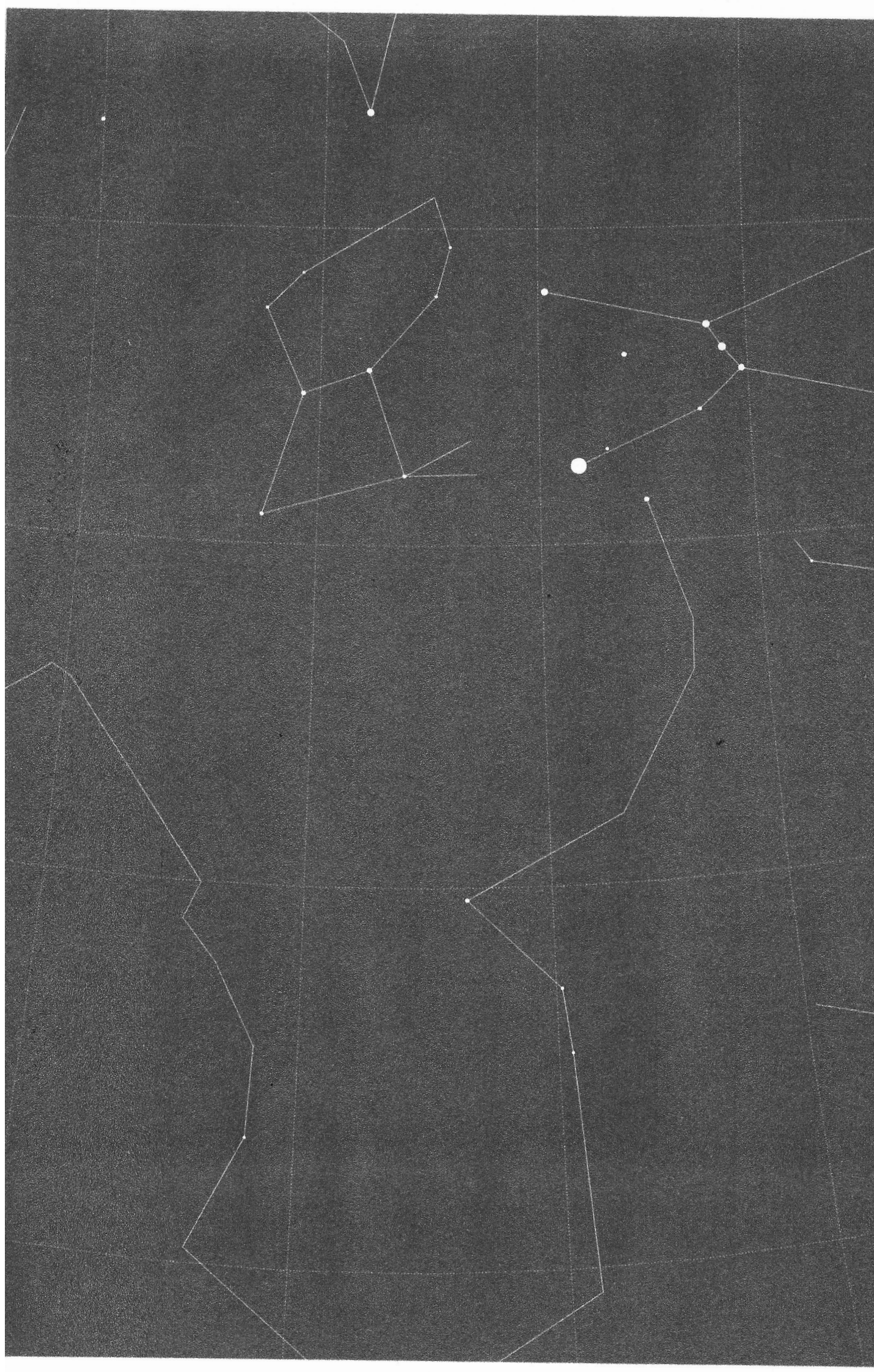


MIRIAM
HILLAWI
ABRAHAM

THE
NIGHT THAT
DREAMS





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THE NIGHT THAT DREAMS
— COSMOLOGIES OF
SCALE

13.06—27.09.2026

*This is the
hour of the
stars and of
the Night
that dreams.*

—Léopold Sédar
Senghor, *Nuit
de Sine*, 1937

RADIUS is pleased to present THE NIGHT THAT DREAMS—COSMOLOGIES OF SCALE, a solo exhibition by Miriam Hillawi Abraham. This exhibition marks a new iteration of her longstanding research on pre-colonial African cosmologies. This body of work studies and draws constellations between African cosmologies and spatial orders as multi-scalar repositories of lived knowledges and world-building traditions. Working intersectionally, she seeks to uphold the rich tapestry of African cosmologies whilst complicating Western colonial legacies, which have long dictated their (mis)understanding. Against a backdrop of Western canonical bias, standardisation and homogeneity, Abraham's work is an expansive offering to know, practice, and imagine otherwise in reclaimed agency over ancestral traditions.

Abraham's area of study is a vast stretch of continental land unfolding from the coasts of Mauritania and Senegal to countries bordering the Red Sea such as Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Djibouti: the Sahel. This is an extremely diverse region in ecologies and climates shaped by centuries of transcontinental trade routes and nomadic societies, now vulnerable to encroaching desertification. The Sahel, just like the rest of the continent, is still scarred by the imposed colonial borders that fenced indigenous cosmologies within arbitrary lines drawn under extractivist and imperial logics. In her work, Abraham defies the static encasement of cultures within colonial borders and builds points of contact between them. The cosmologies of the Sereer, the Dogon, the Kel Ferwan (an Amazigh group), the Zār, and Abyssinia are the anchor points in the work. They are researched and interpreted by means of different cosmological objects of interpretation, navigation, and representation.

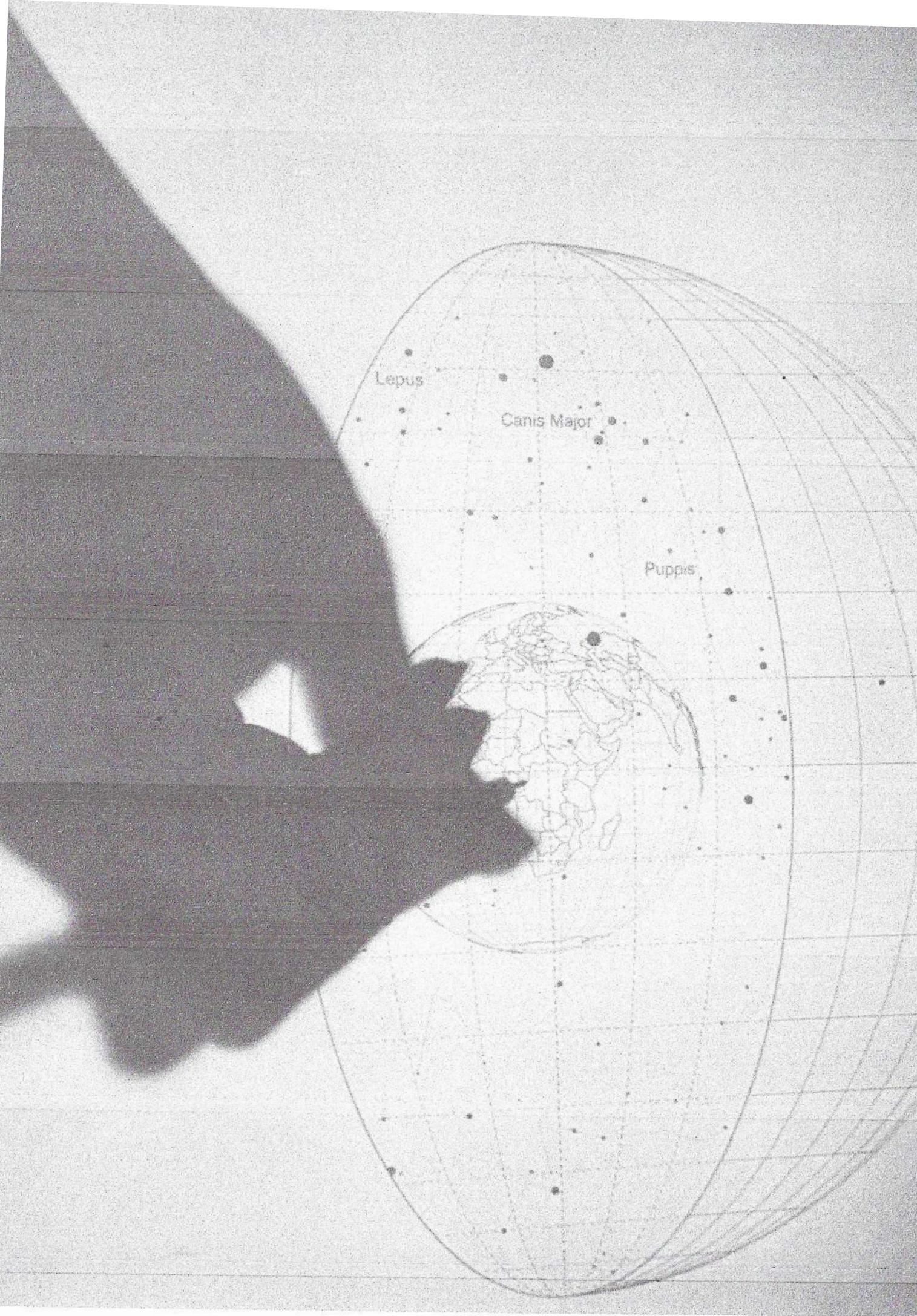
THE NIGHT THAT DREAMS is a scalar exhibition. By means of scaling, enlarging, distorting, overlaying, and obfuscating, the exhibition challenges dominant scientific ways of looking, understanding, and inhabiting the world, divulging ways of navigating it that are more affective, restorative, open-ended, sensorial, and participative. Scalarity is also a fundamental trait of the cosmologies that Abraham engages with. The Dogon, for instance, believe in a "dualised unity", meaning that the largest existing entity in the universe is mirrored in the infinitesimally smallest living organism on earth. The latter, *kize uzi*, which is symbolised on earth by the seed of the species of grass called *Digitaria exilis* (commonly known as *Fonio* in West Africa), turns into *Aduno Talu*, the "egg of the world" represented by the most massive star in the cosmos from which all living beings emerge.

In this exhibition, an array of elements constitute an observatory for speculative cosmological inquiry. Lenses, projections, specimens, maps, cosmograms, and talismans are means to study African cosmologies following a methodology of *interscalarity*: the observation and analysis of phenomena across different scales of time and space simultaneously, rather than in isolation and decontextualised from one another. This manifests in the constant interplay of size, distortion, and layering that the works engage with. Interscalarity is a conscious choice to not only reveal the entanglement between Sahelian cosmologies but to also embrace and reveal the material and epistemological plurality of indigenous navigation in the African continent, which has been long buried beneath the imposed Cartesian Logics of western cartography and astronomy. As Abraham puts it, “as opposed to the emphasis placed on “objective” graphical representation in Western cartography, the mapmaking traditions of Africa may vary in form, technique, and purpose. They can appear in mnemonic devices, as figures carved into human skin (scarification), woven into textiles or expressed in totemic or “fetish” artefacts. The modes of memory and knowledge embedded within them are expressed through the figure of the body in relation to the cosmos, its position within sacred orientation and the natural world it occupies.”¹

The first cosmological encounter in the exhibition consists of a series of floor projections of reinterpreted talismans embedded within Arabic gum. Talismans are protective and healing objects used across cultures. Each talisman invokes a specific cosmology: the star is the symbol of Yoonir, the brightest star in the Northern Celestial Hemisphere, and stands for the Sereer, an ethno-religious group based in Western Senegal and the Gambia; the mask is the Kanaga, a ritualistic mask from the Dogon, Mali; the Tanaghilt, a cross-shaped compass-like talisman, is given to Amazigh youth to help them in their nomadic journeys in the Sahara desert and protect their marriage; the talisman featuring a mermaid conjures the Zār, a spirit possession cult engrained in many communities along the Nile and across the Red Sea; the disk with four faces stands as a Telsum, a protective charm used in Ethiopia following Abyssinian tradition. For this exhibition, the talismans are made with Arabic gum, which is harvested from acacia trees across the Sahel and extending into the Horn of Africa, a region sometimes referred to as the “gum belt”. Especially abundant in Sudan—where 70% to 80% of it is extracted and exported—Arabic gum has been used for manifold applications across centuries, and since the advent of colonialism it has been extracted and traded worldwide as its gluing and binding properties are used in many manufactured products across food, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, paint, adhesives, and other chemical products. At present, Arabic gum is at the centre of financing the war in Sudan among the two factions of the insurgent military government after the 2021 coup.² Manifestly, Arabic gum is a millenary material with great ecological, cultural, and economical importance across vast timespans. As talismanic disks, it is here used as an interscalar material mediator between symbol and representation, between the celestial and the terrestrial.

Further ahead, other cosmic elements are detailed in a series of cosmograms, diagrams, etchings, and constellations projected onto the mineral walls of the space. A cosmogram is a symbolic object, image, or schema that represents a culture’s worldview and how it understands the connections between human life, the natural realm, and the divine. Cosmograms structure a culture’s reality and offer ontological explanations, and they are used in social and religious contexts for storytelling, meditation, rituals, and teaching.





The Dogon's Cosmic Egg and Aduno Kine; the cosmic tent from the Amazigh clan of Kel Ferwan; the celestial map emanating from the Book of Enoch, an apocryphal text found among the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Qumran Caves of Palestine and existing in whole only in the Ge'ez language the Ethiopic language: they exemplify the prolific and diverse manifestations and materialities of Sahelian cosmogonies and the earthly order they establish thereof. Expanded and warped in their projection, the cosmograms acquire a size that allow for an engaged and bodily experience.

At the end of the exhibition, a projection table is set up for the visualisation of maps. These are not ordinary maps drawn according to the rules of cartography. Unlike those, they do not present clear coordinates nor exact topological references; rather, they strike as geographical impressions that are intentionally indeterminate. They are modelled after the heterogeneity and particularities of African map-making, where maps are not intended to be universally comprehensible as they obey situated and indigenous modes of inhabitation, travel, terrestrial, and astrological navigation. The obfuscation in the maps is too a strategy of counter-cartography. Western cartography has been used as a science to "make sense" of colonised lands and ease the theft, exploitation, and displacement of peoples and natural resources. Withholding the ways of reading native maps and providing with misleading information to colonisers was a strategy of resistance by peoples across the continent. Counter-cartography is not just about the preservation of indigenous cosmologies: it asserts map-making as an imbrication of material and metaphorical space. Following this definition, Katherine McKittrick argues that if a refusal of cartographical neutrality is in place, and therefore conceptual connections between physical places and their subjectivities are foregrounded, the envisioning of an interpretative and alterable world is possible, which allows for the possibility of Black lives and histories to be told against Western modernity's transparent and knowable world and against colonialism and its epistemological legacies.³

The projection table is inspired by BESSY, a scanning table produced in 1972 at CERN (the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, located in Geneva). Scanning tables were devised to manually analyse, digitise, and measure the trajectories of subatomic particles. They were mostly operated by women between the 1960s and 1980s, who were referred to as "scanners", fulfilling one of the very few jobs offered to female workers at CERN. A demanding manual job, scanning is just one of the many examples of gendered work in scientific institutions. In the exhibition, this history of technofeminism is alluded to in the projection table. On it, a layering of maps offers a textured, muddled, and blurred representation of Sahelian locations, onto which a series of cosmological elements and designs are placed, creating on the whole a critical counter-cartographic experience.

In Miriam Hillawi Abraham's work, cosmology is understood as a multi-dimensional and scalable practice of situated technologies and embodied cartographies. Against a transcendental and universalist inquiry into the universe, she follows a genealogy of feminist objectivity, which in the words of Donna Haraway means that what is studied ought to be situated in its particular locality and respond to an embodied knowledge.⁴ The starting point of her research was Ethiopia, her place of birth. From there, she moved West, tracing a journey from the Horn of Africa to the West African Sahel, unconsciously undoing the path of the "Mission Dakar—Djibouti", a French ethnographic expedition carried out in the 1930s. This expedition's anthropological findings are still an important source of knowledge on African cosmologies due to the restrictions of movement and access to African researchers to this day. In her research journey, African cosmovisions are pictured as both actor and agent, entangled by the nomadic transmission of knowledge and practices throughout history, continuously embodied in a specific place throughout time by its custodians. As Haraway would summarise it, "the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular."⁵



A cosmovision could be defined as a grouping of concepts about the world, including cosmology—ideas about its structure and inner workings—cosmogony—its origins and development—and ecology—the relation between human life with other kinds of life in a specific ecosystem. Evidence of cosmovisions being essential to the social organisation of human life dates back to the Palaeolithic time.⁶ In shaping cosmovisions around the world, the configuration and movement of celestial bodies have been of great relevance. By looking up to the vast sky, celestial knowledge was inextricably connected to the chronobiology of animals, plants, climate, and economic, social, and religious human activities. All premodern societies were holistic in that they were able to see and organise themselves as part of an intricate, interconnected planetary beadwork of forms, entities, beliefs, constructions, and structures.

In the particular context of Africa, the undermining and erasure of cosmovisions was front and centre during European colonisation in what is recognised as *epistemicide*: the systematic destruction, silencing, or devaluing of existing knowledge systems to be replaced by a dominant, Western-centric paradigm. Coined by Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, but anticipated and echoed by many African philosophers such as V. Y. Mudimbe, Achille Mbembe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, and Feline Sarr, epistemicide has long imposed alien systems of knowledge under the guise of scientific progress and modern emancipation of “backwards” tradition, as much as it has also impoverished and homogenised the human capacity of storytelling and situated knowledges, or in other others, cosmovisions.⁷

Across this exhibition, Sahelian cosmologies are presented as mediating devices between the terrestrial and the celestial as indicators of *cosmotronics*, a term coined by philosopher Yuk Hui.⁸ Cosmotronics defines the entanglement of cosmic and moral orders via the technologies that are developed in their accordance. Hui challenges the falsehood that technology is universal, neutral, or culturally uniform, and instead argues that every technological system is shaped by a specific cosmology and a corresponding moral or ethical framework. This argument disputes the Western framework of technological modernisation and progress, and diversifies understanding and development of technologies within their physical and cosmological situatedness. Sahelian cosmologies and their technologies—maps, cosmograms, talismans, edifices, etc.—are proof of the multiple cosmotronics found in Africa, and therefore, the many worldviews that coexist in dialogue and the capacity to reinterpret and reestablish them, which according to Abraham signals emancipatory futurism(s) situated in the African continent.

In *THE NIGHT THAT DREAMS*, Miriam Hillawi Abraham studies and directs our gaze to some of the cosmovisions and cosmotronics from the Sahel to not only uphold them as ancestral heritage and technologies in themselves, but to also nurture an imagination of alternative planetary existences by highlighting the plurality of worldviews emanating from our shared skies.

1 Miriam Hillawi Abraham, *The (Incomplete) Cosmic Catalogue* (Jan van Eyck Printing and Publishing, 2025), 9.

2 In the current war-ridden Sudan, where the world's worst humanitarian crisis has been unfolding for the past three years, production and smuggling of gum arabic is an important asset to finance the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in their fight against the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) for the control of the country's military government. The RSF have been committing massacres and genocides across the country, often with the patronage of private investors and countries like Chad and the United Arab Emirates. The SAF, on the other hand, is also accountable to war crimes and use of chemical weapons.

3 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 13—15.

4 Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 575-599.

5 Idem.

6 Michael A. Rappenglück, 'The Housing of the World: The Significance of Cosmographic Concepts for Habitation' in *Nexus Network Journal*, volume 15, 2013, pp. 387-388.

7 For a deeper dive into epistemicide across African thought, the following books are recommended: V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Indiana Press, 1998); Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Duke University Press, 2017); Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind, The Politics of Language in African Literature* (James Currey, 1986); Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Feline Sarr, *Afrotopia* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020). For a more general enquiry in epistemicide, see Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South. Justice against Epistemicide* (Routledge, 2014).

8 See Yuk Hui & Peter Lemmens (eds.), *Cosmotronics: For a Renewed Concept of Technology in the Anthropocene* (Routledge, 2021).

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This exhibition has been made possible with the support of:

The Mondriaan Fund

The Municipality of Delft

BNG Cultuurfonds

The Van der Mandele Stichting

Niemeijer Fonds

YEAR-PROGRAMME 2026

YOU AND I ARE EARTH— TOWARDS AN EARTHLY POLITICS

How can this Earth continue to rotate? Seemingly so, the world continues to accelerate tirelessly, and the Earth lumbers on, exhausted and wholly indifferent to human actions. Although the latter does not seem entirely immune and unresponsive to the way fossil-fuel-burning-man continues to disrupt its metabolism, the biosphere. So far, Earth is the only planet known to harbour life, and whether we like it or not, for the time being, Earth is where we take our stand, as dwellers in the critical zone we call the biosphere—the ever-narrowing bandwidth in which life can persist. In short, we are Earth-bound but unable to find a position, as the late philosopher of science Bruno Latour would have said.

Against this backdrop, RADIUS presents the programme YOU AND I ARE EARTH in 2026, focusing on the central question 'Where can we land?' Through five exhibitions and an extensive public and educational programme, we will collaborate with artists and other stakeholders to explore new compositions and possibilities for life in the critical zone—the thin, dynamic layer on Earth's surface where all life is connected to rock, soil, water, and air. Beyond a purely scientific definition, this year-programme—following philosopher Bruno Latour—emphasises the critical zone as an ecological and political concept, emphasising both the vulnerability and interconnectedness of life in the face of climate change.

REKINDLING LIFE

The journey of humanity, a relative latecomer in the history of the living, is indescribable, yet can be summarised in a single sentence: making life livable and the world habitable. Recently, ecological thinking has realised, as other peoples already practice daily in their relationships with living things, that life is only livable for humans if it is also livable for the fabric of the living as a whole. That the world can only be livable for us if it is also livable for other living species, for we are nothing more than a nexus of relationships interwoven with other life forms.

With this in mind, we are developing the year-programme YOU AND I ARE EARTH, to continue the conversation about shared ground and the importance of an open society in times of geopolitical tensions and increasing social polarisation. Just when political attention seems

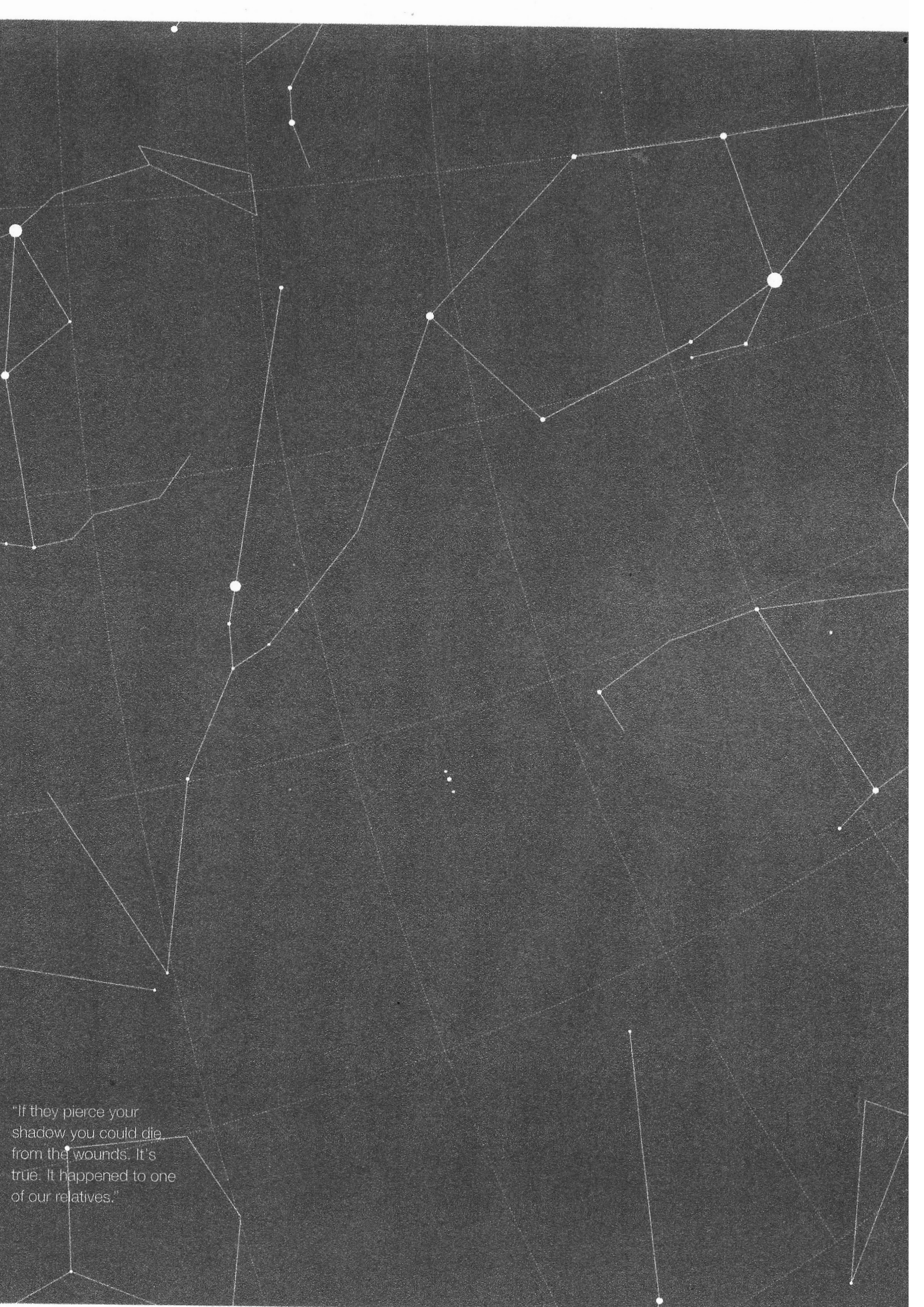
to be drifting away from climate change and thus from defending our diverse environment, we want to collectively lift the world with this programme, setting it back on its axis—call it an ecological lever to rekindle the flames of life. But a sense of powerlessness and despair prevails, despite civil society's strong sense of urgency to take back control. The problem lies in the intermediary between our hands and the world. We need ideas and hands, especially ideas that fit the available hands.

ON THE ROLE OF ART AS VEHICLE

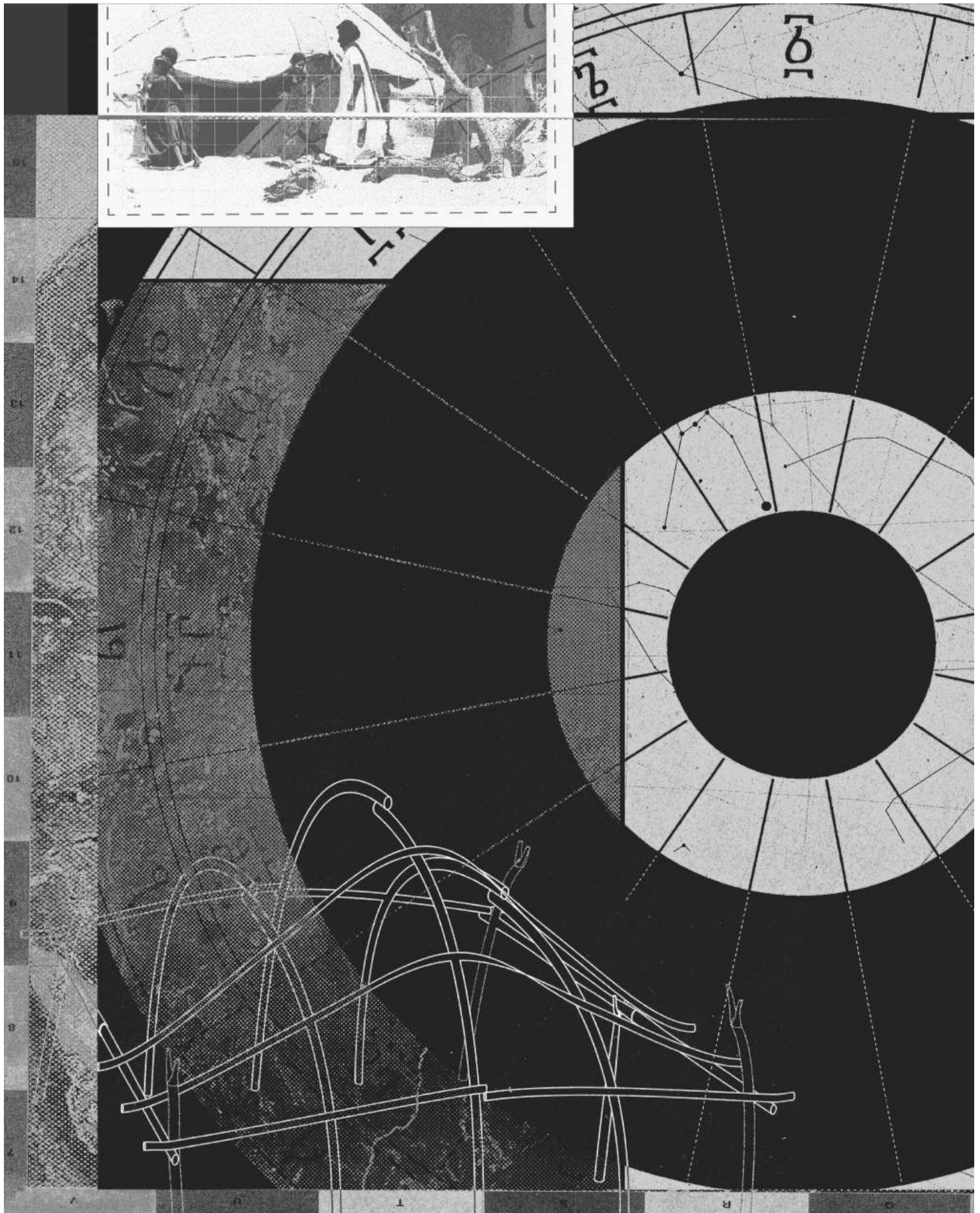
In our cultural landscape, the idea that we are interdependent and related to the rest of the living world is now commonplace. But why, then, isn't the living world central to our collective attention, to the political arena of what preoccupies us as a society above all else, and sometimes even to contemporary ecological thinking? Because, in our cultural self-image, we do not see ourselves as living beings.

With the year-programme YOU AND I ARE EARTH, we aim to reconsider this lack of human connection with the environment, specifically by transcending the false opposition between humanity and 'nature.' We do this through the work of artists who—following Gabrielle Hecht's definition—use their practice and work as an 'interscalar vehicle' to create new connections between humanity and the Earth, viewed from the perspective of interdependence. The story of climate change is all-encompassing and is generally considered too vast and abstract. In this sense, art can serve as a vehicle, on the one hand, by moving between timescales, making complex systems accessible, and making events beyond our capabilities tangible and palpable. On the other hand, art enables us to move from imagination to action—without imagination, there is no vision of a desirable future.

With the programme YOU AND I ARE EARTH, RADIUS develops a counterpoint to the centripetal force of the dominant narrative of the Anthropocene—which centers on the exceptionality of a particular, detached human type—by telling centrifugal stories that acknowledge the enormous inequalities generated by the various forces changing our planet.



"If they pierce your shadow you could die from the wounds. It's true. It happened to one of our relatives."



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