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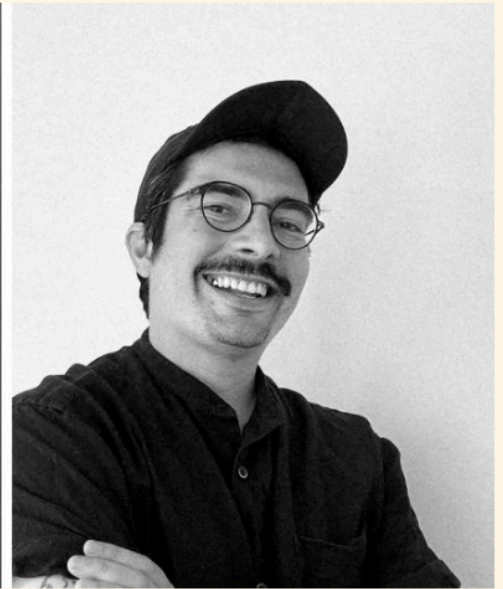
News

October 13, 2025

ON NEW BORDER ECOLOGIES

Nancy Baker Cahill, Yatreda, and Simon Fernandes are marking space across physical and digital terrain

EMANN ODUFU



Nancy Baker Cahill, Kiya Tadele (creative director of Yatreda), and Simon Fernandes. Courtesy of the artists

Now Reading: *On New Border Ecologies*

When I began developing “*Places & Spaces*” as an exhibition at Friedrichs Pontone in Tribeca, New York, I was looking to examine the ways artists collapse the traditional divide between digital and analog practice. Too often, digital work has been siloed as peripheral or “other”, while painting and sculpture are granted default authority, especially in commercial art spaces.

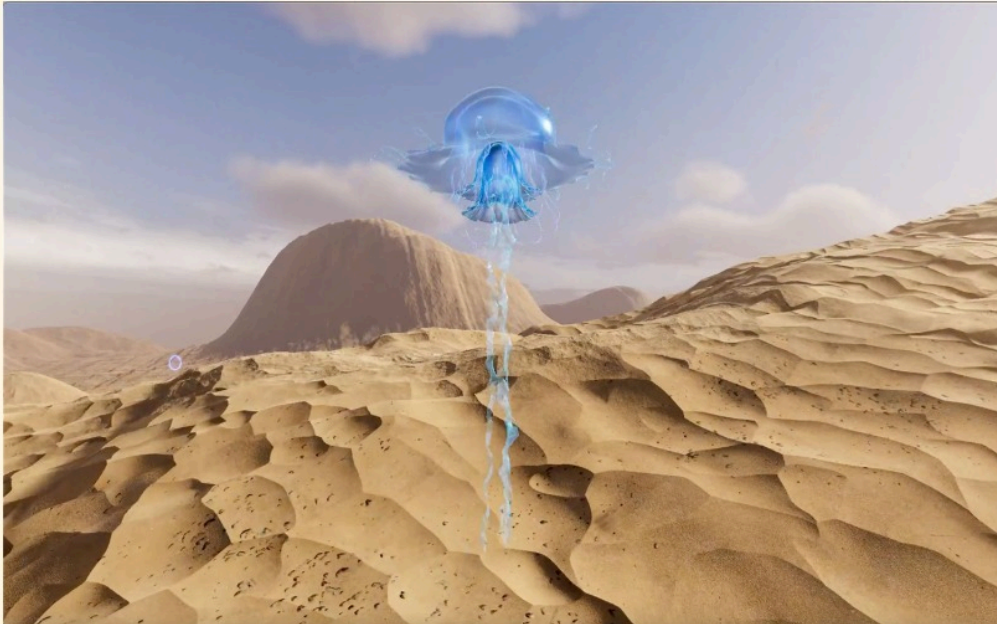
By centering hybridity, the show sought to dissolve such hierarchies, presenting the digital not as a separate category but as part of the same continuum of artistic expression. In the following conversation, three participating artists reflect on the digital and the physical as entangled forces shaping the future of art.

Nancy Baker Cahill expands drawing into multiple registers, from graphite to augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), creating works that toggle between analog and digital states, sometimes even within the same piece. For “Places & Spaces” Baker Cahill exhibited *WIDOW III* (2025), which extends her digital drawing and AR-based practice into hybrid sculptural form.

Simon Fernandes works fluidly across painting, sculpture, and interactive games, showing that abstraction on canvas and the logic of play in digital space can carry equal weight. For this exhibition, he showed *How to Move Dunes and Remove Fortresses* (2024), an interactive game and VR installation that builds a navigable world.

Yatreda (represented by its creative director, Kiya Tadele) fuses classical art and mythology with blockchain ecosystems, reframing history through Ethiopian narratives while embracing the possibilities of on-chain cultural preservation. Yatreda showed *Andromeda of Aethiopia, Volume I* (2022), where mythological storytelling is reimagined through digital video minted as NFT





Simon Fernandes, *How to Move Dunes and Remove Fortresses*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Friedrichs Pontone

Emann Odufu: One of the driving forces behind “Places & Spaces” was the collapse of hierarchies between mediums, especially how digital work has historically been siloed as “other”. How does your practice challenge this separation, and what does hybridity in art mean to you in this cultural moment?

Nancy Baker Cahill: I rarely separate the mediums that I use. They are all interdependent and inextricably linked.

Hybridity in art to me is a formal and conceptual rejection of orthodoxies and established hierarchies that would otherwise contain or delimit what is “allowed” in one medium, versus another.

I embrace hybridity not only for what it illuminates, but more broadly to expand what is possible creatively across disciplines. Hybridity allows for unexpected blendings and the uncontainable, both of which trouble the status quo.

Simon Fernandes: Hybridity in my practice isn't about novelty but about dissolving boundaries between mediums, allowing painting, sculpture, objects, and games to carry equal weight as vocabularies of form and perception. I see the digital not as "other" but as an extension of material practice, placing mediums in direct conversation so that a painting might borrow the logic of a game or a sculpture might feel at home both physically and virtually. This collapsing of hierarchies reflects how we already live between tactile and digital worlds, letting art resonate more truthfully with contemporary experience.

Yatreda (Kiya Tadele): I like to think of Yatreda as protecting a grandmother's recipes, bringing them into the modern world while also contributing my own vision as an Ethiopian woman alive in the digital age. Some of our work resembles the small local theatre you might see outside a church in the Ethiopian countryside, and then we capture the result of the costume design, character development, and final concept with a digital camera; so it becomes a variety of hybrid mediums even when viewed as one final digital result.



Yatreda, *Andromeda of Aethiopia, Volume I*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Friedrichs Pontone Gallery

Yatreda (Kiya Tadele) on myth and common humanity

EO: Your *Andromeda of Aethiopia* series remaps a classical Greek myth through an Ethiopian lens. Why did this particular myth feel urgent to reinterpret, and how does it connect to your broader mission of reclaiming and reframing historical narratives?

KT: I feel the legend belongs to Ancient Greece. If you were to read the words of Ovid as an Ethiopian or Aethiopian person at that time, nothing would be concreted. The creative vision in your mind, someone named Andromeda of Aethiopia, would be my sister; so that is who I cast.

The goal of this work was to interpret the myth as if no other modern visuals contaminated my mind, including paintings, Hollywood movies, and so on. We share a common humanity, and Ethiopia is deeply connected to many of the world's greatest stories.



Yatreda, *Andromeda of Aethiopia*, Volume I, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Friedrichs Pontone Gallery

EO: You are often labeled an “NFT artist”, yet your work extends beyond that category. How do you navigate that label, and what do you think needs to evolve – technically, culturally, or institutionally – for digital art to move into its next chapter?

KT: I am very proud to be labeled an “NFT artist”, because that’s what introduced me to the art world, and this community is one I deeply believe in. I also collect NFTs from other artists I admire. We are our own unique tribe within the art world, supporting one another. The term captures my journey. What we need are more institutions that embrace this technology and meet us where we are. For example, the Toledo Museum of Art **collected our artwork** entirely on-chain, keeping its provenance safe on the blockchain, while also displaying the digital file on a high-resolution screen for all museum guests to enjoy.

Digital art should be accessible to everyone, yet the technology creates digital scarcity, which is very important. We are simply replicating the systems of the physical world.



Simon Fernandes, *How to Move Dunes and Remove Fortresses*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Friedrichs Pontone

Simon Fernandes on memory and jellyfish

EO: Simon, In *How to Move Dunes and Remove Fortresses*, players drift through a surreal Fortaleza landscape as jellyfish, exploring a dune-covered Dutch fort from the 1600s. How does turning this site into an interactive game-world reframe colonial history and local memory for a digital audience?

SF: I grew up in Fortaleza, a city named after a colonial fortress. In my game the fortress isn't visible or conquerable; it's buried beneath the dunes, more memory than image.

By drifting as a jellyfish, players move through sand, light, and atmosphere in a way that resists the rigidity of colonial monuments, sensing history without ever fixing it in place.

For a digital audience, the fortress becomes less a landmark and more a haunting, opening space to reimagine memory as something elusive, felt, and always in flux.

EO: Your choice of the jellyfish as the central avatar resists naturalization and fixed identity. What does this nonhuman perspective allow you to explore about movement, belonging, and survival in relation to both history and ecology?

SF: The jellyfish drew me in because of its fragile, transparent form, made of 95% water and pulses of electricity, hovering at the border between matter and life. Though it has no brain, its network of nerves recalls our own neural systems, where perception flickers into consciousness in tissues that feel both material and dreamlike. In this sense, I imagine life without the fortress of bones and skin, simply as electric water drifting through space — fluid, luminous, vulnerable, and closer to a dream than to a monument.



Nancy Baker Cahill, *WIDOW III* (2025). Courtesy of the artist and Friedrichs Pontone

Nancy Baker Cahill on embodied sensory experience

EO: Your work pushes drawing into three dimensions through AR and VR, treating mark-making as sculpture. What excites you about how these tools alter the definition of “line” and “gesture”?

NBC: What excites me is that these technologies expand the definition of “drawing”, “trace”, and mark-making itself. The affordances of AR and VR allow for a layered and embodied sensory experience with the work (both for the maker and for the viewer). When I turn my graphite drawings into my *Slipstream* or *WIDOW* wall works, which were shown at “Places & Spaces”, I consider them to be as much 3D drawings as sculptures. Gesture takes on a whole new meaning: its inception on paper; its realization as a torn, 3D “mark” in space; and ultimately as a digital artifact of these processes.

Materially, the iterative nature of my work allows me to transform my drawings into digital objects which become key subjects in my experiential (expanded) films.

EO: Many of your projects exist simultaneously across multiple states: on paper, as digital sculptures, and as site-specific AR. How do you think about the tension between permanence and ephemerality when your works circulate across both physical and digital space?

NBC: I don’t really believe in the idea of permanence, which is a whole other discussion! But these projects’ material simultaneity gestures at the essential contradiction of two (or many) things being true or “real” at once — a light gesture toward the probabilistic nature of reality via quantum mechanics. The poetics of ephemerality are endlessly interesting to me, and only exist as concerns in regard to physical and digital conservation.



Nancy Baker Cahill is a New York-based new media artist known for her work with augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and blockchain technology. Her interdisciplinary practice explores themes of power, consciousness, and the environment through research-based and immersive experiences. Baker Cahill creates immersive experiences, video installations, sculptures, and conceptual projects that engage the human sensorium and are rooted in drawing. Since 2018, she has been the Founder and Artistic Director of 4th Wall, a free, AR public art platform exploring resistance and inclusive creative expression.

Simon Fernandes is an artist from Fortaleza, Brazil who is currently based in Los Angeles. His practice explores how surfaces record time, reveal layers of presence, and suggest absence. With a process attuned to materiality and transformation, his work engages with memory, displacement, and permanence, giving form to images that exist on the threshold between the visible and the latent.

Yatreda is a family-based Ethiopian art collective, led by its creative director Kiya Tadele. Using digital art and blockchain technology, they create work in the style of *tizita*—an Amharic term for nostalgia and longing for the past. The collective focuses on preserving and celebrating Ethiopian legends, culture, and history. In a fusion of tradition and innovation, Yatreda mints their artwork on the blockchain, employing a 21st-century approach to preserving history. This peer-to-peer, shared online record of transactions enables them to immortalize African legends, folk dances, and endangered cultural styles for eternity, reflecting their mission to rediscover Africa's original self once again.

Emann Odufu is an independent art and culture critic, filmmaker, and curator from Newark, New Jersey. His creative practice, spanning filmmaking and curatorial projects, explores Afrofuturism within Black cinema and beyond. As a curator, he has organized exhibitions at the National Arts Club, MoCA Connecticut, Leila Heller Gallery, the Liu Shiming Art Foundation, and Friedrichs Pontone, New York.

"Places & Spaces" ran from September 5 to 28, 2025 at Friedrichs Pontone, New York. The participating artists were Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman, William Buchina, Nancy Baker Cahill, Edgar Cano, William Corwin, Delano Dunn, Simon Fernandes, Ivan Forde, Tomokazu Matsuyama, Suchitra Mattai, Maliyamungu Muhande, Chelsea Odufu, Dennis Osadebe, Umar Rashid, Laurie Simmons, Pap Souleye, Sergio Suarez, Kiyomi Quinn Taylor, Chester Toye, and Yatreda.