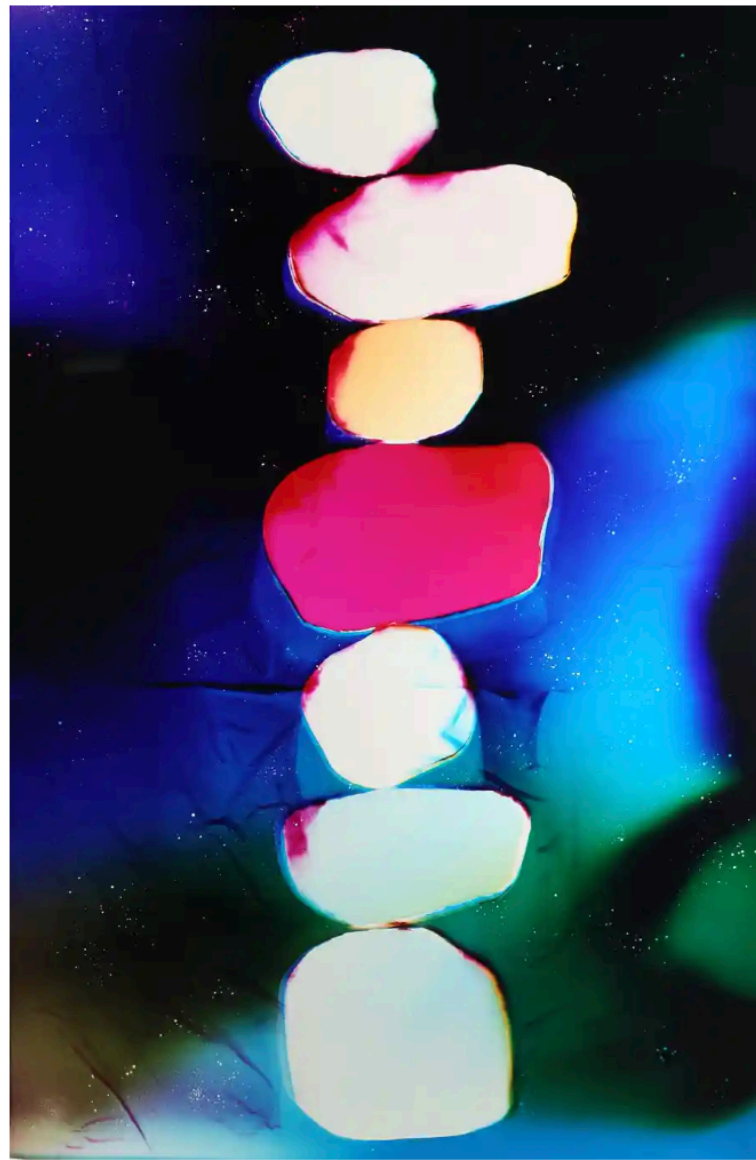




A large abstract artwork titled 'Pyramid' featuring a central triangular shape with a warm, orange-yellow gradient. This triangle is set against a background of a mountain landscape with evergreen trees and a blue sky. The entire composition is framed by dark, angular shapes that create a sense of depth and perspective.

# Liz Nielsen

Liz Nielsen's abstract landscapes vibrate with colour and layers, each telling a story. The American artist (presented by Black Box Projects) adheres to one of the first experimental photographic techniques: the photogram. She works in complete darkness, save for the occasional use of mobile phone light bounced off the ceiling, to create colours in the most basic ways without lenses.



The Meeting, above left, and Pyramid, top, from the Interdimensional Landscapes series (2019); above right: Cosmic Stone Stack, from the series The Arrival (2018) by Liz Nielsen/Black Box Projects

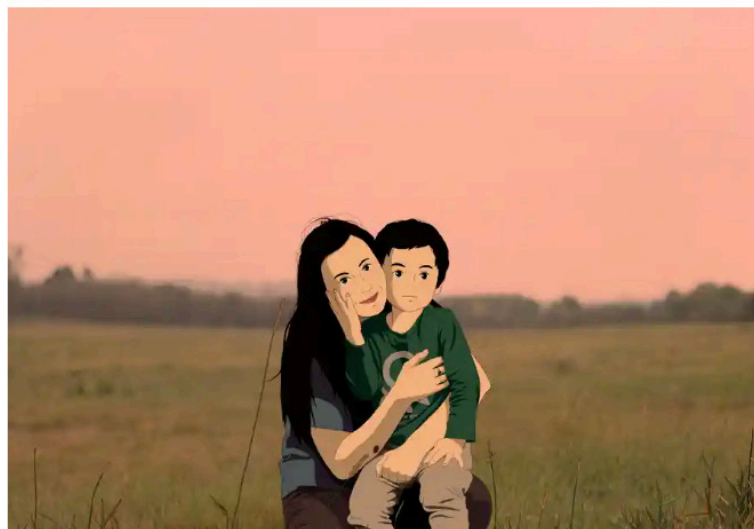


The Interdimensional Landscapes series was shot on a road trip in Yellowstone national park in Utah that turned out to be tragic and has a very personal meaning.

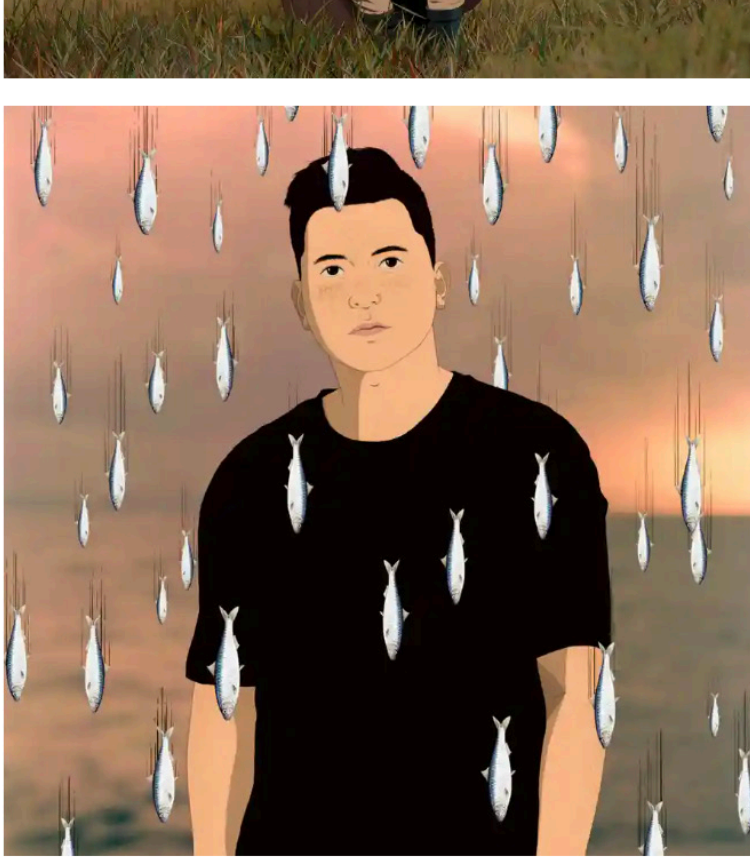


David Favrod

The Ibasho gallery exhibited artist David Favrod, who is of Swiss-Japanese heritage but is currently based in Spain. His work combines manga and anime-style drawings with photography. He usually starts by sketching. Or, in the case of an artwork titled *The Fall (La Chute)*, by digging a hole for a week.







Clockwise from top left: The Day of the Fires; Les 4 Cols, from the Sound of the Black Waves series; work-in-progress shots of The Fall; Une Pluie de Sardines © David Favrod, courtesy Ibasho

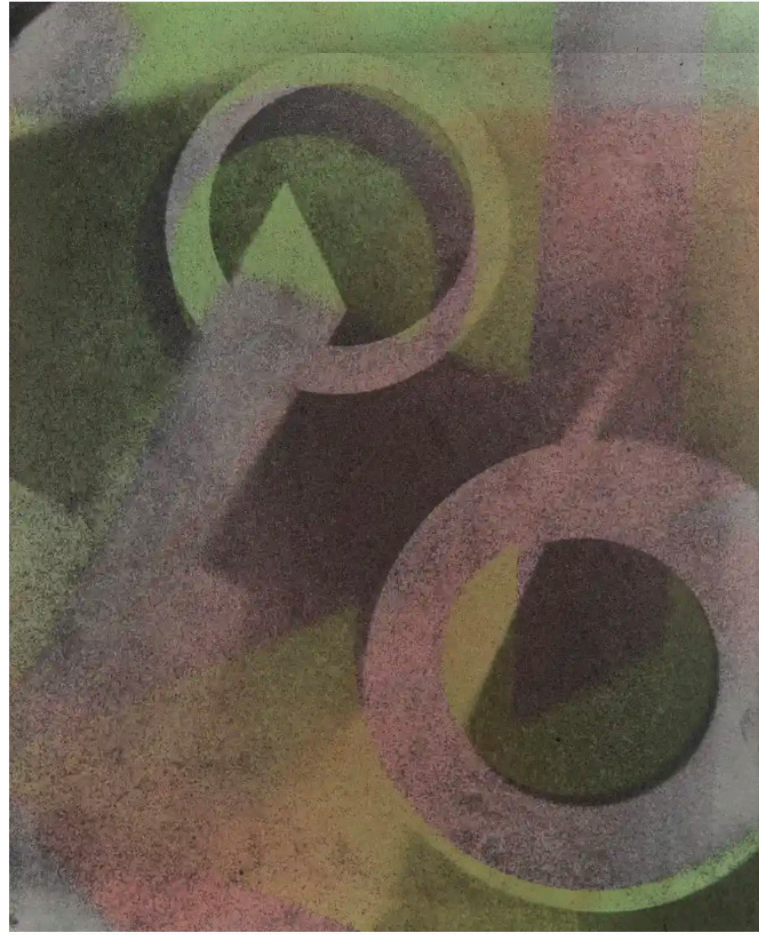
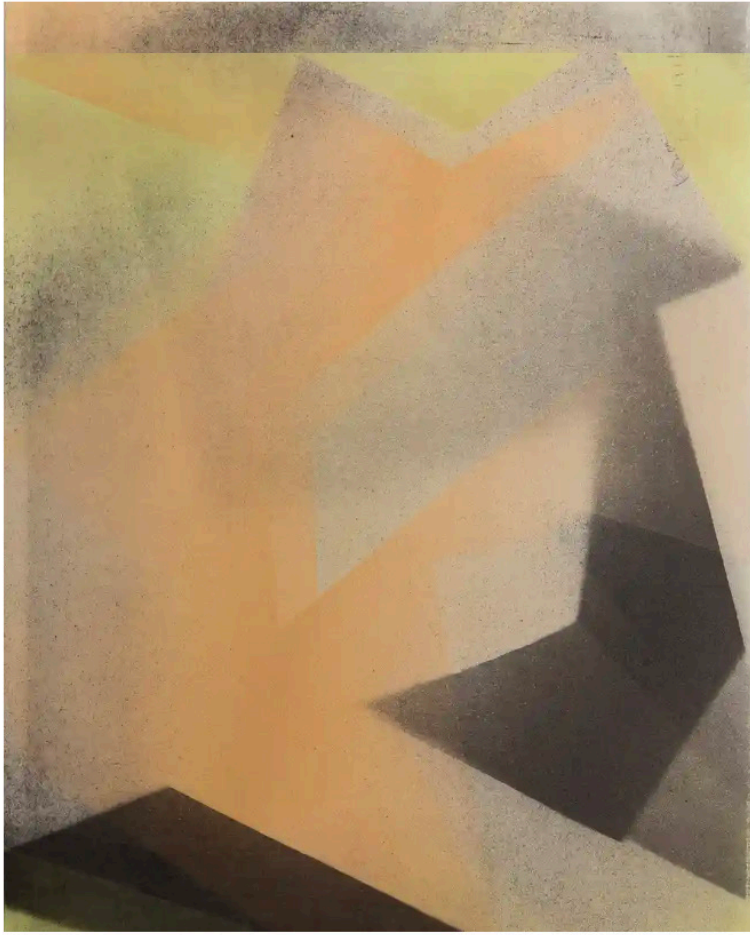
As there was a boulder beneath where he began digging, he used Photoshop to make the hole look deeper. After scanning the photograph, and 2,500 hours of Photoshop drawing later, the image was finished.

His surreal work A Shower of Sardines, meanwhile, resembles Magritte in a manga style.



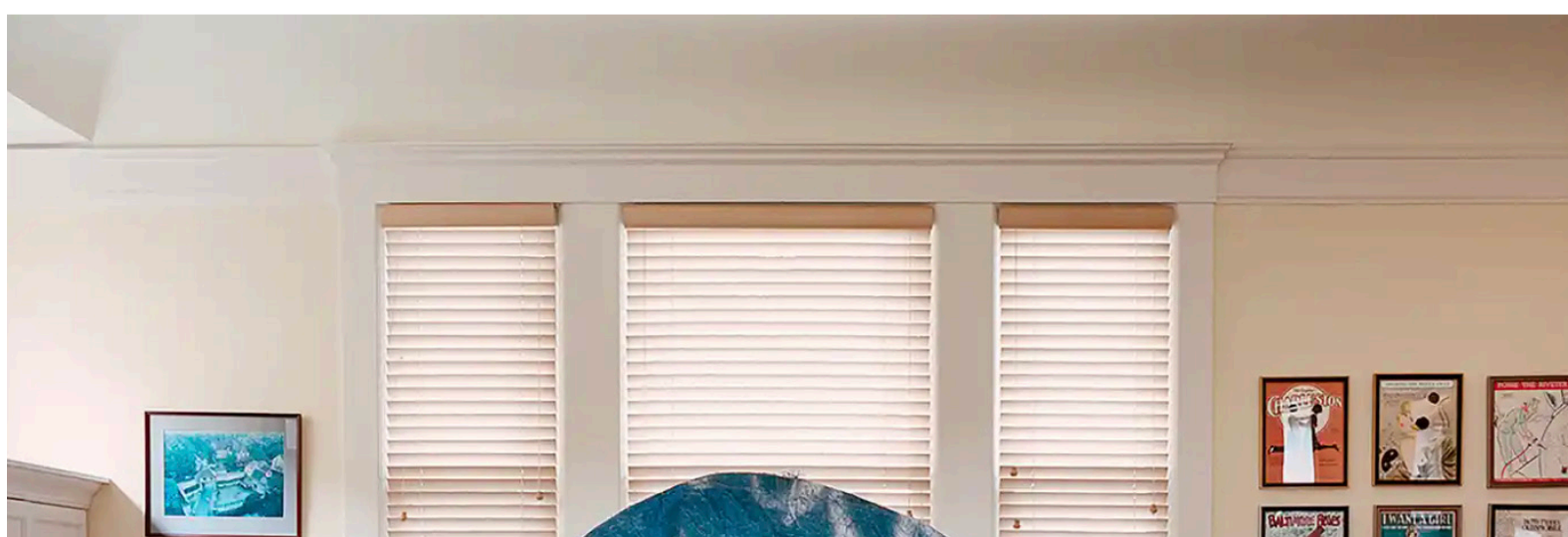


# Mustapha Azeroual



At first sight, the work of French-Moroccan light artist Mustapha Azeroual (Galerie Binome) could be taken as being inspired by cubism. His technique involves capturing several images on the same film, transferring them on to a single image, and therefore distorting them in a multistage process of capturing and deconstructing, before merging them again. These untitled works from his series Radiance feature four different locations superimposed into one.

- Sans titre #0005 (top); Sans titre #1302 and Sans titre #0004, from the series ACTIN, 2019 by Mustapha Azeroual, courtesy Galerie Binome.
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Jana Sophia Nolle's socially charged series *Living Room* (Catharine Clark Gallery) places the shelters of some of San Francisco's homeless into affluent domestic interiors. The intimacy and vulnerability of the shelters is emphasised by the stable structures of the living rooms, with their paintings and bookshelves. It offers a different take on the concept of privacy, and emphasises the value of security, by comparison to the temporary refuge used by the growing number of homeless people in the second richest city in the US.

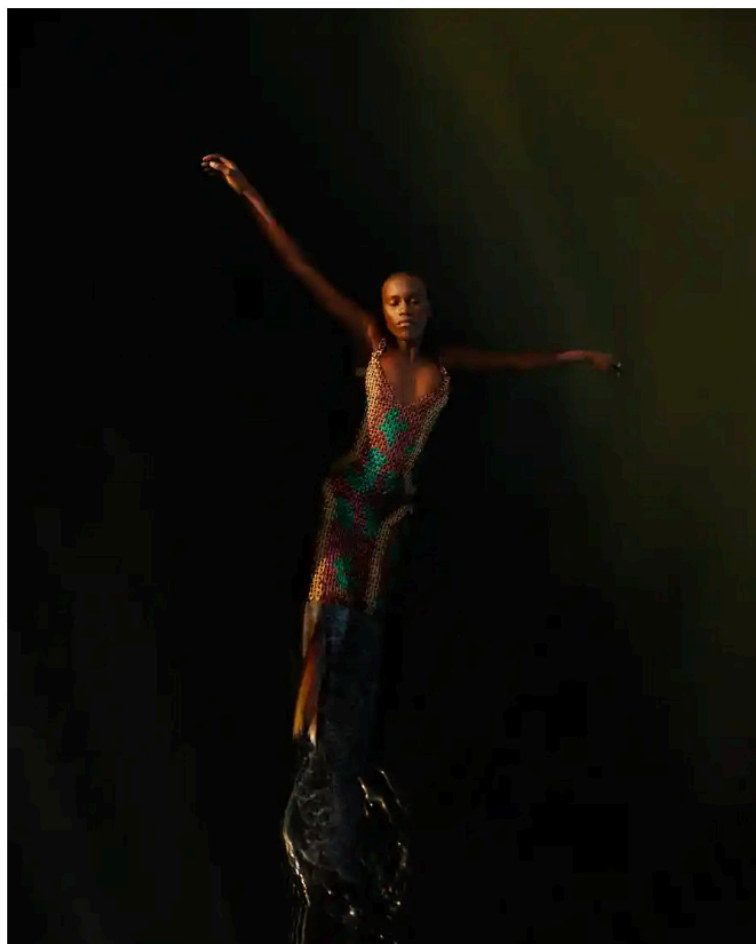
- San Francisco, from the series *Living Room*, by Jana Sophia Nolle, courtesy Catharine Clark Gallery







David Uzochukwu



Slab, top; Bouyant, left; Uprising, right, both from the series *Drown in Magic* (2019) by David Uzochukwu, courtesy Galerie Number 8

Twenty-year-old David Uzochukwu (Galerie Number 8), was the youngest artist on show at Unseen this year, and his observations on race and migration are powerful and somewhat disturbing. One photograph, *Uprising*, involves fish Photoshopped to look like a serpent. He draws inspiration from Greek mythology, but *Bleeding*



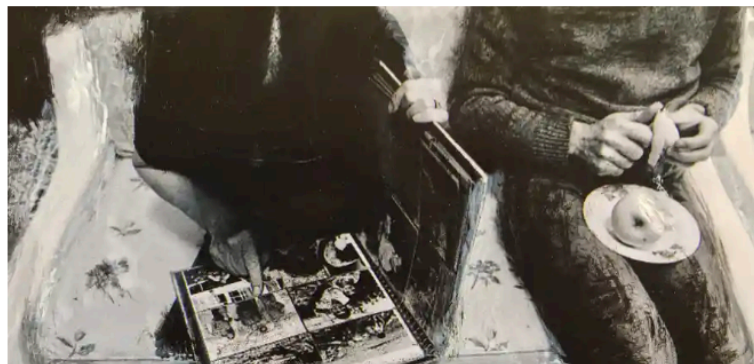
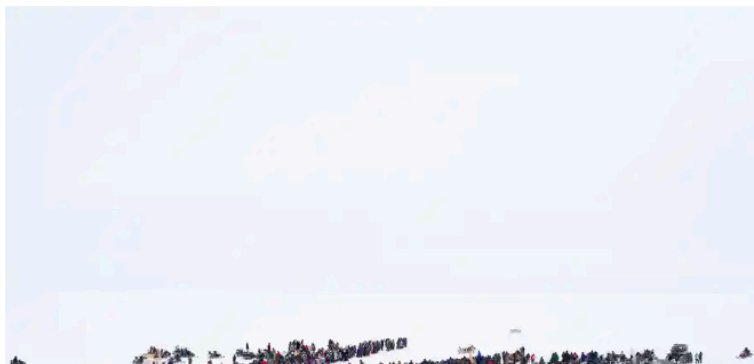
Body Near Water is a direct parallel with migrant crossings into Europe. Uzochukwu is of mixed Austrian and Nigerian heritage, and lives in Belgium. His everyday experiences of racial bias permeate his work.



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HyperFocal by Simon Roberts

There were many other artists at Unseen deserving of mention, including **Simon Roberts**, whose magical forest landscapes could have come straight out of Lord of the Rings ; **Charles Xelot**, who shows Nenet reindeer herders filling the void of Siberian Arctic; **Parisa Aminolahi**, whose work deals with homeland, exile and childhood memories; and **Xing**, an online female collective.







Reindeer race by Charles Xelot, left; Tehran diaries by Parisa Aminolahi, right



Foot face 9 by Xing

**The free press is under attack from multiple forces.** Media outlets are closing their doors, victims to a broken business model. In much of the world, journalism is morphing into propaganda, as governments dictate what can and can't be printed. In the last year alone, hundreds of reporters have been killed or imprisoned for doing their jobs. The UN reports that 85% of the world's population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country in recent years.

This week marks the 30th annual World Press Freedom Day, a day for everyone to reflect on the importance of free expression as fundamental for all other rights. It is also an opportunity to pledge support for independent media - because without a robust and free press, a healthy democracy is impossible.

As you're joining us today from France, we hope you will consider marking this



day by [supporting the Guardian](#). Despite the financial challenges plaguing the media industry, we've decided to keep our journalism paywall-free, because we deeply believe everyone has the right to access high-quality, fact-checked reporting. And we maintain our independence thanks to generosity from readers all over the world, who understand that supporting the free press is an investment in an informed and empowered public.

Unlike many others, we have no billionaire owner – this helps us maintain the freedom to fearlessly chase the truth and report it with integrity. Your support will allow us to continue to work with trademark determination and passion to bring you journalism that's always free from commercial or political interference.

We also encourage you to support one of the many, smaller independent news organisations around the world. Over the years, we've collaborated with teams who are often publishing quality reporting in the face of great adversity. We have shared our expertise with them, helping to start and grow their own reader funding models. If this interests you, [find out more about our work](#) with outlets in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Turkey, Hungary and beyond.

Today we ask you to power Guardian reporting for the years to come, whether with a small sum or a larger one. **If you can, please support us on a monthly basis from just €2. It takes less than a minute to set up, and you can rest assured that you're making a big impact every single month in support of open, independent journalism. Thank you.**