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SWAP supports artists in the creation, presentation, and discussion of new work, while facilitating collaboration with artists and audiences in Northeast Ohio. James Webb is SPACES' 69th SWAP Artist-in-Residence.

Large print available at the front desk.

# IT'S NOT WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

James Webb (Cape Town, South Africa)

On view: November 16, 2018 - January 11, 2019



# IT'S NOT WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: An Audio Guide to Getting Lost.

Can we consider one another beyond just looking? And, can we leave enough room for more than one explanation? These were the personal and social questions driving my work when I arrived in Cleveland, searching for answers and finding only more questions.

I began this project on foot, exploring Cleveland at a walking pace. I allowed myself the time and space to take in all that was new. Somewhere between the people, the stories, and the many thrift stores, I began to discover how unsettling answers could be and how freeing it was to look past the obvious.

This exhibition includes a collection of works created through chance and experimentation. Collectively, they consider the vast reaches of religion, psychology, philosophy, and the body.

## **3. A series of personal questions posed to a set of Rorschach Psychodiagnostic plates**

This work features an artist interviewing an inanimate object. Time is given between each question so the object can reply, either in silence or through each viewer's expectations. The set of Rorschach Psychodiagnostic plates (copyright 1921) appear to be addressed to the USA Army.

## **4. Friends of friends**

Here a surrealist gesture is created through a proverbial blind-date of two objects. The plant may be blocking the print, or perhaps getting close enough to befriend. There's a chemistry there. Both items were procured from Sweet Lorain - proof of their expert curation and their holdings' eagerness for new beginnings.

## **5. Infinite yearning met with a finite world**

This installation is a coda to *All That Is Unknown*, a piece the artist made in 2016 featuring recordings of two adult hearts beating and separated by the length of a room. *Infinite yearning met with a finite world* features a concurrent recording of a mother and her unborn fetus' heartbeats. The signals pulse to their own rhythms even as they are connected to a single bloodstream. The piece is presented through a transducer vibrating the gallery wall and unseen architectures. The recording features Trina Hines and her son.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# DETAILS

## 1. *Wanderer Above The Sea of Fog*

Speaking at this year's Expo Chicago, Theaster Gates called thrift stores "the archives of America." Their cultural resonance is as present in Cleveland as elsewhere. This statue was acquired from Century Antiques and reanimated by the electric current of the attached transducer. Now acting as a speaker, the form carries connected messages of spirituality, meditation, privacy, intimacy, power, and protection.

## 2. *I do not live in this world alone, but in a thousand worlds (A comet is coming)*

This is a continuation of an existing series. The dissolved text gains the possibility of entering the body through the mouth, like an elixir or psychoactive drug. These transmuted texts, or 'drowned anthologies,' contradict any perceived permanence of the written record and allow the text to remain in flux.

### Left bottle:

*Let virtue and goodness be perfected in every way.*

[The final line of the colophon of the Bardo Thodol, Liberation Through Hearing During the Intermediate State (8th Century (composition) / 14th Century (discovery), Karma Lingpa (1326 - 1386), unnamed Lama scribe, translated by Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdup]

### Center bottle:

*The thief left it behind:*

*the moon*

*at my window.*

[The Thief Left It Behind (Date Unknown), Taigu Ryokan (1758-1831)]

### Right bottle:

*Sometimes the mountain*

*is hidden from me in veils*

*of clouds, sometimes*

*I am hidden from the mountain*

*in veils of inattention, apathy, fatigue,*

*when I forget or refuse to go*

*down to the shore or a few yards*

*up the road, on a clear day,*

*to reconfirm*

*that witnessing presence.*

[Witness, Denise Levertov (1923 - 1979)]

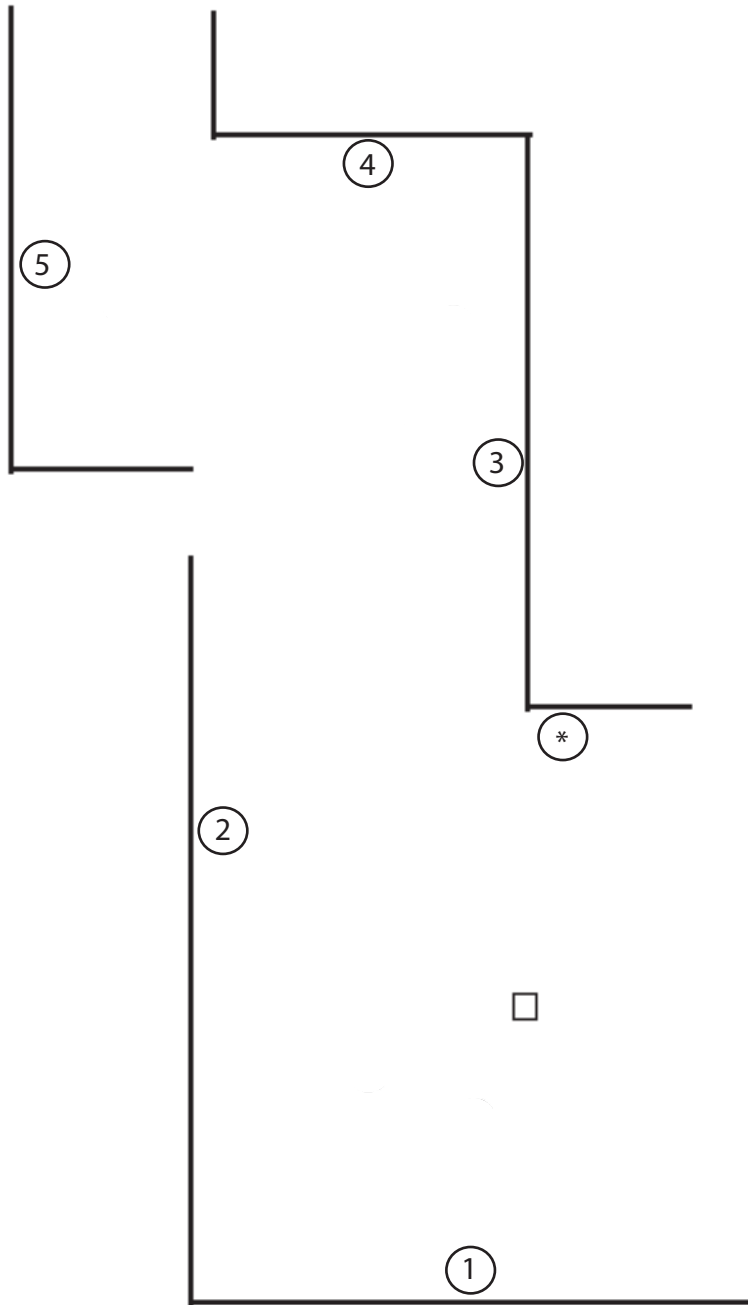
# ARTIST BIO

James Webb (b. Kimberley, South Africa, 1975) is an artist whose work is framed in both large-scale installations in galleries and museums, and as unannounced interventions in public spaces, often making use of ellipsis, displacement, and détournement to explore the nature of belief and the dynamics of communication in our contemporary world. Webb's practice employs a variety of media including audio, installation and text, referencing aspects of the conceptualist and minimalist traditions, as well as his academic studies in advertising, comparative religion, and theater.

Webb's first North American exhibition is currently on display at The Art Institute of Chicago. Recent solo presentations include Norrtälje Konsthall (Sweden, 2018), Galerie Imane Farès (Paris, France, 2016), Yorkshire Sculpture Park (Wakefield, United Kingdom, 2016), Hordaland Kunstsenter (Bergen, Norway, 2015), blank projects (Cape Town, South Africa, 2014), CentroCentro (Madrid, Spain, 2013), Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa, 2012), and MAC (Birmingham, United Kingdom, 2010).

Group exhibitions include the 13th Biennial of Dakar (2018), 4th Prospect Triennial of New Orleans (2017), Documenta 14 (2017), 13th Biennial of Sharjah (2017), 12th Bienal de la Habana (2015), 55th Biennale di Venezia (2013), the 3rd Marrakech Biennale (2009), the 2009 Melbourne International Arts Festival and the 8th Biennale d'Art Contemporain de Lyon (2007). Other notable group shows include spaces such as Wanås Konst and Historiska, (Sweden), MAXXI (Roma, Italy), Darat al Funun (Amman, Jordan), Théâtre Graslin (Nantes, France), and Tate Modern (London, United Kingdom).

James Webb is represented by blank projects and Galerie Imane Farès.



## FLOORPLAN

### 1. *Wanderer Above The Sea of Fog*

A statue of the Madonna and Child vibrates to the recorded electromagnetism of the Aurora Borealis.

### 2. *I do not live in this world alone, but in a thousand worlds (A comet is coming)*

Three texts written on soluble paper, dissolved in water, and presented in three glass vials. See full text on page 6.

### 3. *A series of personal questions posed to a set of Rorschach Psychodiagnostic plates*

A recorded voice addresses 65 questions to an original 1921 set of Rorschach Psychodiagnostic inkblot cards.

### 4. *Friends of friends*

A Miró silkscreen is concealed by an arrangement of plastic plants.

### 5. *Infinite yearning met with a finite world*

A simultaneous audio recording of a mother and her unborn child's individual heartbeats.

### *\*Now comes the mystery*

A wooden beam waits at the entrance to the exhibition.