

Open studios – Artists in residency

Chizu Anucha



Chizu Anucha
credits Marco Cornelli

**villa
arson**

Residence January 28 - April 8, 2024

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Chizu Anucha (aka chizu nnamdi) is in residency at Villa Arson from January 29 to April 8 in the framework of *Magnetic 2*.

Magnetic 2 is a programme of Fluxus Art Projects that brings together eight institutions to create a new programme of artist residencies of eight weeks: four in France – Villa Arson in Nice, CAPC in Bordeaux, Frac Bretagne in Rennes, Frac Grand Large in Dunkirk- and four in the United Kingdom – Cove Park in Scotland, Wysing Arts Centre in England, Flax Art Studios in Northern Ireland and Aberystwyth Arts Centre in Wales. *Magnetic 2* will gradually build an expanding network of partner residencies with shared commitments and values. *Magnetic 2* is supported by the Institut français du Royaume-Uni, the Institut français, French ministry of Culture, French ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Creative Scotland, Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales / Wales Arts International, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the British Council and its precious private patrons and friends.

A Scotsman of Nigerian origin, Chizu Anucha graduated from Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh in structural engineering and architectural design, and holds a Master of Design in sound for the moving image from Glasgow School of Art.

His multidisciplinary and collaborative practice is at the intersection of music composition, video and performance. His moving image work is poetic and reflexive, while his music brings together internal conflicts, yearnings and nostalgic relics to investigate the historical tensions inherent in the publicness of the black body. With this he experiments in the formation of historical and fictional narratives, often by recontextualizing archive film and collages of VHS video with a music soundtrack at the fore. His work has been presented in numerous festivals, museums and contemporary art centres in Scotland, including the Royal Glasgow Institute (2020), Edinburgh Art Festival (2021), Victoria & Albert Museum Dundee (2021), David Dale Gallery (2022), Burrell Collection (2023) and Glasgow Short Film Festival (2023).

Interview

Gil Lekh: Hi Chizu, can you tell us a bit about your background and what drew you to the mediums of performance, video and music?

Chizu Anucha: Hello! I came to find that these mediums lend themselves to each other really well for trying to communicate certain things because they're very similar languages. Theoretically and aesthetically they complement each other really well. My music journey started with classical training in violin, then clarinet and bass clarinet as a teenager and I played in wind ensembles. During this time I learned acoustic guitar and I was interested in indie, alternative, folk and Spanish styles of guitar-playing, then eventually started writing music. I never played guitar in bands when I was young but I always wanted to. I made a home for myself performing music and I've always loved being moved by music videos that strike a chord with me for whatever reason. Then it was when I was at art school that I started experimenting with video. When we were tasked with video projects, most people would go straight for the 4k cameras and ultra HD stuff but I wasn't that interested in them. I liked digging through archives and I liked the textural qualities of VHS and videotape. I liked the idea of blending historical narratives and their images with music I'd made and superimposing things I'd shot on camcorder. Then the viewer's imagination is in this space between realism and fantasy – somewhere in surreality. I like working with VHS and miniDV because the equipment is so easy to use. It's not as disposable as digital and it's much more instantaneous than analog film, it's somewhere in the middle. Like with analog film, you have image grain, surface noise, there's character and there's a certain charm to it that invites the viewer's examination and draws you to the image underneath. Then, when you apply a narrative and a music score, it heightens the realism and creates a little world. All these things you can explore with music, moving image and sound make up a language that can communicate things in a special way that really speaks to me.

G. L.: What are the subjects that run through your work, and what fields of reflection are you involved in?

C. A.: As I'm making, video and music exist quite separately. My video work is about social phenomena: people, place and temporality. Specifically people of colour, and how we navigate the world in and amongst the oppressive frameworks that are imposed upon us. The way that our bodies are racialised and politicised by just existing. My music is much more self-involved, it's all me, me, me, woe is me, and about how I'm feeling. Most of the time it's very insular, it's escapism and it helps me to make sense of things in my life that I'm confused about or that don't make sense. I like to be in a room with small, warm lights and incense, and build up a sonic space that feels like it matches what's happening in my head and body. I'm trying to become more of a well-regulated person, for which you have to separate yourself from your emotions to an extent, to not be reactive, to be able to observe them and yourself from some distance with a level of objectivity. At the same time, we owe it to ourselves to carve time and space with the intention that we

can fully feel things out, allowing our body's reaction to the things we experience to really filter through. Underscoring that, I love romance and desire – things that are viscerally felt and that can also be hard to articulate. With the right filmmaking techniques you can romanticise anything you like. That then informs an artistic language and how things can be communicated – with warmth. Joy and pleasure are also interesting to explore, particularly as racialised people, how we're conditioned to or societally permitted to experience these things can be subverted in quite interesting ways on screen or through performance. Also, anywhere in the world, every story revolves around conflict and resolution, whether interpersonal or internal. People want passion and drama, and people also want to see different kinds of resolution modelled.

G. L.: I notice that your past works deal with these subjects by linking them to healing practices, spiritualism, psychoanalysis and care practices. Your work seeks out archives and documentation, and involves investigative work or cooperation with other artists. These practices infuse your work. We find an afrofuturist perspective as in *pidgin* (2019) through the use of contemporary music assembled with a look at the past through a rewriting of the white imperialist narrative of *African Sanctus* (1977, BBC Omnibus) by David Fanshawe. In this film you go in search of the voices of those who preceded us and instituted Black thought like the artist Maud Sulter or the fugitive abolitionist enslaved couple Ellen and William Craft. Can you tell us how your work has evolved since 2019? And can you tell us about your relationship to time in your work?

C. A.: Those are all quite massive undertakings. It's important to know that it's not done alone, that a lot of people precede your life, they've laid a lot of groundwork, and you can pick up on the things that resonate with you, or not. I think the world we live in today is a very confusing, infuriating and overwhelming place to be, so we can use historical narratives and social phenomena as tools to help us navigate it. From a place of genuine curiosity, by connecting certain dots and drawing parallels to different happenings across the world through time, we can then extrapolate a route to go forward for ourselves.

G. L.: What project do you plan to develop during your *Magnetic 2* residency at Villa Arson?

C. A.: Nowadays, more and more people choose to work with the intention of slowness and I'm glad that's becoming normalised because I'm naturally just very slow at doing things. When it comes to making work, it's more often a case of taking all these fragments of music, sound and video, and piecing them together into something with a narrative. A few days before I arrived at Villa Arson, I recorded a number of tracks at Green Door Studio in Glasgow with my bandmate who plays drums. Producing and thinking about music projects is forming a large part of my time here. I'm also developing a project called "May the townspeople rejoice! huzzah!!" which is an audiovisual landing point of music, spoken word, ambient sound, video, images and text that centres Black, Indigenous and POC¹ perspectives through

the lens of spiritual and ritualistic practices. This stemmed from research and development support I had with Sound UK between June and November 2023. I invited creative practitioners to submit voice notes which explore notions of ancestry, belonging, the collective voice, healing, pleasure and desire in response to an evolving series of questions, prompts and sounds. Taking the model of video as a container, where sound and the moving image is a site for knowledge dissemination and experimentation, I'm aiming to establish solidarity and collectivity among marginalised perspectives who have a strong affiliation to otherworldly phenomena via lands of the Global Majority². While I've been here I've been discovering more on Audre Lorde's viewpoint of "the erotic"³ through some of Brandon LaBelle's work, whereby sharing joy acts as a highly charged foundation from which forms of cohabitation, interpersonal exchange and mutuality can emerge. We can nurture the productive conditions for mutuality and empowerment through an emotional, psychic or intellectual basis which bridges the spiritual and the political. The visibility and interdependency which is evoked from the "joyfulness of erotic becoming" is a visibility which makes us most vulnerable and also acts as the source of our greatest strength.

G. L.: Music will be an important part of your research here, so what kind of music are you interested in?

C. A.: I'm mostly interested in experimental music that bridges the gap between popular music and the avant-garde. So while I'm not concerned so much with genre-specificity I'm really excited by that. I'm going to Arnaud Maguet's listening sessions in the teaching module MMM (Meta Musique Machin) on Thursdays at Villa Arson – these are really good landing points for exploring musicians and bands with interesting stories. Finding out more about music scenes in Nice, Marseille and around Côte d'Azur has been great. A lot of touring bands only go to Paris which is quite a shame. I also get the sense that there's a lot of alt-pop and leftfield, angular pop that's infused with jazz – I'm really into that. Students I've met so far are into all sorts of things that I also really like and it's all really varied. I'm trying to rid myself of expectation, and that way I wouldn't be so disappointed by not finding something and having to change or dilute a plan. An intentional denial of expectation also opens the self to a degree of randomness that I think enriches some subconscious thought, similar to listening to radio or MMM, there's a balance there between familiarity and "chaos", that then filters through and influences the mind in unpredictable ways.

¹People of color

²A collective term that speaks to and encourages non-White persons as belonging to the majority in the globe, referring to people who are racialized as Black, African, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the Global South and/or racialized as 'ethnic minorities'. These groups currently represent approximately 80% of the world's population.

³ Audre Lorde, *The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*. This text was presented at the Fourth Congress on Women's History, Mount Holyoke College, August 25, 1978. It was published in pamphlet form by Out & Out Books, and reprinted in *Sister Outsider, Freedom, California, The Crossing Press Feminist Series*, 1994. You can listen to her speech on youtu.be/aWmq9gw4Rq0

G. L.: Can you tell us how you come into contact with archival resources and collaborators?

C. A.: With online archives it's normally making use of material with a Creative Commons license. With institutional archives, it's normally about knocking on the door and hoping for the best, and that normally requires some funding or organisational backing. So when a project is mostly experimental, which is often the case, it's easier and more fun to comb through ephemeral online archives. Comparing that to music-making, it's a bit like crate-digging in a record shop, then listening through albums, sampling parts, overdubbing and making something new from them. The appreciation for the original material is still there but it's taken towards something memetic. I just hope that by undertaking processes like that, we can add to the narrative of a work by recontextualising it through diverse lenses. I normally make things on my own because that's my comfort zone. For the project "May the townspeople rejoice! huzzah!!", I really had to step outside of that and put myself out there which was quite uncomfortable but immeasurably rewarding. For me, it pursues something generative – echoing the work of Audre Lorde. Because the project serves as a platform that relies on the contributions of others, it's interdependent at its core, and we each have to mutually exercise varying kinds of vulnerability. In Scotland, collaborations came about with people I already knew, so there was already a foundation of trust. Whereas here in France, I don't have that basis of rapport, and there's a language barrier. So for me it's a challenge to not only meet new people, but to develop enough trust in people to ask them to take part in this kind of project.

G.L.: Can you tell us more about the "May the townspeople rejoice! huzzah!!" project?

C. A.: Right now I see it as quite an amorphous space that attempts to formally archive and collate a few avenues of thinking. It underscores experiences and approaches to self care and platforms these methods in quite a meditative form. I hope that it would serve somewhat as a resource catalogue from which people can be advised on ways that they can explore their spiritual journeys in whatever way is right for them at that time, be it collectively or individually. I was brought up in the Catholic Church and attended Catholic schools. So taking for example the ritualistic practices that are embedded in this particular organised religion, these are established, methodical, rehearsed exercises that functionally serve to care for the self, the community and to connect the body and spirit to the Divine. Within this community of people, this unconditionally loving Divine presence is eternal and omniscient. Equally localised within a built structure, housed within the body and metaphysically omnipresent in space. I'm interested in the rejection of formalised practice, and the formulation of self-directed approaches that aim to meet similar goals, while also recognising the existence of otherworldly beings that are mostly beyond human recognition. In a series of prompts, one of the questions I ask is, what do you do to feel rooted in your body or to the Earth? Without directly asking for it, the response to this generally follows a methodical approach to a spiritual becoming, often in isolation, to

letting go of the idea of the Self and offering the body to the elements of nature, even if just for a moment. So the wider project attempts to capture these things, tie them together and platform them in quite a poetic way that instigates some form of meditation. I want it to allow people to offer themselves the time and space to consider what's been discussed and reflect on it in their own ways.

Villa Arson is a public institution of the ministry of Culture and a legal entity of Université Côte d'Azur. It is supported by the city of Nice, the Département des Alpes-Maritimes, the Région SUD Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. Villa Arson is a member of the networks L'Ecole(s) du Sud, BOTOX[S], Plein Sud, d.c.a., ANdEA and ELIA Art Schools.



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