

Villa  
Romana

A House  
for  
Mending,  
Troubling &  
Repairing

**OPEN HOUSE  
AND STUDIOS**

16-17 September 2023  
Villa Romana Florence  
+ Piazzale degli Uffizi

**EXHIBITION**  
*a house is a house  
is a home*

From 16 September to  
19 November 2023  
Villa Romana

## CONCEPTUAL NOTE

by Elena Agudio

If “a rose is a rose is a rose”, like Gertrude Stein suggested, *a house is a house is a home*, and is also not always what we are expecting or imagining. We all need a house, we are all longing for a home or running away from one, we all crave for this something which is as much an abstraction as a lived experience. A process which is in constant becoming, and which materialises in different images, sounds, forms, practices, and relations.

Villa Romana was founded in 1905 by an artist for artists, as a space in which to experiment, breathe, and live in togetherness. A place where co-habitation could become an opportunity for individual artistic engagement and communal change.

Villa Romana is not a villa, it is not a museum, but a house. It is not an arcadia but a real place, with its challenges and its cracks; a physical and mental space where to feel safe and at times unsettled, as in life. This is the fundamental and grounding deliberation at the core of the newly started phase of this institution in becoming.

Over the past months, since my arrival as new director in January 2023, Villa Romana has in fact been transforming into *A House for Mending, Troubling, Repairing*, unfolding a new vision and programme for the historical artist residency and artists' house founded nearly 120 years ago by Max Klinger. Nourishing a hospitable and critical laboratory for artists, activists, cultural workers, diasporic communities, children, animals and plants; the programme envisions an agenda and climate that grapples with the very core of the institution Villa Romana: its infrastructure, domestics, community, locality, and garden. To see the Villa as a home for crafting the tools and practices to face times that ask of us a radical and planetary repair of an asymmetric world.

On 16 September 2023, Villa Romana opens its doors to the public to present the studios and the work of the four Villa Romana Fellows 2023: **Diana Ejaita**, **Jessica Ekomane**, **Samuel Baah Kortey**, and **Pınar Öğrenci**. The house will speak across the ideas and works of these artists who have been living in the Villa since February this year, in dialogue with further invited artists who carry on the spirits and transmit the echoes of the history of Villa Romana and its current transition: among them **Emeka Ogboh**, **Shannon Bool**, **Archive Ensemble**, **Stephany Nwobodo**, **Radio Papesse**, **Álvaro Urbano**, **Ivana Franke**, **Aline Benecke**, **Erik Tollas** and **Daniela Zambrano Almidón** as well as **Leone Contini** – who have established the garden team together with with curator Marleen Boschen, agronomist Isabella Devetta and members of the Villa Romana team.

As an artists' house and centre for contemporary art production and international exchange since 1905, Villa Romana has become a unique and dynamic interface, a node for critical reflection, committed to advancing debate and cultural exchange between Europe and the Global South. Under the new direction (following on from Angelika

Stepken's sixteen-year-long leadership), Villa Romana renews its committed agenda and opens up more radically to a transformational agenda, proposing to confront some of today's most pressing social and ecological emergencies. The times of crisis in which we live force us to rethink the way in which we co-inhabit the planet, and to reconsider some of the founding values of Western culture – a culture that has discovered itself to be ecocidal, and epistemicidal towards systems of knowledge beyond the grand Euro-centric narrative. In order to imagine an ecologically and socially sustainable future, Villa Romana rebirths as a laboratory for critical reflection and confrontation, as a space for socio-artistic-cultural experimentation, and at the same time as a workshop and home for developing tools and practices that enable us to tackle the difficult work of repair to which we are called. The new programme embraces a path of institutional self-reflection and infrastructural transformation. One that starts from the practice of co-habitation and doing-together by means of ecological thinking and anti-racist, anti-discriminatory acting, to elaborate practices of radical conviviality, inclusion, sharing, and restitution. But also to embrace vulnerability and doubt. To articulate a non-universal agenda, and that is instead always situated and not prejudiced.

Led by contemporary critical artistic thinking, Villa Romana further connects to academic institutions and bodies that support similar progressive visions for art and towards a (still) inhabitable planet.

Experimenting with discursive and performative formats, (digital) residency programmes, exhibitions, sound and sonority, radio, digitisation, the making and the unmaking of archives, digital networks, and educational platforms, the main focus of the programme and its direction is and will be on forms and practices of:

### 1. domesticity and conviviality

The poet Harmony Holiday writes that “reparations begin in the body”. We develop Villa Romana from the experience of living and the practice of inhabiting together a domus, shaping a different vision of domesticity and togetherness. The house itself is the starting point from which, concretely and locally, to think hospitability and (be)longing, domesticity and care, but also the connections between ruin and repair, ecology and worlds beyond the West.

For over a decade, I have been working on the role of conviviality, hospitality, carework, and commoning at the independent art and community SAVVY Contemporary, in Berlin. I strive to decouple the domestics from forms of exploitation and subjugation/domestication, shaping instead visions of non-normative domestic solidarity, which focus on processes of making home in migrant and diasporic realities, and conjure alternative practices of habitation of the world and of coexistence between species. A possibility of coming together in a world that isolates us, of repair as re-pairing and reconnecting disrupted worlds and polarised political imaginaries on a planet ravaged by a global mental and public health crisis.

A first axis of the project therefore focuses on crafting the house into a hospitable sphere that begins to take seriously the role of team-work, food and cooking, communal living, sustainability, corporeality, and hospitality. We have in fact established a series of artist workshops and formats of conviviality that focus on the role of the kitchen in the tradition of the Kitchen Table Talks and radical feminist practices of solidarity that challenge racist, homophobic, and patriarchal norms. These are meant to also underscore the importance of the Villa's impressive garden as a laboratory for ecological thinking and organic collaborations beyond capitalist labour.

The role of the Villa as the home and residence of artists and the team of the institution is paramount to its identity and embodied life. This programme underlines reflections on living together by working on the role of food and sharing, of storytelling and community engagement, and feminist understandings of family in an expanded way. The role of the inhabitants of the villa with their families is central to this, as Villa Romana underlines support for artists with children, and especially mothers, by focusing on childcare, education, and learning as fundamental pillars. Establishing the residency as a critical institution supporting artists struggling as mothers and parents, we want to create an infrastructural possibility for an every-day community of domestic solidarity. One in which knowledge accessibility materialises on a daily basis through the dissemination of inclusive modes of programming, display, and diffusion that also acknowledge neuro-diversity, illness, physical barriers, and other forms of impairment and challenge.

## 2. troubling ruination

A second axis focuses on the role of troubling and ruination, dealing with the problematic fascination with European antiquity and the epistemic violence of Western art history. "A House for Mending, Troubling, Repairing" puts centre stage the problem of canonisation and decanonisation in the West and promotes research and artistic practices that challenge and rethink European, modern, and white epistemological paradigms. Villa Romana is situated in a city famed for its world-renowned Renaissance art collections and heritage while being also the epicentre of a bottom-up collective movement for the recognition of Black History and non-white agencies. Animated by engaged activists and inspiring scholars, Florence has become a city through which the Black History Month movement spreads across Italy and connects to a wider European and global reckoning with the role of black life in Europe. Villa Romana collaborates with the founders of Black History Month Florence and partners with more communities creating alternative canons of telling the history of art in the city, and the Italian territory.

Italy is famous for its classical ruins, while also painfully experiencing the ruination of its present ecosystem and social fabric. Ruins are not just the imperial debris of past regimes; they are also durable signs of corrosive toxicities sedimented in the history of the West. Italy is brimming with monuments to its "white" classic and Christian antiquity, but also with capitalist ruins, failed concrete urban centres and peripheries, abandoned villages in the South, cities ravaged by earthquakes and hoping in vain for governmental rejuve-

nation. Rather than recreating a nostalgic gaze on ruins as cultural patrimony, we seek to engage with life amidst social ruination. While capitalist abandonment and social ruination is a planetary phenomenon, it is a marked feature of Italian identity. Italy's relation to its South as a territory forcefully underdeveloped and culturally patronised is a fire fuelled by corruption, poverty, and emigration. We ponder and engage with the *questione meridionale* – the Southern predicament – and focus on life despite abandonment and misery across the entire county. Ruins and ruination, we believe, can become sites and epicentres of new claims to collective life, entitlement, and political projects.

## 3. diasporic (be)longing

Italy's modern history is marked by the experience of migration and new forms of projected (be)longing. For centuries, Italy has been a land of emigration, where millions of Italians left the peninsula in the foundational period of US history and as guestworkers in the European postwar era, especially as Gastarbeiter in Germany. But Italy has likewise been a land of immigration, at the crossroads between Africa and Central Europe, and as a crucial crossing point in the middle of the Mediterranean.

Even if Italy is founded on diasporic (be)longing, it has struggled with xenophobia and cultural discrimination, even within its borders – the North against the South – and continues to see the social consequences of a politics of fear.

It is an urgency to create institutions as archives and infrastructures in which conflicting diasporic (be)longing can be heard, discussed, and expressed. Villa Romana has been a central hub for artists from a wide range of nations and places. My colleague curator Mistura Allison and I – with very different positionality respectively – have worked extensively with the global African diaspora of intellectuals and artists, and with a multiplicity of diasporic communities. Collaborating with participatory, radical, and vulnerable archives, connecting them to a wider network of initiatives in different geographies and spaces, Villa Romana foregrounds diasporic imaginaries and their politics of affect, with their multiple temporalities, forms, and corporealities.

# a house is a house is a home

by Elena Agudio

The open house and open studios of 16 and 17 September 2023 mark the reopening of Villa Romana as *A House for Mending, Troubling, Repairing*. The house opens its door to a wider public, one not just specifically engaged in art discourses and practices but committed to various forms of active citizenship, research, critical and ecological thinking.

It opens giving centre stage to the work of the four fellows who have been inhabiting the casa since February and March 2023: **Diana Ejaita, Jessica Ekomane, Samuel Baah Kortey, Pinar Öğrenci**. They have been participating and balancing the process of transition and continuity of the institution over the last months. Their presence, artistic research, and active engagement have been fundamental to the reframing of the agenda of Villa Romana, and have paved the way to some of the most substantial reflections articulated in this show. As curator Mistura Allison notes, they have embodied and multiplied the echoes vibrating in the Villa and beyond it, channeling past and future agencies of this artists' house while at the same time digging into their own research and practice.

While the artists are opening their studios over the vernissage weekend, a multiform and growing exhibition – under the title *a house is a house is a home* – is also taking space in the rooms of the Villa, and in the public space, to support the reverberating of the echoes in a multidirectional way. And to plant seeds. As the house is lived, experienced, and animated by the artists and the team living in it – and by the many friends that are participating in its everyday –, in the same way the exhibition is conceived as a living organism: not something static and crystallised, for visitors to walk in and experience unaltered over the weeks, but a porous assemblage which is transforming, moving and growing according to the rhythms of the house and the needs and moods of its inhabitants. Because as *A House for Mending, Troubling, Repairing* the Villa is not a space for contemplation but one of action and relationality, of transformation and habitation. In a house, tables are often turning, chairs are relocated, items get moving, lost and sometimes reappear. Moods are also shifting, as sun, shade, and light change the form of the house and its experience across days and seasons.

*A house is a house is a home*, and its walls are not static but at times they can talk and dance, crumble and dust, shelter and oppress. Across cultures home is a never definite concept, but an experience. An experience that, beyond the West, is mostly collective and does not exhaust itself within the individual or the nuclear and biological family borders. It represents instead a chain of interconnected and ever inclusive intimacies, framed around interdependency and conviviality.

If at SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin we learned to live and embody a *njangi house* (Ndikung 2017)<sup>1</sup>, as an exercise of constant solidarity, here at Villa Romana we are also interested to experiment with the need of troubling the order of home. To put it with the words of Giulia Palladini, we see this as an opportunity and an outpost to rethink what a home might be, and to make clear that "it is the relation between the 'political' and the 'domestic' that needs to be carefully reconsidered, in politics as much as in art." As she elaborates: "... to invent a different politics of use for the domestic, mending the fate of its predicament and imagining a possible future of redemption for all the activities which this word might evoke. (...) to call for a non-domesticated domestic, for a wild domestic, for an imaginative and unpredictable domestic. (...) to conjure a domestic beyond family and psychoanalysis, a domestic that already in fact exists in many realities, one built, defended and sustained by a multiplicity. A domestic not based on identity, but on a mode of being which makes human life possible and desirable."<sup>2</sup>

The current exhibition is not standing as staging of statements and a set of conducts. Along the lines of the children's *Takeover* and free experimentation of few weeks ago or our co-writing of a policy of respect and co-habitation, we create a beehive of relations, a possibility of lived complexities and open interconnections, where conflictual pluralisation and processes are also played out, as in our "societies of negotiation", to use Naika Foroutan's words.<sup>3</sup>

Home is not just a building, a place, or a physical unit, but rather a temporary outcome of permanent processes of negotiation, through which social norms and power structures are pondered, and unequal opportunities and resources in the distribution of ordering work may arise. This is what we address.

*A House for Mending, Troubling, Repairing* stands for a space embracing dissent and open to collective reflection; a place where normativity and canons are challenged; a house where artistic experimentation goes hand in hand with social repair.

Many are the doors and windows you will encounter and open while walking through the many rooms of this house. Consider each of them a threshold taking you to a personal space, but also as a hyperlink always allowing you to step back and retrace to the relational rhizome of interconnections that the house is setting. Through its history, and through its presences.

1 Ndikung, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng. "Savvy Contemporary: The Laboratory of Form-Ideas: A Concept Reloaded" 2017. Available at [https://savvy-contemporary.com/site/assets/files/2811/savvy\\_concept\\_2017.pdf](https://savvy-contemporary.com/site/assets/files/2811/savvy_concept_2017.pdf) (accessed 2021-03-27).

2 Palladini, Giulia. "On coexisting, mending and imagining: notes on the domestics of performance" (2019). In *A Live Gathering: Performance and Politics in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Ana Vujanovic and Livia Andrea Piazza, Berlin: B-Books Verlag: 106-132.

3 Foroutan, Naika. "Postmigrantisches Gesellschaft", p. 248. In Schramm, Moritz, Moslund, Sten Pultz and Petersen, Anne Ring (eds.). *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts: The Postmigrant Condition*. Abingdon: Routledge. 2019.

Public space is also embraced, to blur the boundaries between the personal and the political, between the private and the public engagement of our artistic reflection. **Emeka Ogboh**, who together with Chiara Figone (Archive Ensemble) served as juror for the Villa Romana Prize 2023 and has been supporting the work of our fellows throughout these months, is intervening with a newly commissioned edition of *This Too Shall Pass – Tutto Passa*, a multichannel sound installation at the Piazzale degli Uffizi, and a choir performance at the historical Società Canottieri Firenze. The work reflects on what singing together means in our society, especially in a (post) pandemic and a crisis-ridden world where music and art per se have long been sidelined by other urgencies, sonically interrupts the flow of one of the most crowded and symbolic squares in Italy, the Piazzale of the Uffizi.

Doing so it connects Villa Romana to the layered history of Florence while at the same time invoking and prelude the opening of the grand exhibition *Camere con Vista. Aby Warburg, Firenze e il laboratorio delle Immagini* at the Gallerie degli Uffizi on 18 September, curated by the Kunsthistorisches Institut (KHI), the Warburg Institute and the Uffizi itself.

As Juliane von Herz – curator and commissioner of the first iteration of the piece in Frankfurt – writes: “through sensory experiences such as hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling and feeling, Emeka Ogboh opens up cultural memory spaces. In his artworks, cooking and DJ performances, these memory spaces are sampled according to musical principles, their origins intertwined.”

Together with the Villa Romana Fellow Samuel Baah Kortey, Ogboh is inviting the public to a multi sensorial experience on the evening of 16 September at Villa Romana: *Florence na so so enjoyment*, a session at the barbecue in our garden with small chops and music. This special convivial moment will continue with a DJ set by Emeka Ogboh, another integral part of the piece *This Too Shall Pass – Tutto Passa*.

To expand on the further warburgian polysemic possibilities, in the communal spaces of Villa, **Archive Ensemble** presents an iteration of its *Haptic Library*, “reimagining libraries as communal displays for collective interaction and various cultural formats based on anti-colonial and feminist thinking and practice.” Using readings, textiles, and music as multi-sensorial mediums for archiving and disseminating narratives and knowledges, the *Haptic Library* redirects its focus beyond the printed book and the western fever of accumulation and the dominant sense of sight towards the sense of touch, and features plural perspectives and forms of story-telling across regions, generations, and epistemologies.

The installation and relational library might be found in the office space, or in other places according to the movements, the needs and the moods of the inhabitants or beings living the house, as all other pieces in this installation. As in a home and shared space, you are asked to find out what is where, and to attune to the rhythms and the uses of the house and the people who are living there.

As soon as you enter the gate of the Villa you encounter **Diana Ejaita**'s textile installation, six printed fabrics imbued with rich abstract symbolisms. They welcome the visitor in a multisensorial way, and they filter the view to the bourgeois architectural succession of rooms, multiplying layers of opacity and of epistemological dissent and imagination.

You can arrive at the atrium, the main crossroad of the house – where many echoes and soundscapes as many visual perspectives are merging and being woven together –, or you might walk back to the side rooms, where **Pinar Öğrenci**'s films are shaping time and space. The first piece you encounter, entitled *Snow* (2023), paves as a detail to scenographies highlighted in *Aşit* (2022) highlighting themes of displacement, migration, survival, and resistance. As you navigate through the snow, Öğrenci's three-channel film installation, *Hotel Miks* (2023), reverberates the convivial mundanity of life in the Villa; albeit at the artist' father's hometown of Miks (or Müküs in Kurdish, Moks in Armenian, Bahçesaray in Turkish) in the province of Wan. In the atrium a selection of photographs and documents from the historical archive of Villa Romana are presented, to set a tone and give a background to the articulations and ruminations that the exhibition tries to bring to the fore. Reproductions from the first moments of the grounding of this artists' house – all documents from the first decades of the institutions are lost, as during World War II, the archive was sent to Berlin and the building where it was stored got bombed –, as well as original photographs and images of convivial and artistic life in the Villa. Together with **Carlotta Castellani**, who is currently in charge of leading research in the archive in the prospect of our 120 years anniversary, we highlighted moments and works that created ruptures and change of trajectory in the life of the Villa. Some that allow us to build on the current research directions of the institution, such as feminist troubling, diasporic belonging, commonality, ecological sustainability, and decanonisation.

The work of three artists in particular are brought to the fore: three women – not three mythological Parcae – whose research intertwines with some of the threads that we are weaving together in this exhibition and programme.

**Anna Oppermann**, Villa Romana Fellow in 1977, is presented with her monumental and subtle *Ensembles*, three-dimensional wall installations brought together as open collections and arrangements, sometimes consisting of several hundred picture screens, photographs, drawings, objects, sculptures, architectural elements, writing panels and writing tapes. They were elaborated by the artist as image and thought processes spread out in space, and as reflections about transitions between reality and fiction. An interesting visual echo and conceptual counterpoint to the working method of Aby Warburg and his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, which is in these days pondered in the exhibition *Camera con Vista* curated by Gerhard Wolf and the Kunsthistorisches Institut at the Gallerie degli Uffizi, with which we are intertwined

**Ulrike Rosenbach**, who was hosted here as a visiting fellow in 1977 together with other figures such as Martin Kippenberger, Marcel Odenbach and Klaus vom Bruch, brings to the fore a feminist performative practice that is still inspiring many discussions and reflections in the house. At the end of July 1977, the residents at that time organised an evening of performances in and around the garden entitled *Künstler arbeiten für Künstler* [Artists work for artists]: during that evening Rosenbach wrapped a 1370m long red thread ten times around the house, a measure to represent the distance from Villa Romana to her home (1370km), wrapping the remaining part around her legs while laying down on a labyrinth of candles and showing the symbol of the Italian women's movement with her hands in the air. The next day she used the same thread that she cut to cover the head of the “dumme (dumb)” (as she calls her) Medici-Venus at the end of the driveway to Villa Romana.

**Dorothee von Windheim** was awarded the prize in 1975. Her work is literally concerned with the practice of the *Strappo*, pondering the ephemerality of traces and the philosophical meaning of fractures, as much as the notions of framing and of index. Decontextualising plaster from old and more recent buildings, the artist was interested in shedding light to the (non)history of the everyday but also to reflect on the individuality that an anonymous part of public space is suddenly gaining by being transposed in an art context. Another interesting deliberation in the *House for Mending, Troubling, Repairing*.

The exhibition continues multidirectionally, subject to the visitor's choice to follow this or that voice and path.

Following the stairs further up the house, we are captured by a multichannel sound piece by **Jessica Ekomane**, *Untitled 1*, to be experienced bodily and while moving up along the larger stone stairs of Villa Romana. A separate curatorial text by Mistura Allison is accompanying you to delve into the layered and pondered work of our fellows, and their particular contributions in this exhibition. But the theoretical and mathematical complexity of Jessica's work requires your focused cognitive collaboration.

Arrived at the first balcony, you can confront the hypnotic and pulsing piece by **Stephany Nwobodo** – *Genesis* (2023) – a painting carved out in one of the architectural lunettas of the atrium, reviving ancient masks from the Igbo knowledge system. Namely, the *Adamma Masquerade* is juxtaposed with seven peacock feathers, transcending female beauty and functioning as an invocation of past and future good spirits in the house. A protection for the fellows, for the house, and for the people able to read these signs and codes.

On the highest balcony, turning back to the stairs and the stairwell, the short film *Forensic for a Mamluk* by **Shannon Bool** (Villa Romana Fellow 2013) is installed. The piece, from the collection of Villa Romana, presents an analytical bird's-eye view of a masterpiece of decorative art, the giant Egyptian Mamluk carpet from the first half of the 16th century. The carpet was forgotten among stored items of the Palazzo Pitti until it was rediscovered in a sealed chamber at the palazzo by Alberto Boralevi, a Florentine carpet expert, in 1982. The object was forgotten due to the historical bias that positioned the decorative arts as inferior to painting and sculpture. For us it does not only give us the opportunity of unfolding a non-Western epistemological approach to the study of images and artefacts, but it also symbolises the intention of renegotiating domesticity, it embodies the literal gesture of mending and weaving, and it opens up a strong connection to our garden.

Walking on the first floor, through the octagon, to the artists' studios and apartment of **Diana** (on the right) and of **Pinar** (on the left), you suddenly find yourself in a high-ceiled space, an empty geometry that goes as a carved-out tower up to the roof of the Villa. Looking down, you can encounter another film by **Pinar Ögrenci**, a piece from *Un Peso*, taking us to the city of Acapulco, Mexico.

Climbing the steepest and tightest steps of the house, a wall faces you with all the names of the Fellows awarded the Villa Romana Prize from 1905 until now. A long list of some gone and many still living artists who gained recognition throughout history.

The parcours takes you either to the terrace, where a sound installation by the in-house radio – **Radio Papesse** by Ilaria Gadenz and Carola Haupt – is echoed, or to the library of the Villa. On the occasion of the Open Studios 2023, they present *Echoes from troubled bodies*, an immersive installation showcasing selected voices from the Radio Papesse archive, namely by Ananda Costa, Alessandra Eramo, Adriene Lilly, Jasmina Metwaly (Villa Romana Fellow 2022), and Joséfa Ntjam. They all ponder the body as a site of discourse, making use of them as sounding boards and sound instruments.

On the same roof, another kind of multisensorial experiment is unfolding over the course of the exhibition and throughout the year, as a journey towards the solstices: **Ivana Franke's** piece *Suncostaj*. An instrument capturing sunrays has landed on the highest point of the Villa, rendering sunlight visible by bouncing it towards visitors and roaming in the city. It appears as a liminal glare instigating curiosity rather than a mark or a signpost – a 'navigational star' delineating invisible trajectories, possible paths of movement from different locations in the city. A visual echo from Villa Romana to be unexpectedly experienced by inhabitants and passers-by of the city of Florence. Not a lighthouse but a day star, to invoke presence and those who feel called to the *House of Mending, Troubling, Repairing*.

Descending the stairs and walking through the corridor where different guest artists' studios and rooms are encountered in succession, one gets to another pulsing heart of the Villa: the library and archive, where thousands of books are made available to the use of residents and researchers. Here filmmaker **Aline Benecke** presents the piece *Can we not be so self-centered and keep our experiences to ourselves? Diasporic remembrances of Fasia Jansen*, a piece that grapples with the memory of the German political singer-songwriter and peace activist Fasia Jansen. Fasia was born in 1929 in Hamburg as the illegitimate daughter of white German maiden Eli Jansen and liberian consul Momolu Massaquoi. She witnessed the suffering of Jewish Women in the Camp of Neuengamme, where she was imprisoned to do forced labour. After this and many other traumatic experiences, Fasia dedicated her life to different political struggles, and became active in women\*, labour-, anti-atom- and peace movements, writing an impressive collection of protest songs. As Benecke writes: *Our longing was to relate to Fasia from a Black queer Perspective, to understand her positionality and hence to negotiate ours. We did so by gathering and re-enacting her songs and spirit. Our choir – the Fasia Jansen Ensemble – is a spiritual invocation.* The piece won the Villa Romana award of this year's ADCF, the African Diasporic Cinema Festival founded and directed by Fide Dayo, another resident of the Villa Romana. For us here it functions as a reflection on the importance of the making and the cultivation of dissident archives, and the need of troubling heteronormative historical memory. At the same time, it materialises as a chorus of activists' voices that resonate throughout the space of the house in polyphony and in echoes.

Back to the corridor of the same floor, you will find the rooms of the guest artists: artists and practitioners that are co-inhabiting the Villa with us for a shorter period. The rooms are four, and among them you will find one which was named after Hans Purrmann and that in the *House For Mending, Troubling, Repairing* is in the process of being renamed collectively. Living at the moment in the room is artist Erik Tollas, a ERIAC (European Roma Institute for Art and Culture) and Villa Romana residency guest, who is partaking in the Open Studios and the exhibition *a house is a house is a home*. Inspired by the garden of Villa Romana and its presences, Tollas produced three new pieces that you will find dispersed in the green: *Indian summer with flowers*, *Olive yard at night*, and *Honeydew teardrops*.

The room opposite the former Hans Purrmann room is named Superstudio. The Superstudio furniture that are giving the name to the room are an artwork by Marine Hugonnier: pieces from her individual exhibition, which was on view at Villa Romana in Summer 2009, are now arranged in a guest room as a permanent installation: a bed, a wardrobe, shelves and three small tables. As you can read on our website for her exhibition, the French artist Marine Hugonnier had cloned prototypes from the "Misura" series by "Superstudio", the radical group of architects in Florence in the 1970's. She thought of the concept of cloning as a contemporary reproduction technique. In practice, Hugonnier subtly altered the dimensions, and the proportions respectively, of the individual objects. This idea of cloning has opened up the possibility of a critical reappraisal of the concerns of "Superstudio" with respect to those of the present day.

The last room on the right is the somewhat mythical and – from what all people sleeping there say – intensely inspiring Álvaro Urbano Room (formerly named after Arnold Böcklin), another permanent-installation-as-a-guest-room that resembles a dreamlike crypt: *the bed rises from the ground as if levitating. Old stone and terracotta sculptures, display cases and archaeological finds excavated in the garden seem to emerge alongside the bed like communicating vessels in a hermetic dream. The Psyche of Capua resurfaced from the garden watches over the sleeper and assists his awakening. A window opens from the sloping ceiling, from which blades of grass can be glimpsed in a roof garden high above.*

The room connects to another piece left by Álvaro during his residency as Villa Romana Fellow in 2014: in the garden, on the left side next to the gazebo taken over by the jasmine, the piece *Observatory* is carved out as a nocturnal bed, suggesting buried association to the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, to Böcklin, Edgar Allan Poe, Ebdòmero, Bréton, Dali, Buñuel, Tati, Jodorowski, horror cinema, etc. The piece has been restored for the occasion of the Open Studios 2023 and the exhibition, and the public is invited to activate the piece and relate to it anew. This piece will be in fact soon included in the *Healing Garden* that we are planting and taking care of during the autumn.

Returning down the stairs, in reverse along the path taken on the way up or walking down the smaller stairway, you will re-encounter the main hall, the fork from where different routes departed. There you will walk towards the garden and will find the main Sala Giardino, our biggest and most renowned room, used for different public activities and communal moments. Here our fellow **Samuel Baah Kortey**

is presenting a new set of works produced during his time here in Florence: a large scale painting reconnecting to the art of African wax prints and in particular to the tradition of commemorative fabric prints of prominent figures as a symbol of strength and identity in the face of oppression. The canvas, part of the artist's series *Do This in the Remembrance of Us* is aptly titled *Na Who Give Up, Messop*, unfolds throughout the length and the width of the room, while its materiality gets amplified by the sound piece *Our Village People (Do This In Remembrance of Us)*. Samuel also accompanied the visitors throughout the navigation of the house, installing smaller works in different corners of the Villa, mysterious presences emerging on the walls like webs or like living organisms: the pieces are part of the series *Chris-sis; Inaccessible files 00BC-Forever III*, which ponders and addresses the hyper-visibility of the Christian crucifix and Christian iconography within the urban landscape of his home country, Ghana, and alludes to the commercialisation of that religious symbol.

## echoes of resonance

## awaiting their song

Villa Romana, with its storied walls as a house for artists by artists, has long stood as a testament to the confluence of time, gathering, and memory. This season, the Villa transforms into a space for reflection; a nexus for *mending, troubling, repairing*, drawing on the echoing parallels of history and the contemporary.

Echoes make space for more than just the repetition of sound, they embody resonance, an interplay of reflections, and reverberations across mediums and minds; delving deep into the cyclical dance of remembrance. Drawing inspiration from these vibrations that permeate the Villa, *a house is a house is a home* seeks to explore intricate connections, weaving together the diverse yet interconnected practices of 2023 Fellows Samuel Baah Kortey, Diana Ejaita, Jessica Ekomane and Pinar Öğrenci – each contributing threads to a narrative tapestry of echoes and resonances.

In the *House for Mending, Troubling, Repairing*, we are reminded that memory is not a linear continuum, a mere passage from one point in time to another. Rather, memory is an echo. It resonates, fades, reemerges, and at times becomes so intertwined with the present that we are unable to discern between the vibrations of the past and the palpable moments of the now.

Following Saidiya Hartman's concept of "*wayward lives*";<sup>1</sup> quilting their practice together reminds us of the importance of storytelling in reimagining and reclaiming conceptualisations of home, ruination and belonging. Narratives, we are reminded, that have the power to transform our understanding of place and belonging. Through storytelling, we can explore the complexities of home, challenge dominant narratives, and amplify a *pluriverse* of voices.

<sup>1</sup> To be wayward and to practise waywardness is to exist against all odds.

Hartman, S. V. (2019). *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. W.W. Norton.

<sup>2</sup> Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Harvard University Press.

The act of *mending* emerges not just as a tactile repair but as a symbolic echo, reverberating through space. Mending, at its core, is a gesture of hope and an affirmation of worth. Be it the delicate stitching of hanging fabric adorned with evocative narrative symbols, the crumpling of torn paper transformed into omnipresent celestial portraits, or the reconciliation of fractured communities journey in collective; each act is an ode to the past and a nod to the future. Each mend, while addressing a past rupture, anticipates future wear. In doing so, it acknowledges the inevitability of decay, yet acknowledges the act of repair as an eternal dance of disintegration and revival.

Each piece on display communicates a dual narrative: the palpable evidence of wear, tear, and breakage, contrasted sharply with the subsequent repairs. These repairs, however, are not mere acts of restoration but profound echoes of spirits and voices, resonating with stories of endurance, conviviality, and the undying belief in the potential for renewal.

As we weave through the exhibition, we are invited to not only observe but also listen. The hum of sonics finding common ground — these are the echoes that pervade the space. They speak of collective memory, of hands that once worked diligently to restore what was lost.

**Jessica Ekomane's** sonic compositions provide a captivating entry point into the concept of *process*. Her innovative use of sound and its unfolding over time serves as a metaphorical and sensory exploration of the dynamic nature of processes in our lives and the broader universe.

In Ekomane's soundscape *Untitled 1 (2023)*, we are immersed in a world where time is not a linear progression but a malleable substance. Her compositions unfold, evolve, and transform gradually, inviting us to contemplate the intricate layers of change and development that define processes.

One key aspect of Ekomane's work is her meticulous and arithmetic attention to detail. She explores the minutiae of sound, manipulating and sculpting it with precision. This dedication to detail mirrors the way processes in our lives often involve a multitude of small, interconnected steps, each contributing to a larger whole. Ekomane's sounds remind us that processes are often comprised of countless micro-events and transformations that may go unnoticed but are essential to the overall outcome.

In the spirit of micro-events and path-finding, the long journey of self-actualisation also transcends in **Diana Ejaita's** attempt to capture and expand on the *double consciousness*<sup>2</sup> that Gilroy loops us into – through the series *Untitled (2023)*. These spirit-vessels, made of clay, are not just artistic expressions; but profound *living* reflections on the concept of restoration and transformation.

The plurality of place in Ejaita's works often incorporate elements of identity-making and ancestral knowledge as symbolic representations of the narratives and experiences that shape our sense of belonging. By sculpting these narratives into tangible forms, she makes the intangible aspects of identity and belonging more abstract and approachable. One of the recurring themes in Ejaita's work is the idea of fragmented identity. Her sculptures might feature fractured or disjointed forms, which serve as powerful metaphors for the multifaceted nature of identity.



In Ejaita's pattern-like visual rhythms, she also explores the dynamic between the individual and the collective paralleled as griot and listeners. Some of her pieces depict figures intertwined or emerging from a shared base, emphasising the idea that belonging is not just about one's individual identity but also about how it relates to and is influenced by the village (aşê).

As we insist on declaring *A House for Mending, Troubling, Repairing* to set our intentions forth, we rely on the knowledge that names are conduits for passing down ancestral wisdom and narratives, seamlessly interwoven with the tradition of oral history and storytelling. **Samuel Baah Kortey's** research becomes a contemporary embodiment of this tradition, visually preserving and sharing the stories and identities embedded within each name.

Community is certainly another resonance that ties these four practices together, as they absorb and engage with the offerings the multitude has to offer. Naming in West African oral tradition carries a profound significance that reverberates through Kortey's never-ending canvases, as monumentally shown in *Na Who Give Up, Messop* (2023). This canvas accompanied by a floral installation and immersive soundscape, serves as a powerful testament to the community's resilience, identity, and contributions, while also providing a captivating platform for reflection and recognition.

In West Africa, as in other dimensions, names are imbued with ancestral wisdom, reflecting the collective hopes, aspirations, and values of a community. Kortey's work artfully captures this weighty significance by visually preserving the stories and identities encapsulated in the names of his people-by-proxy. In this piece, he pays his dues to the tireless work of Afro-descendants breathing in Italy, encountered or not. We call out their names:

Antonella Bundu  
Pape Diaw  
Andy Ndkuba  
Gavin Dabire  
Dudu Kuoate  
Pap Kouma  
Suad Omar  
Janet Buhanza  
Mehret Tewolde  
Leonard Bundu  
Tesfaye Yohannes Tewolde  
Almaz Mebrahtu  
Fartun Mohammed  
Igiaba Scego  
Fred Kuwornu  
Angelica Pesarini  
Rahel Sereke

The act of gathering embodies the essence of community. It is a deliberate coming together of individuals, often from diverse backgrounds and histories, to connect, remember, and acknowledge their shared stories. This concept mirrors Kortey's visual narratives, where his portraits are brought together not just as individuals but as representatives of a collective experience. *The Afro-Italian experience*. Kortey's paintings serve as a visual manifestation of the act of togetherness. Each brushstroke seems to whisper tales of shared memories, struggles, and triumphs, resonating with Scego's exploration of communal narratives.

In an ever-changing world, where oral traditions can face challenges in preservation, Kortey's radical act of *giving people their flowers while they are alive*, becomes a powerful form of resistance against cultural erosion/exclusion. After all, one must *not* give up the fight at the risk of messing up.

Resilience and memory work as a process of preservation is not only showcased in 10-metre long canvases flowing like a stream, but also journeyed in equally monumental mountains. In this instance, **Pınar Öğrenci's** shapeshifts us to Miks (or Müküs in Kurdish, Moks in Armenian, Bahçesaray in Turkish) in Wan, through her films *Snow – Is geography a fate?* (2022) and *Hotel Miks* (2023). We are confronted with the reminder of the prowess of nature as avalanches are a regular and deadly occurrence. The last major accident occurred in February 2020, when 42 people were killed in two consecutive avalanches. *The video shows a group of men shovelling snow off the road in order to reach the city in case of emergency situations. Since loss and death is part of daily life of Kurdish people living in Turkey, while they are shovelling, they sing a song called Malan Barkır which was written for the memory of Dersim Massacre.*<sup>3</sup> Just as an avalanche, chess is a game of unpredictability, with each move carrying consequences. Öğrenci's narrative underscores the unpredictability of life, reflecting the uncertainty faced by the Kurdish community in their quest for autonomy and recognition. Stefan Zweig's *The Royal Game* (1941) is a novella that reflects on the power of memory, even in the most challenging of circumstances. In Öğrenci's *Hotel Miks*, the act of playing chess becomes a means of preserving memories and stories, passing them down through generations as an act of cultural resilience. It draws parallels between their struggle for cultural preservation and the intensity of a chess match. Just as in chess, where players must anticipate and counter their opponent's moves Kurdish people have had to adapt and strategize to preserve their cultural heritage and identity.

The resonant name of *a house is a house is a home* is certainly not limited to the fixed geographical location of Villa Romana, but is deeply intertwined with the stories we carry within us, the communities we belong to, and the memories that define us.

In this house, the beauty of echoed memories lies in their imperfection. Just as no echo can perfectly replicate its source, no memory can bring back a moment in its entirety. The gaps, distortions, and embellishments infuse richness and depth, allowing room for introspection and interpretation. In the end, the joint practices of the fellows reminds us that we are all living archives of echoed memories, awaiting their song.

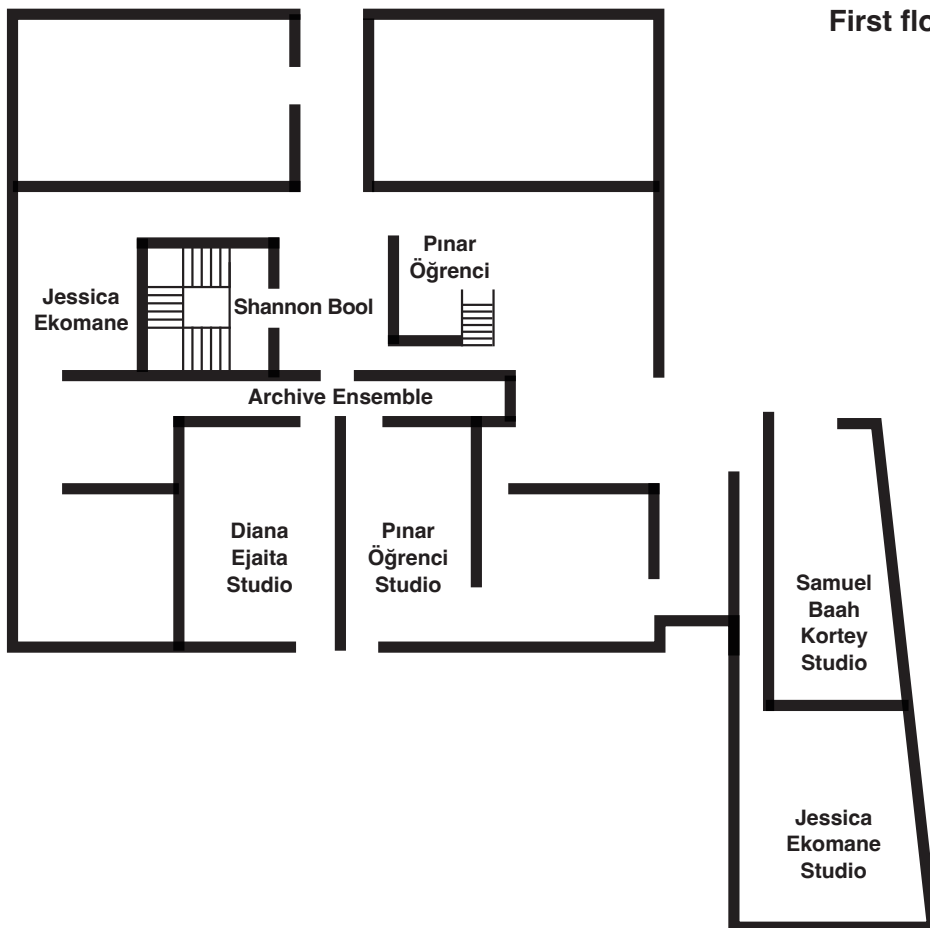


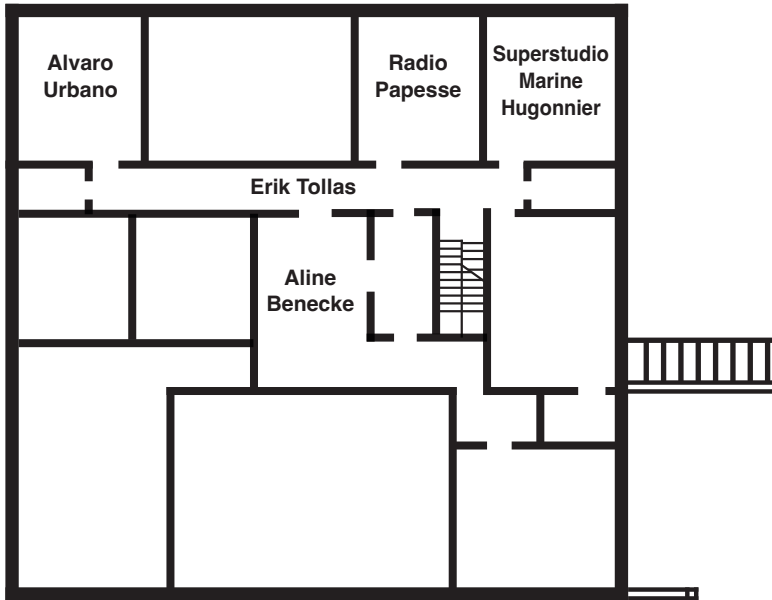
<sup>3</sup> More than 40,000 of Kurds were killed by Turkish Army and many others were internally displaced in Dersim region of Turkey in 1937-1938.

Ground floor

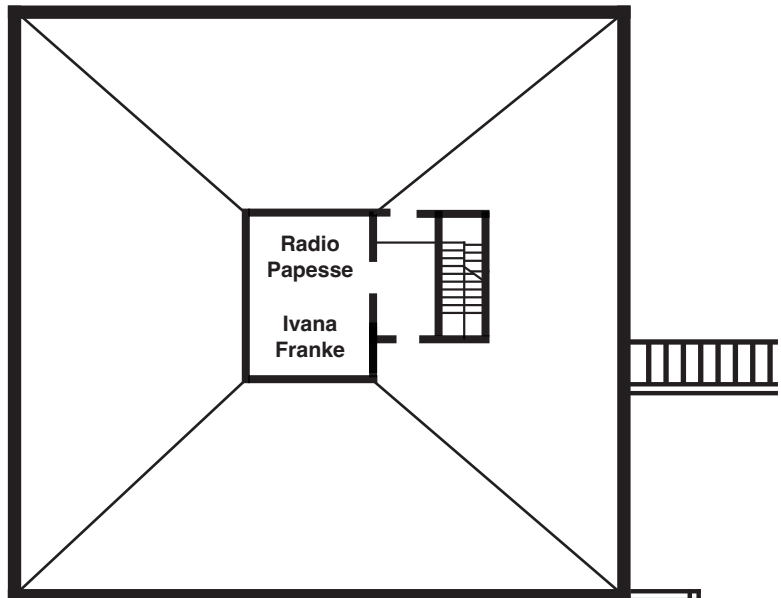


First floor





Second floor



Terrace

# Testing Grounds / Seeding Worlds

by Marleen Boschen,  
with Elena Agudio

The house extends into the garden, a central living laboratory of Villa Romana, where since January 2023 we have been experimenting with seeds and with ecological imaginaries for agropoetics. Villa Romana is a home, as explored in this programme, and it is an ecology. Drawing from the greek word *oikos* which means 'home' or 'dwelling place' it is the Villa's more-than-human inhabitants that make it a home. With the programme *Testing Grounds/Seeding worlds*, curated with Marleen Boschen, we have been encouraging joy through co-cultivation, enacting belonging through access to land, supporting biodiversity and regenerative practices.

We draw from the privilege of access to a large piece of flourishing and abundant land and seek to use this space to amplify the voices of those involved in environmental resistance and in keeping marginalised knowledges alive. In this way we want to build collaborations and conversations with local diasporic communities and solidarity groups in encouraging the garden's ability to sustain many, both human and non-human collaborators.

Villa Romana opened its doors to practitioners and people imagining the garden as a testing ground for agroecological and agropoetic practices that are grounded in collective care and intergenerational and interspecies knowledge sharing.

The programme began by slowly learning from the diversity that's already present, understanding the dynamism of the garden as a place that has been in the making for decades, soil that has been made and remade for hundreds of years, and that will keep holding and giving ground for the life of the Villa and in the Villa, and for its ecosystem. Alongside an ecology survey by agronomist Isabella Devetta, we developed plans to establish a healing garden that can function as a collective resource. If you'd like to get involved in the ongoing care for Villa Romana's garden, please get in touch.

Since January we developed a range of collaborations in the garden: *The Living Recipe Book* by **Daniela Zambrano Almidón**, *Orto Continuo* by **Leone Contini**, *Seed Bunch*, a collective seed-centred garden imagined with **Monai de Paula Atunes** and a *Healing Garden* with ecologist **Isabella Devetta**.

# a house is a house is a home:

## Garden Weekend

As the seasons shift and we move into the darker winter months, we invite you to the Villa Romana garden for a harvest gathering that celebrates collaborative cultivation. Join us to eat together, for workshops and performative presentations. The weekend is centred around artworks by Daniela Zambrano and Leone Contini as well as a collaborative seed garden, all of which have grown in the garden since spring, bringing together explorations of human-plant kinship and diasporic belonging.

As a new team at Villa Romana we are slowly learning from this garden and its inhabitants. We invite you to join us in doing so over the weekend of 7th and 8th of October:

### **Saturday 7 October 2023** **(as part of Florence Art Week 2023)**

10:00 – 13:00, 15:00 – 18:00  
Guided tour of the archive with art historian Carlotta Castellani (Università di Urbino)

13:00 – 15:00  
Seed Bunch, seed exchange and seed vessel-making workshop

17:00  
Orto Continuo presentation and performance by Leone Contini, part of *Semenzaio*, a research project supported by the Italian Council (2023).

### **Sunday 8 October 2023** **(as part of Florence Art Week 2023)**

13:00  
Pachamanca / Cosmic Pot: Andean Community Food Action by Daniela Zambrano Almidón

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

### **Seed Bunch workshop, Saturday 13:00-15:00**

Seed Bunch is a seed-centered garden and performative seed library, growing in the garden of Villa Romana. It is an attuning to vegetal agency, freedom, entanglement and co-cultivation. Join us for an experimental seed harvesting session where we will explore the stories attached to some of the garden's seeds. We will make clay vessels for the storage of seeds through the winter months and use ash to protect the seeds. The seed garden has been imagined with Monai de Paula Atunes and developed with Leone Contini, grown from the generous seed donations of artists and friends. Seed Bunch is deeply informed by artist Zayaan Khan's work on moving from seed-as-object to seed-as-relation. Open for all ages.

### **Orto Continuo Leone Contini, Saturday 18:00**

*Orto Continuo* creates a space for creative cohabitation of the histories and movements of plants and their custodians. Responding to the evictions of Chinese migrant farming communities from their farms in Prato, *Orto Continuo* brings together plants from these farms that were forcibly abandoned, or that are in the constant danger of being confiscated, in order to unveil the demagogic circle of institutional/media violence that informs such practice.

These evictions take place in the local area where Leone lives. *Orto continuo* thus carries a responsibility to respond and make visible to the destruction of this form of self-subsistence farming that is able to feed the local community and therefore sustainable. This 'continuing' garden asks how authorities and media other the cultivation practices of migrant communities through discourses around *invasive* species. Above all, the garden is a reflection on the practices of resistance that happen despite the evictions, on gardens that are destroyed only to reappear elsewhere, evading capture. Join us for a meal and open conversation at *Orto Continuo*, reflecting on the treatment of migrant farming communities and the movements of plants.

This project is a part of *Semenzaio*, a research project supported by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Culture under the Italian Council programme (2023).

### ***Pachamanca / A Cosmic Pot:* Andean Community Food Action by Daniela Zambrano Almidón, Sunday 13:00 onwards**

*Pachamanca* means 'a cosmic pot' in Quechuan, it is at once sustenance, celebration and collective ritual. Cooked underground and with hot stones a range of Quechuan ingredients are cooked together. Artist Daniela Zambrano Almidón works with the deep and vital connection to the Land and connection to the rhythm of the earth in Quechuan culture. In spring this year Daniela planted indigenous varieties of maize, sweet potato and chili in the garden of Villa Romana. *Pachamanca / A Cosmic Pot* will create a moment of sharing food and rebuilding memory for Andean diasporic communities in the context of displacement. Based on the Quechuan concept of *Ayni* as a practice of reciprocity and interconnection *Pachamanca / A Cosmic Pot* celebrates a moment of connection with the land for migrant families.

The *pachamanca* is a celebration that takes place during harvest time. Respecting the rhythm of the land, and with the hope of harvesting the migrant species planted in Villa Romana, the Andean community is invited to participate in this celebration that connects our roots to the land, our histories and identities. This celebration of cosmos, flavours and memories is also a recognition of the migration of food of Andean origin. We are able to share these foods in gratitude to the ancestral knowledge that indigenous communities in the Andes and in their diasporas – such as in Florence – keep in practice, or in memory, and that are indispensable to safeguard life. This cosmic pot is the living recipe that closes this agricultural year and opens a path to the rest of the earth.

### ***Healing Garden***

How can an artists' house become a space for collaborative healing and learning from plants? Drawing from the pre-existing biodiversity in Villa Romana's garden we want to create a medicinal garden, put differently, a

garden for healing both for humans and the villa's nonhuman inhabitants. We imagine this garden to take shape in a secluded area within the villa's larger garden in the autumn and winter of 2023/24. With the expert knowledge of agronomist Isabella Devetta we are currently mapping the biodiversity of the garden and learning about the pre-existing species with medicinal properties. Throughout the summer, together with the resident artists and the villa's many visiting thinkers and practitioners, we will develop a list of plants and a design for a community apothecary. Exploring what the reasons and conditions are that might make us turn to plants – such as stress, anxiety, pain, digestion, sleep\_ – we will create a space that creates both an aesthetic experience of being held and belonging as well as a space for collective gatherings and practical learning from plants and people with herbal medicinal knowledge. By the spring of 2024 we plan to start using this garden actively, sharing knowledges around the plants with Villa Romana's audiences and visitors and creating moments of collection, processing and experimentation.

# Monthly Dispatches

Since the arrival of the new director to Villa Romana last January 2023, we have been publicly sharing the unfolding of the life in the house in the form of monthly letters: this has now materialised as a collection of Monthly Dispatches from Villa Romana. We think that bringing them together here, as in a diary, could help you familiarising with our house and home, attuning to and jamming in our rhythms.

## January 2023

Day after day, this first month of 2023 at Villa Romana unfolded silently, meaningfully. In dormancy phase, like seeds and plants active in the soil albeit still underground, in this transition and winter time, the institution is undergoing major infrastructural reflections - pondering the political importance of maintenance and the possibilities of transformation activated by processes of cultivation, pausing, and regeneration.

After the break before New Year's Eve and the first days of January, the new director moved from Berlin to Florence. She didn't arrive alone, but with her two children, who now started school here in Italy and moved to the Villa. The house has been filled with new energies, and new constellations have been created: Yannis and Marie, the two cats of Villa Romana, have found new favourite companions in the kids, Edo and Jaki. Ala, Victor, and Claudia, together with Ilaria and Carola from Radio Papesse, engaged intensely with the new trio and embraced the new spirits animating the house. The garden and the plants experienced new eyes, hands, and molecules moving around and caring for them. Some collaborators are gone (thanks and greetings to Luca and Davood), and we are preparing the ground for someone new to come.

Despite the arrival of very cold days, much warmth has been in the air. Artist Monai de Paula Antunes brought emotions and ideas, when she came to stay at the Villa during the second week of January to start the process of imagining a pilot programme driven by children's agency and animated by anti-racist and anti-patriarchal values. In dialogue with the garden, with brilliant people active in Florence and with the inhabitants of Villa Romana, communal lunch after communal lunch, she provoked and instilled collective reflections about the urgency of transformational politics to be enacted by and with children, whose political imagination is not yet fully "formed" by normativity and capitalist values... and who might be daring to "experiment, invent, risk and try to work out new forms of organisation, new modus of struggle, new vision and concepts" - to use Walter Rodney's words. For the future of our children to be liveable, we need rigorous transformations. And they can and should participate in them fully.

After Monai, Villa Romana has been hosting artist and scholar Marleen Boschen for a few days, who has been spending time observing, talking, and interacting with the garden and the people who have been caring and experiencing it for years, Victor and Claudia in particular. After a long-term immersion in "agropoetic" practices through a research, publication, and exhibition project she ran together with Elena Agudio through SAVVY Contemporary from 2019-2020, she came to Florence to attune to the rhythms of more-than-human collaborations, to the ecosystem of Villa Romana, and to engage with its soil, seeds, and organisms. And to plan collaborative planting sessions soon.

The month of February is about to start, and Black History Month Florence (BHMF) is preparing its numerous events and projects: Since the last week of January and throughout the month of February, to continue the close dialogue with BHMF and to make it structural, Villa Romana is hosting artist Jermay Michael Gabriel as guest resident, and plans active collaborations with the programme of this year's BHMF. The intention is to weave together narratives and infrastructures to support community-engaged agendas, sustainable futures and visions.

We are cooking a lot at the moment, and we look forward to keeping you informed about the organic developments, changes, and movements that Villa Romana will be witnessing and experiencing over the coming months: Beginning with this newsletter, we are going to share monthly dispatches from Florence and together with our social media platforms, we invite you to have closer insight into the life unfolding in and around the house.

Stay tuned and participate in the process of homemaking.

Elena Agudio and the team of Villa Romana

## February 2023

February is Black History Month! Here at Villa Romana the month didn't just last 28 days but few brighter days more – and will continue in different ways along the whole year! We celebrated BHM by supporting and collaborating with the rich programme organised by BHMF and The Recovery Plan, and by re-opening to the public.

Jermay Michael Gabriel animated the house as the first guest artist in residence of 2023: he stayed with us for the whole month, taking time to work and focus on his exhibition and performance, and collaborating with the miracle team who has been putting together the most intense and inspiring programme of this year BHMF's edition: SFORZANDO. He convened and brought here amazing people and spirits, enjoying cooking and enacting many moments of radical togetherness. His artistic research and practice, focused on the possibility of challenging the elusiveness of the Italian colonial archive, and his engagement with the restitution of looted objects and the reconsideration of the colonial violence embedded in some collecting practices, provided grounds for many collective reflections.

After weeks of more quiet working sessions with Claudia, Ala, Victor, Eva and with Carola and Ilaria from Radio Papesse, many more people lived in the house with us and contributed to the making of its reopening. During the last week of February, while renovation works have been still going on the first floor, the rooms of the ground floor and of the guest quarters on the second floor got warmed up by residents of YGBI\* and the different activities organised at Villa Romana for them by BHMF. \*(YGBI Research Residency is a platform designed by The Recovery Plan to collectivise young artists of African descent in the context of Italy and provide research avenues and career support. This year's selected participants were: Mistura Allison, Elena Ndidi Akilo, Leyla Degan and Theophilus Imani with a mentorship by artist Sonia E. Barrett). Chef Prince Ebo Asford stayed with us as first chef in residency at Villa Romana and delighted YGBI participants (and most of us!), performing a marathon of lunches and dinners and blessing us with the most sophisticated delicacies and alchemies blurring Ghanaian culinary traditions with Italian ones. What a treat!

On Friday 24 February we launched our first event of the season and opened with a double-exhibition and a performance. It was a joyful and meaningful opening and we would like to thank all the people that joined us to celebrate the work of Muna Mussie, SADI, Georges Senga, and Jermay Michael Gabriel! Chef Ebo Asford shared his art with the public too! Thanks to you all, gratefulness to the artists, the curators of and around BHMF, to Ooh Sounds, Nub Project Space, the artists, the YGBI research residency participants, and the whole community!

Very cold winter winds are blowing here, but we are so warmed by the arrival of our first residents! Samuel Kortey Baah is here in full spirit, and the last day of February also Jessica Ekomane joined us. Very soon Diana Ejaita will arrive with her daughter, and after her Pinar Öğrenci will be also finally with us. We cannot wait to enjoy the full house!

## March 2023

Difficult to believe, but March already came to its end, while April slowly started blooming. This past one has been a busy and intense month at Villa Romana. One after the other, all the fellows arrived in the house: the imagined encounters have transformed into embodied experiences and the life inside the Villa has woven into a texture. A texture that has been crafted collectively. After a few days to attune to the place and its (historical) spirits, but also to each other's rhythms and agencies, the fellows and the team convened to discuss the future 10 months of co-habitation, pondering policies of respect, practices, and codes of sharing common spaces, and sensitising each other to fundamental ecological urgencies of which to be mindful. Very soon internal workshops will be held to elaborate and publish together a protocol of anti-discrimination and reciprocal respect, and a protocol of sustainability, to create more awareness about the carbon dioxide impact of everyday activities at the Villa, and to implement strategies for reducing emissions on an individual, community, and institutional basis.

We established regular internal gatherings, open to the public: a communal lunch on Wednesdays, which serves as a general meeting and a moment of internal reflection as much as of conviviality, and a Knowledge Sharing Session every Tuesday evening, a self-organised and self-curated evening by the fellows of Villa Romana in the glass pavilion. Please reach out to us if you want to partake in some of these appointments, and if you have proposals!

At the moment we are cooking a lot, exchanging recipes to implement our programme and our institutional reflections, and rummaging through the archives and in the sophisticated minds of our residents, our team members, and our guests. Our guest Chris Cyrille and his research on the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists provoked important conversations and grounded some of the boldest first exchanges between the fellows. On 15 April you are all invited to *Which Kind of World Are You Preparing Us?/Quelle sorte de monde nous préparez-vous là?*, the public programme conceived by Chris to reactivate the Congress and to re-actualise the questions that were at the centre of that historical gathering.

We are also happy to share the news that the double exhibition of George Senga and Jermy Michael Gabriel curated by Black History Month Florence and Lucrezia Cippitelli is prolonged until 11 April 2023. Hurry up and don't miss the opportunity of visiting it if you haven't done so yet!

The soil is soft and the spring arrived, the garden is calling for attention, and many are the actions that we have planned and that will be implemented during the next couple of months. This month, long-term collaborator and artist Leone Contini visited the Villa, worked with the fellows, and planted some cucuzza sicula and some Wenzhounese pugua seeds, which might sprout soon. Some seeds and seedlings are on the way, and caring hands too. In a couple of days you will receive news about it, we wish to keep some Easter surprises for you...

To follow us and be updated about our activities please keep an eye out for our social media platforms! Our website is in the process of being redesigned and restructured from scratch: you will find materials and updates when navigating it, but at the moment our main channels and tools of sharing are Instagram and Facebook. We have implemented a series of introductions, beginning with short portraits of our team and inhabitants and makers of the Villa Romana world on Mondays. From next Wednesday onwards, we are also starting a series from and in the archive of Villa Romana, while soon the fellows will do takeovers, being featured and featuring their narrative on the next months of co-habitation.

Very soon we will share some of the most exciting news :), and will shake you with a rich and exciting programme to be experienced and lived, here in radical presence, but also from afar.



## April 2023

The past month at Villa Romana was like an intense long and deep breath. With the coming of the spring season, the brimming life in the house has started to grow stronger and bloom, like agencies in the garden have begun to take action. The cold surprised us by leaving and then suddenly coming back, again and then again, in a quite unexpected cycle. But who surprised us more radically are the inspiring and generous people that came to visit us, so numerous in these weeks!

For April's beginning, the entire team has been busy decoding a plausible but quite dazzling message by an inhabitant of the house, who was announcing the sudden visit of an unforeseen and illustrious guest. The irony of the *mise-en-scène* has pushed up to keep in mind that next year we will have to keep being creative, but that we won't be fooled again :)!

On their way to Olevano Romano, we have been blessed by a stop-over of artist **Surya Gied** and writer **Angelo Angelino Wemmje**, who will be spending three months as Villa Massimo fellow at the Casa Baldi (Stipendium der Deutschen Akademie Rom Casa Baldi). At the beginning of the month, **Lene Markusen**, a former Villa Romana fellow of 2021, came back to the house to keep working with some local practitioners and develop a performance piece which will soon be presented in various locations in Germany. She enjoyed the changed atmosphere of the Villa and intercepted much curiosity while rehearsing with her collaborators in the garden and in the exhibition rooms of the ground floor. One of the most thriving presences has been that of **Marleen Boschen**, who came back to the Villa to start implementing ideas and practices together with the garden team of Villa Romana – a composite group of garden caretakers with core members of Villa Romana as well as professional botanists, seed specialists, and old and new artists friends. With agronomist **Isabella Devetta** from the association Seed Vicious, we started a detailed ecological survey of the garden, making an inventory of all the different species that are living and animating the green space of Villa Romana, and drafting a biodiversity manifesto. Together with our fellows, we have been starting to imagine a medicinal plant garden that we are planning to start after the summer, when the weather will allow us to plant certain seeds which need a wet season ahead. We have been also preparing the soil for a seed bunch to grow soon (a seed-centered small garden imagined with **Monai de Paula Antunes**, and realized with the help of **Leone Contini**), while we are receiving rare seeds from different corners of the world, posted by a large community of agropoets and artists.

Villa Romana's garden is becoming home to an inspiring ecological community, a space for sharing, for growing exchanges across lifeforms and cultural communities. Over the coming months and years, in conversation with the fellows and the alumni of Villa Romana, we want to nourish a space of collective care, learning, and healing – learning together from those who carry knowledges about how to care for land and soil. Quechuan artist **Daniela Zambrano Almidón** also arrived to Villa Romana with gifts, starting to grow plants that will become a living recipe book of Andean chilies, maize and tomatoes.

Mid-April also offered us a lot of inspiration, with two events which mobilized a lot of reflections and forces. One has been a collaboration with the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence around the publication of the book *Encounters In An Archive. Objects of Migration/Photo-Objects of Art History* edited by **Costanza Caraffa** and **Almut Goldhahn**: an open discussion to continue - and to complicate - a conversation began by the previous director **Angelika Stepken** around the work of the artist **Massimo Ricciardo**. Artist and cultural worker **Leila Bencharnia** was invited to perform a listening session, a 40-minute-long sound piece and the sonic experience *Witnesses of Water*. The listening moment was followed by an open conversation on the power and violence of archives and taxonomies with the artist, the director, the fellows, and the team of Villa Romana together with Massimo Ricciardo, Costanza Caraffa, Almut Goldhahn, and the cultural mediators **Luda Berhe**, **Pinto Manuel Francisco**, and **Ebrima Saidu** of the Amir project.

The second important event of the month has been the long-prepared Reactivation of *The Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists* of 1959 in Rome. After studios research and more recent fruitful conversations with the current fellows of Villa Romana, following study trips to archives in Rome (thanks to Villa Massimo for offering hospitality and support!), our curator in residency, **Chris Cyrille**, convened an assembly of artists and cultural workers around a question formulated at the time by Aimé Césaire: *Which Kind of World Are You Preparing Us?* Our fellow **Diana Ejaita** conceived an amazing poster for the event, inspired by the one designed at the time by Gerard Sekoto, and by conversations with Cyrille and **Samuel Baah Kortey**. A wonderful crew of guests such as our artist-resident Samuel from the house, **Janine Gäelle Dieudji**, and **Justin R. Thompson** from The Recovery Plan, **Johanne Affricot** from Spazio Griot, **Bocar Niang** (at the moment fellow at Villa Medici), **Frida Korang** from the entourage of Kirykou, and **Mistura Allison** remotely, joined us, and planted a seed for future engagements of Villa Romana.

The same evening, we announced one of the most important news of these months: from May we are welcoming to the team of Villa Romana Mistura Allison, as curator and project coordinator! Mistura will be moving to the house in the next days, and will support the director and the team of Villa Romana to articulate its vivid programme, all focused around the work of the fellows and the plans for *A House for Mending, Troubling, Repairing*.

Last but not least, we have been humbled by the interest of some many students and curators who arrived at Villa Romana with (among others) the curatorial courses by Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo and of the European Institute of Design, one group under the guidance of **Irene Calderoni**, the other two by **Daria Filardo & Martino Margheri** and **Francesca Verga** (new artistic director of Ar/Ge Kunst, together with **Zasha Colah**). Extraordinary curators such as **Paz Guevara** from Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) and later **Lynhan Balatbat** from SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin came to visit the fellows and started unfolding conversations that will keep growing in these months.

In the last days of the month, we also re-opened a conversation with professor **Anna Lambertini** and launched a collaboration with the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence, Bachelor's and Master's programme in Landscape Architecture. The collaboration is meant to support the activities of Villa Romana around its garden and its ecological programme. In the framework of this collaboration, from 8 May, we will host in the Villa the professor of landscape architecture **Gareth Doherty** from Harvard University's Graduate School of Design.

During the entire month of May we will keep our doors open, to receive ideas and collective meditations to continue "test grounds" in our garden - and in our minds! -, willing to keep growing our ecological community, and to put into practice our agenda focused on sustainability and togetherness.

## May 2023

It is not for nothing that the month of May starts with a day of rest and celebration of labour for all workers in the world. The fifth month of the year is a time of "maying" – a month where so much happens, and so many new paths and moods open and sprawl.

In respect of all the workers and their political achievements around the planet, the month here at Villa Romana started with a cognizant reflection of the incredible work done by the team of Villa Romana. Again, a huge gratitude to **Ala, Victor, Claudia**, and all the people and collaborators who supported the unfolding of this new chapter in Villa Romana, in particular to **Elena Micheli**, who finished her internship here and has now started to collaborate with us on a more regular basis; to **Giulia del Piero**, who keeps coming in for technical advice and precious professional help; to our friends **Ilaria** and **Carola** from **Radio Papesse**, who are continuously nourishing the everyday of the life in the Villa as an act of conviviality and reciprocity.

May arrived with more than precious gifts, a newborn, a population of honourable bees, and - last but not least! - a key central new figure of the team who joined us: **Mistura Allison**, who finally moved to the Villa as Curator and Project Coordinator, and immediately started to animate the life of the office and of the house with greater inspiration and brilliance.

Many seeds have been planted, and our colleague **Marleen Boschen** came back to Florence to keep working with us. Lots of rain fell from the sky to bless our planting actions, but the cold kept surprising us in a season that somehow was supposedly not expected by most of us.

The team, the fellows, and all collaborators saw the finalisation of some structural renovation works in the house, and participated in the preparations for the official visit of our Board and of our Board of Trustees on May 19th. The day was terribly wet and chilly, but the productive and focused working time, the mood – and the food! – made it remarkable and memorable. We give thanks for the dedication and reliability that the members of the Board showed to the institution of Villa Romana, which could never exist without their huge amount of support and labour. We are also delighted to have hosted so many supporters and friends of Villa Romana, members of the Kuratorium, and wish to share our gratitude publicly.

The following day, on May 20th, we hosted the jury session of the Villa Romana Prize 2024, in the presence of this years' jurors: **Lerato Shadi** and **Paz Guevara**. Stay tuned, we will announce the names of the fellows who will move to the Villa next year very soon!

*The House of Mending, Troubling, and Repairing* is working industriously at the moment, and putting the basis for a lot of long-term projects to develop. For that we are also learning from the zeal and diligence of some new members of the Villa's ecosystem and crew, who really have a lot to teach us: four beehives have been installed in the southern and calmer part of our garden, each of them being inhabited and cared by more than 60.000 bees.

Despite the rain and the hail of some of the days of the last weeks, the growing population of circa 250.000 bees has been incessantly working, focusing on their peculiar practices of making home and immediately starting pollinating the plants and flowers of our garden. We invite you to come here and meet them, to pay homage to the fundamental and essential work they perform to restore our eco-systems and to contribute to the endangered biodiversity of our planet.

Last Saturday we finally performed the first activation of our programme focused on practices of decanonisation and repairing, with a wonderful performative lecture by **Rosalyn D'Mello**. Navigating us through the visionary and disrupting prose of **Clarice Lispector** and her masterpiece *Água Viva*, reasoning about time and temporality and the conundrums of its transformation by the act of becoming mother and mothering, Rosalyn accompanied us in the process of making bread, the poie bread from the region where she comes from in Goa. We are thankful for all the wonderful people that came here to share stories, hands and time together, it was a very special moment of learning!

The month is ending on the notes of two legends of Calypso music: the ones by **Lord Kitchener** and by **Great Honourable Lord Pretender**, who have been played, listened and analysed together with our fellow **Samuel Baah Kortey** and some of our special regulars, under the sky of these first nights of summer in the garden of the Villa.

## June 2023

These past weeks have been the most intense of the last months at Villa Romana.

Not only the heat and the summer moods have been filling up the house with joy and warmth, but also the wonderful and inspiring people who blessed us with their presence and collaboration contributed to navigating us into another season. A new season for Villa Romana, one grounded and based on sharing, on commonality, and social and relational practices. The month started with most of us – fellows and team – participating in the reopening of the House of World Cultures (HKW) in Berlin: our fellow **Diana Ejaita** presented *Bodies, Tales, and Landscapes. Progression III* (2023) in the *O Quilombismo* exhibition – which we had the privilege to previously see shapeshifting in her atelier at the Villa. So many of the intertwined and international communities that are central to the work we do at the Villa participated in the opening programme of the new director Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung; and they did with a radical and radiant presence. We believe that the strength of holding on, shifting canons and transforming infrastructures, comes from the very possibility of celebrating togetherness by practicing friendship and transformative solidarity. This long weekend at the HKW gave us the opportunity of imagining wider and being inspired by the work of many amazing colleagues and practitioners.

Back in Florence, where in the meantime children in Italy already started their three month-long summer holiday (!), artistic life in the Villa became more and more brimming. On June 8th, for the first time this year, we have been grilling and roasting, inviting old and new friends of Villa Romana for an evening of conviviality and festivity. **Giacomo Zaganelli**, the Florentine and now Berlin based artist who created that massive barbeque / social sculpture which is installed in the garden of Villa Romana, took special care of us and together we grilled for the entire evening while new conversations unfolded. The house started to set up for a programme that we had been preparing for a while: between June 12th and 18th artists and students from the MA in Spatial Strategies from Weissensee Kunsthochschule Berlin (Germany) and members of the collective blaxTAIRLINES – from K.N.U.S.T in the Kumasi College of Art (Ghana) – convened for a week-long seminar and short-residency at Villa Romana. An activation of the expanded studio practice of the Villa Romana Fellow **Samuel Baah Kortey**, this gathering explored and experimented with practice-based research on forms of commoning and 'communing' as possibilities of restructuring social and environmental justice. Under the invitation to practice *Beyond Wishful Thinking*, the gathering and activation materialised as a possibility of reflecting on forms of emancipatory art teaching and cohabitation. We give thanks to all the artists and practitioners that took part in this enriching and deeply inspiring experience, and who activated the entire space of Villa Romana: its kitchens and garden, its hidden corners, with wonderful projects and interventions: **Fernanda Aloï, Franziska Lentes, Cau Silva, Mohamed Ali Oueled Ltaief, Maria Fallada, Farokh Falsafi, Margarete Kiss, Sayaka Shinkai, Philip Hergenroether, Mariana Garcia, Rebecca Korang, Reem Alfahad**; and from the **blaxTAIRLINES**

**collective, Rosemary Esinam Damalie and Frederick Ebenezer Okai.** We especially want to thank our artist in residency Samuel Baah Kortey, co-founder of the collective blaxTARLINES, who mobilised a space of reflection for us in the main room of Villa Romana and installed an art piece produced for the occasion. Because much of the metatheoretical questions and reflections focused on the teaching of professor **kaří'kachä seid'ou** at the Kumasi College of Art and his cogitations on gift-form-of-art and the responsibilities associated with the choice of practicing art, on June 15th we hosted a talk by another "student" of kaří'kachä seid'ou: artist **Ibrahim Mahama**, who lectured about The Quagrey Effect and The Precarious Gift. A beautiful and warm evening full of people, music and food, closing a rich day of presentations that also saw the participation of **The Recovery Plan** and their guests from the Justice in Geoscience retreat. The workshop with the students continued until the end of the week, and many collaborations and friendships with the team and other artists staying in the Villa happened. Experimental sound artist **Lamin Fofana**, who also stayed at Villa Romana for a short residency, generously shared his spark and knowledge, and lifted us of his constant participation and deeply inspiring presence.

As announced in our previous newsletter, the other big event of the month was the **Midsummer Night** on June 21st: a very special and unexampled evening, an invocation to the sun and the stars on the day of the summer solstice. Under the biggest and most monumental olive tree of the Villa, a wonderful line-up of sound performances took place in front of a warm public of people lying down in the grass to fully enjoy the expanded sonic experience. **SADI** composed a series of sonic landscapes interacting with nature and the presences of the garden; **Lamin Fofana** impressed us with a set weaving together empowering political speeches, Caribbean and Black grooves, and breathtaking poetry, such as Kumina by Kamau Brathwaite; and in closing our fellow **Jessica Ekomane** partnered with **Afrorack**, continuing to explore a self-made technology from a sub-Saharan African context, a collaborative dialogue started some time ago and beautifully celebrated at Villa Romana.

As every year around this time, we hosted the seventh edition of the **African Diaspora Cinema Festival** directed by **Fide Dayo**. Four nights of film screenings, music, debates and performances concluded the month. Villa Romana had the pleasure to award one of the films in competition: *Can we not be so self-centered and keep our experiences to ourselves? Diasporic remembrances of Fasia Jansen*, directed by **Aline Benecke**. A moving piece on sisterhood and comradeship transcending the concept of community, a film that recognises the energy, labour, and relationships that bind Black people together. A wonderful offering to the life of Fasia Jansen, the Black German activist and songwriter who dedicated her life to different political struggles with an impressive collection of protest songs. As the film director and her crew wrote: "Our longing was to relate to Fasia from a Black queer perspective, to understand her positionality and hence to negotiate ours. We did so by gathering and re-enacting her songs and spirit. Our choir – the Fasia Jansen Ensemble – is a spiritual invocation."

Continuing the thread of supporting the practice of international moving image artists, Villa Romana partnered with **Lo Schermo dell'Arte - Cinema and Contemporary Art**

**Festival** in selecting participants for their VISIO Production Fund, financially enabling younger generations of artists to develop new bodies of work.

As part of the important work and commitment of safeguarding at Villa Romana, on June 26th we convened with a group of field experts in drafting a "living" *Protocol of Anti-Discrimination and Policy of Respect and Cohabitation*, that will soon be implemented and published.

The summer suddenly turned resolutely hot, and if on the one hand the mosquitos have made their way to start irritating us too seriously, on the other the chirping of the cicadas has finally exploded, pleasing our ears. And as if the heat is not enough, **Frederick Ebenezer Okai** from **blaxTAIR-LINES** has started the construction of a big and special kiln that all artists in residency at Villa Romana will be able to use in the future!

Stay tuned, and get ready for the hot vibes arriving from The House For Mending, Troubling, Repairing!

## July 2023

Europe is struck down with weather extremes: hail and mudslides in the north, extreme heat in the south. Villa Romana in the centre copes – neither the garden nor the house are hit with unbearable extremes, so our continued ecological transition can continue. The seed garden, the vegetable patch, the *orto continuo* by Leone Contini and the maize planted by Daniela Zambrano Almidón, continue to sprout and cherish, as do the *Cercis siliquastrum* which we had to plant in the spring to replace two elms that had sadly died.

For the seventh time in a row, we were grateful to host the wonderful **ADCF**, the **African Diasporic Cinema Festival** (28 June – 1 July), which opened the month with a series of film screenings, concerts, discussions, panels, and convivial moments to celebrate together. The film *Can We Not Be So Self-Centered and Keep Our Experiences to Ourselves? Diasporic Remembrances of Fasia Jansen* by Aline Benecke won this year's prize by Villa Romana – though it was hard to choose among the many significant contributions. We are grateful to the activist and cultural worker Hadija Francesca Sanneh, who together with the founder and director Fide Dayo facilitated the festival and stayed in Villa Romana, alongside festival producer Simona Fabiani. We are also grateful for the enduring collaboration of Elena Micheli, and to the charismatic moderation of Antonella Bundu.

In these days, we also got the news that the Swiss Foundation Gwaertler Stiftung partially supported our pedagogical and experimental project *Beyond Wishful Thinking*, and the bigger news that the Italian Council has granted us a publication and research project in cooperation with the publishing house Archive Books and the artist researcher Alessandra Ferrini on colonial archives. This will allow us to support important research, as well as to work on a series of workshops, exhibits and publication projects with our in-house publishing partner Archive, which opened a fantastic new space in Milan in June in Via Arquà.

On 19 July, researcher and curator Marleen Boschen (with whom Villa Romana has made a successful funding bid ... more soon), agronomist Isabella Devetta, musician SADI, and Claudia, Carola, Mistura and Elena from the team, gathered to finalise plans for the medicinal garden that will be planted in a newly available patch of land in the garden. We imagined how to design collectively a **healing garden** where healing is understood holistically through plants, community and sensory experiences.

Around this time, the house began buzzing already as people from all over started to arrive in Villa Romana for a very special event that we organised for the first time, and that has been cooking for some time: *La Volata*. **She flies (out of her body, not her mind)**. The event took over an entire evening until the early morning hours, organised in conversation with the director of the *Spore Initiative* in Berlin, Antonia Alampi.

With lectures, dialogic music and performances (Elena Agudio and Mistura Allison from the house, Antonia e Maurizio Alampi, Dance of Oya, Jeanette Bisschops, Nando Brusco), lyrical outbursts (Savannah Morgan) witnessed by dancing and candle-lit table audience, *La Volata* meandered from a bountiful BBQ to the garden parterre stage and screen (Robert Machiri – Listening to Pungwe), and finally into the Sala Giardini where Lynhan Balatbat and Emeka Ogboh kept us on our feet until we had to close the house in the early morning hours. We give special thanks to all the guests, to the entire house team for staying up so late, and to Pardo for supporting technically and as always with so much joy.

In the days after, perhaps more slowly than before, we ventured to the hills out of Florence to meet Frankfurt am Main based curator Juliane von Herz, while elaborating a floating and choral project (shush ... details to be revealed) with artist Emeka Ogboh, which will find a second iteration in Florence in the very near future, in a very prominent place.

Quechua artist and activist Daniela Zambrano Almidón, who stayed with us already twice before for the first developments of our project Testing Grounds / Seeding Worlds to plant the garden and connect to the large Peruvian community in Tuscany, organised a workshop on maize plants and pottery on 24 July. Please consult our website linked above to find out more on the wide range of projects that we are elaborating as part of this unfolding.

The month of July concluded with a culmination of the buzzing and wild energies, the ecological immersions, and the hands-on workshops of the last thirty days: the **take-over** organised together with Archipel e.V., and supported with funding by a Culture Moves Europe grant and the Fondazione CR Firenze. For an entire week, over 18 children from diverse backgrounds are welcomed to the Villa Romana, from 9am-6pm every day, for free, to explore musical instrument-making, soil and pottery, the animals of the garden, and to learn how to live together across languages and cultures. This take-over is special to us. While many families in Italy flock to the sea in the summer, not everyone can afford such a voyage, or maybe does not have family and grandparents in the vicinity. The lush garden and house of the villa affords the luxury of a safe and at the same time experimental week, which culminates tomorrow (3 August) at 6pm with **a concert by Dudù Kouate and Niko Lefort**, and with the presentation of the children's projects with the open doors on Saturday 5 August, and a final **volcanic party**.

In August, Villa Romana remains open as we cook things, and also take care of the children that are plentiful, and full of energy in the last month before school begins again, and as we help to water the dry garden, some of us try to finish their course plans for the upcoming semesters, and we focus on preparing the biggest and most anticipated event of the year – the **Open Studios** of Villa Romana, for which we would like you to earmark again the 16 and 17 of September!

## August 2023

The month of August was slow, long, fast, hot, busy, calm, festive, dry, mellow, inspired and inspiring. The only thing that was not was boring. It was an atypical Italian August, in which things usually simply do not happen or pause for a long while. Here in Villa Romana, things happened otherwise, at times upside down.

The office kept working on a daily basis, plotting and programming, preparing for the upcoming big event of 16 and 17 September. Some of us were gone for the summer break, but the ones that stayed continued to shimmer, sustaining the exuberant as much as composed life in the house. The month started with the children's Takeover, a week in which seventeen children with different backgrounds, ages, languages, and talents occupied the programme of Villa Romana, literally taking up our space and daily routine – phhhw, we managed to keep the office out of their space of action ;)!

As the Berlin based collective Archipel e.V. stated: Their presence troubled the usual inhabitation of the Villa (..) and filled the house, and especially the garden, with truly transformative play and joy. The week-long experiment enabled a unique and groundbreaking laboratory for dynamic conviviality and public domesticity, where children's timeless play of creation-and-destruction-and-re-creation allowed for a generative purposelessness, an endless folding and unfolding of worlds that inspired new forms of relationality, of artistic thinking, and social engagement in the house. We give thanks to the kids: Francesco, Fabrizio, Maria, Nour, Nuria, Obeida, Lila, Joia, Lia, Edoardo, Jacopo, Linda, Samuele, Samuel, Enea, Cosimo, and Cosimo. And we express great gratitude to the artists, curators, and educators that mediated the programme: Archipel e.V. (Monai de Paula Antunes – artistic director-, Florian Bendsen, Silvia Noronha, Niko da Paula Lefort), Dudú Kouate, The Rediscovery Planet (Marzia Duarte & Ilaria Cavallini). The house is still resonating with the voices and the agencies of the children! And the kids who are inhabiting the house are now experiencing the whole environment with a different kind of flavour.

After that brimming moment of vivacity and intense creativity, the weeks turned more focused and calmer. Some fellows travelled, some team members took holiday, but the garden team and the open studios crew kept the ball rolling: while Victor and Ala were off, our artists, curators, and practitioners involved in the garden team cared for the garden and made sure that all plants and beings were surviving the very high temperatures and the drought. We managed pretty well, and we are very happy to have grown closer and more intimate with our green companions.

In the hottest days we also found time to rummage into the archive with art historian Carlotta Castellani, the person and scientist who has been studying the archive of Villa Romana for longest time, and who a couple of months ago, was invited to lead research in perspective of our upcoming 120 years anniversary. In the past and coming weeks we are selecting historical photographs and documents for you, to get you more familiar with the long, unique, and rich history of this artists' house:

on biweekly basis we are publishing a column on Instagram, in our upcoming exhibition we are showcasing a curated selection of historical materials, and on 7 October we are participating to the national archive day, opening up our folders and drawers, and offering guided tours with Carlotta Castellani and the team of Villa Romana.

As a paradoxical exercise and a patience training game, in these weeks we have been also incessantly dealing with bureaucracy, which of course is never an easy task but in August becomes more a kind of a riddle. This year the Open Studios in fact are happening with an intervention in the public space of Florence (read the news below!) and with a larger exhibition and programme at Villa Romana.

Make sure you won't miss the biggest appointment of the year, coming up very soon!

## Biographies

**Jessica Ekomané** is a French-born and Berlin-based electronic musician and sound artist. She creates situations where the sound acts as a transformative element for the space and the audience. Her quadrasonic performances, characterized by their physical affect, seek a cathartic effect through the interplay of psychoacoustics, the perception of rhythmic structures and the interchange of noise and melody. Her ever-changing and immersive sonic landscapes are grounded in questions such as the relationship between individual perception and collective dynamics or the investigation of listening expectations and their societal roots. Her first LP *Multivocal* was released in 2019 via Important Records, stemming out of a project for a sleeping event at Ars Electronica, curated by Shu-Lea Chang and Matthew Füller. Since then, her work has been extensively presented in festivals, venues, contemporary art spaces and museums across the world such as Hamburger Bahnhof, Reina Sofia, Kanal Pompidou, Art Basel, Villa Massimo, CTM festival, Cafe OTO, Gedächtniskirche. She was one of the composers chosen as collaborators by Natascha Sadr Haghigian for her installation Ankerzentrum at the German pavilion of the Venice Biennale 2019, alongside Maurice Louca, DJ Marfox, Jako Maron, Tisha Mukarji and Elnaz Seyedi.

**Samuel Baah Kortey** is a multi-sensory artist, thinker, and visual researcher from Ghana. He started paying attention to his immediate environment and highlighting post-colonial traces in the ways of life of modern societies during his art school days in Kumasi, Ghana. Samuel has a BFA and MFA from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (2013-2022). In early 2023, he graduated from Stadelschule, Frankfurt-Germany (Klasse de Willem de Rooij). Samuel's installations have explored and examined the hyper-visible expressions that characterize cities. The artist is a member of three collectives, blaxTARLINES, Commune6x3, and a co-founder of the Asafo Black Collective. He has shown in the 2020 Stellenbosch Triennial and the 2022 Documenta 15 with his collectives Asafo Black and blaxTARLINES Kumasi collective respectively.

**Diana Ejaita** is an artist, textile designer and illustrator, a mother living between Berlin, Italy and Lagos. Her practice encompasses installation, illustration, and textile design to reinvigorate visual storytelling traditions of her African lineage. As a Nigerian-Italian Diasporic artist, Ejaita's works are concerned with shaping notions of belonging while also revitalizing aesthetic genealogies from the African continent. This oscillation between worlds is reflected in her visual reinterpretation of stories, such as those by Nigerian authors Amos Tutuola and Chinua Achebe, or narrative techniques found in West African textiles. Working with recordings made during residencies in Nigeria and Burkina Faso, Ejaita centres the intergenerational power of stories passed on via oral traditions.

**Pinar Öğrenci** is an artist, filmmaker and lecturer. She used to work as guest lecturer at Master Studies of Kunsthochschule Berlin Weißensee Raum Strategies, HFK, University of Arts Bremen and Leuphana University in Luneburg. Her first documentary film 'Gurbet is a home now' produced in Berlin won Special Jury Prize of Documentarist Film Festival and selected for National Documentary Film Competition by Istanbul Film Festival in 2021. Her second documentary film *Aşit* is commissioned by documenta fifteen in 2022. She is nominated to Böttcher Strasse Kunst Prize 2022 in Bremen and won Villa Romana Prize for 2023. Öğrenci has a background in architecture, which informs her poetic and experiential video-based work and installations that accumulate traces of 'material culture' related to forced displacement across geographies. Her works are decolonial and feminist readings from the intersections of social, political and anthropological research, everyday practices, and human stories that follow agents of migration such as war, state violence, collective movements, as well as industrial and urban development projects.

**Emeka Ogbob** engages with places by using all five human senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. His art installations and culinary creations incorporate sensory elements to explore how private, public, collective memories and histo-

ries are translated, transformed, and encoded into different sensorial experiences. Ogbob's works delve into how sensory perceptions capture our connections to the world, shape our comprehension of reality, and offer a backdrop for examining critical issues such as migration, globalization, and post-colonialism. Ogbob has participated in numerous international exhibitions including documenta 14, (2017), Athens and Kassel, Skulptur Projekte Münster (2017), the 56th edition of La Biennale di Venezia, Italy (2015), and Dakar Biennale (2014).

**Shannon Bool** has been living in Germany since 2001. She is professor of Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Mainz, Germany. Her works are part of renowned museum collections such as Museum of Contemporary Photography Chicago, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Metropolitan Museum New York, Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt, Collection of the Federal Estate of Germany, Lenbachhaus Munich or The National Gallery of Canada. Currently the Kunstmuseum Krefeld and the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago have dedicated solo exhibitions to her work. Recent solo exhibitions have been at Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston (2020), The Kunstverein Braunschweig, Centre Culturel Canadien in Paris (both 2019), Musée Joliette Canada (2018). She has participated at internationally renowned group exhibitions such as NUR NICHTS ANBRENNEN LASSEN. NEUPRÄSENTATION DER SAMMLUNG, Kunstmuseum Bonn, INTERTWINGLED – The Role of the Rug in Arts, Crafts and Design, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome and recently at Dip in the past, Lehnbachhaus, Munich (2022), I am a Problem at Museum of Modern Art Frankfurt (2017), Mentally Yellow at Kunstmuseum Bonn (2017), La Biennale de Montréal and at In the Picture: Overpainted Photography at Sprengel Museum Hannover (2019).

**Archive Ensemble** reimagines libraries as communal displays for collective interaction and various cultural formats based on anti-colonial and feminist thinking and practice. In the *Haptic Library*, Archive Ensemble creates a library as a social display of texts to

sense, touch, and listen to—a collection of *texturalities*. Using readings, textiles, and music as multi-sensorial mediums for archiving and disseminating narratives and knowledges, the *Haptic Library* redirects its focus beyond the printed book and the western dominant sense of sight towards the sense of touch, inviting us to relate to knowledge from a plurality of materialities and modes of thought—involving carpets, fabrics, sonicities, and printed media. Against the 'colonial library' that accumulates knowledge produced by the Eurocentric gaze, as defined by Congolese philosopher Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, the *Haptic Library* instead features plural perspectives and forms of story-telling across regions, generations, and epistemologies. As a space, the *Haptic Library* offers hospitality for one's own body in relation to a communal gathering.

**Aline Benecke** is a filmmaker. Benecke sees the body as an archive and seeks to engage in dialogue with people who have experienced violence within the context of colonial and fascist history. Aline's aim is to remember these individuals while connecting to emancipatory practices of the diaspora. Aline's performances and installations have been exhibited internationally at venues including CRAC in Sète, MUMOK in Vienna, and Artistic Research Pavillon, Venice. Aline has been supported by grants from the Berlin Senate, the Goethe-Institut, and the Federal Government's Neustart Kultur programme.

**Stephany Nwobodo** is a Nigerian-Italian visual artist. Her practice is rooted on the concept of Afrocentrism as an affirmation of African culture and exaltation of the traditional values that belong to it. It stems from an introspective investigation related to my ethnic origins. The works develop through the representation of abstract forms placed in undefined environments. Through an anthropological investigation, the artist interviews relatives, collecting their testimonies regarding the post-colonial period up to the civil/ethnic conflict that took place in Nigeria in 1963. **Radio Papesse** is a non-profit cultural association based in Villa Romana curated by Ilaria Gadenz and Carola Haupt.

Founded in 2006 at Palazzo delle Papesse in Siena, it is an online audio archive devoted to contemporary art; it is a place for the documentation and the articulation of a critical discourse around the visual arts and at the same time it is a radio project dedicated to sound art production and distribution. It produces and shares documentaries and interviews, as well as exhibitions and museum collections storytelling. It has embraced radio not only as a medium but also as a language to communicate art making and art practices today.

**Álvaro Urbano** lives and works in Berlin. He studied at the Architecture School in Madrid and completed his studies at the Institut für Raumexperimente taught by Olafur Eliasson, Universität der Künste in Berlin. Álvaro Urbano's practice embraces a variety of media, from performance to spatial installations that unfold throughout an experimental process. Using architecture, fiction, theatre and heterotopia as points of departure, his often site-specific installations consider the space and its local inhabitants as possible actors

or co-authors of a narration. His work invites dialogue between entities in newly conceived environments – conflicts between reality and fiction that redefine and render time-space situations. In 2014, Urbano received the Villa Romana Fellowship. He attended The Artists and Architects-in-Residence at MAK, Los Angeles, 2016/2017. He is currently a professor at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Paris, France. His works were exhibited at TBA21 Ocean Space, Venice; Bergen Assembly, Bergen; Storefront for Art and Architecture, New York; La Casa Encendida, Madrid; ArtBasel Statements with ChertLüdde; Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn; Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Boghossian Foundation, Brussels; Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Salón Acme, Mexico City; CAB, Brussels; Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, Moscow; PAC, Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan; S.A.L.T.S., Basel; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

**Ivana Franke** is a visual artist based in Berlin. Employing light and complex geometric structures, her installations, sculp-

tures and drawings investigate the interface between perception, cognition, and environment, focusing on perceptual thresholds. She developed projects for Yokohama Triennale 2020, 16 th Shanghai Biennale, Manifesta 7, 52th Venice Biennale and 7 th Venice Biennale of Architecture. Her works were exhibited in numerous institutions including Kunsthalle Bern (2022), Savvy Contemporary (2020), MACBA, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka (2019), Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, (2018), Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (2017) among many others.

**Erik Tollas** is a visual artist of Roma origin from Hungary, living and working in Budapest. As a former graduate of the University of Pécs, Faculty of Music and Visual Arts, his first steps as a painter were taken in the realm of figurative painting. More recently he turned towards experimenting with abstract forms, his works obtaining a more meditative and surreal character. In 2021 he was shortlisted for the Eszterházy Art Award at the Ludwig Museum, Budapest. He

regularly exhibits in galleries across Hungary and participates both in solo and group exhibitions, among the latest in the NACO Gallery (Metanoia, 2022) in Budapest.

**Daniela Zambrano Almidón** is a Peruvian Quechua researcher and interdisciplinary artist, with experience in artistic projects and research on Andean-Amazonian popular culture in Peru, migratory groups, interculturality and memorial culture. She is involved in numerous projects that are rooted in participatory practices, artistic research, as well as interventions in public spaces and museum institutions.

**Leone Contini** studied Philosophy and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Siena. His research sits at the intersection of anthropology, aesthetics and politics and his media include lecture-performances, collective interventions in public spaces, textual and visual narratives and drawings.

## Credits

Director: Elena Agudio

Curator and Project Coordinator: Mistura Allison

Administration: Claudia Fromm  
Production Exhibition: Giulia del Piero

Production House: Ala Turcan,  
Victor Cebotaru

Art Handling: Leonardo Panci

Curatorial Assistance: Cecilia Buffa

Technical support and sound engineering: Pietro Mauro Forte  
(for the installation *This Too Shall Pass - Tutto Passa* by Emeka Ogboh at the Piazzale degli Uffizi)

Composer and translation of Emeka Ogboh's piece: Omar Gabriel Delnevo

Archive: Carlotta Castellani

Archive Assistance: Leonie Wessel

Garden Team: Marleen Boschen, Isabella Devetta, Claudia Fromm, Victor Cebotaru, Leone Contini, Carola Haupt, Mistura Allison, Elena Agudio.

Graphic Concept: Untitled Design Agency

Booklet Graphic Design: Archive Appendix

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 **Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz**

 Max-Planck-Institut

 **COMUNE DI FIRENZE**

 **FLORENCE ART WEEK**

 Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien

 **BAO STIFTUNG**

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