

Assemble + Schools of Tomorrow: The Place We Imagine Meriem Bennani: Life on the CAPS

7 May – 4 September 2023

This summer Nottingham Contemporary has two exhibitions that rethink how a gallery can be used and how we question and connect with the world around us. The serious issue of play and children having the freedom to play in the gallery and in public is explored by Assemble, in partnership with Nottingham schools. Meriem Bennani imagines the future and themes of migration and displacement in two joyous video installations. Both exhibitions playfully ask questions about belonging, gathering, ownership and resistance.

The exhibitions can be used to support teaching around Art & Design, PHSE, Citizenship, Media Studies and Geography. They can be used to explore design, architecture & public space; community & identity; student voice, activism, human rights and children's rights, as well as current debates and experiences of migration.

Galleries 3 & 4

Assemble + Schools of Tomorrow: The Place We Imagine

In 1968, Italian-Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi drew a fantastical playground. This colourful drawing imagines a series of vast structures in front of the famous Museum of Art, São Paulo (MASP) which she had recently designed. This idealistic play-space was, however, never built.

Through a collaboration between the Turner Prize winning design collective Assemble and Nottingham Contemporary, Bo Bardi's vision is brought to life.



Lina Bo Bardi, Preliminary Study—Practicable Sculptures for the Belvedere at Museu de Arte Trianon, 1968. Collection Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, Gift Instituto Lina Bo e P.M. Bardi, 2006. Photo: MASP

Three large-scale play sculptures fill the galleries, two based on Bo Bardi's drawing and one developed in dialogue with children from three local schools. These are artworks to be played and interacted with. They challenge the confines of the gallery space and its uses and open new ways of being in the museum, for children and adults alike.

Assemble have a co-operative working method that seeks to actively involve the public as participant and collaborator – *both making things and making things happen*. Over the last three years they connected to our Schools of Tomorrow programme – which involves artists

and teachers working together to support creativity in and beyond the classroom - and worked closely with a resident artist and children at three schools, while engaging more broadly with the wider programme. Children's actions, ideas and responses were at the heart of this collaboration.

Surrounding the play sculptures the voices and experiments of children from all eight partner schools are showcased, including a playful set of rules by children on how to act in the galleries; a play manifesto for adults; quotes in a typeface designed by children and Fraser Muggeridge studio; and videos and images of children's engagement and discoveries.

The eight partner schools are Edna G Olds L.E.A.D. Academy, Huntingdon L.E.A.D. Academy, Jubilee L.E.A.D. Academy, Melbury Primary School, The Milford Academy, Nottingham Nursery School, Robin Hood Primary School and Southwold Primary School.

Gallery 3

In Gallery 3 there are two large play sculptures. One we've called, *The Menagerie* is taken from Bo Bardi's drawing and realized as a multi-coloured floor vinyl with seven large scale foam animals that can be moved about the space.



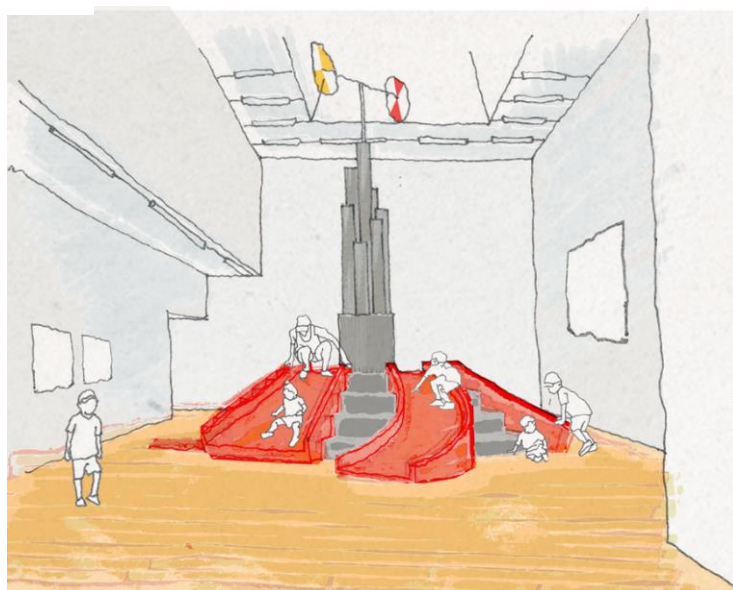
The second sculpture called *The Fun House* has been inspired by observations of play and how children engage with spaces, materials and each other at Jubilee L.E.A.D. Academy, Nottingham Nursery School and Robin Hood Primary School. The design was developed further with children at Robin Hood Primary School through a clay workshop – their clay design is also on display.

Image from the clay workshop with children at Robin Hood School, with Assemble, Laura Eldret & Kerry Whiting 2022. Photography by Sam Kirby

Gallery 4

The sculpture we've named *Big Red* is another realised from Bo Bardi's drawing. It fills our large, double height gallery and has a tower, steps and six slides.

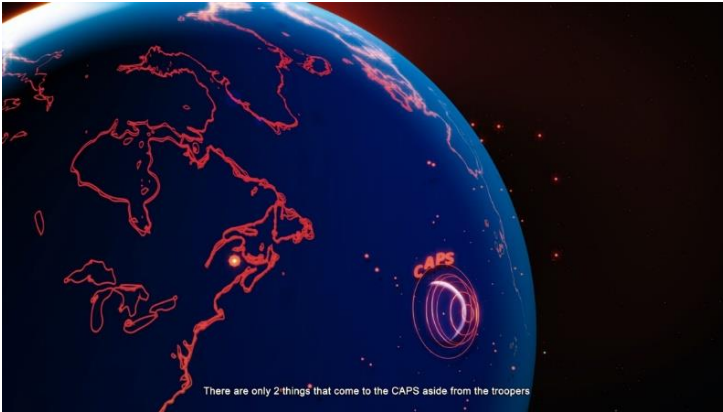
Please note visitors are asked to remove shoes to play.



Visualisation of *Big Red*, Assemble, 2022.

Meriem Bennani: Life on the CAPS Galleries 1 & 2

Meriem Bennani is a storyteller. She works in video, sculpture, multimedia installation and drawing. She is known for her playful and humorous use of digital technologies such as 3D animation and projection mapping and special effects. She draws on reality TV, documentary, advertising and social media to present an amplified version of reality. She often posts her films on Instagram. During 2020 she posted 8 episodes of *2 Lizards*, a series of animated videos with a cast of animal characters living in lockdown in New York. This is the first UK solo exhibition by the Moroccan-born, New York-based artist.



Meriem Bennani, *Life on the CAPS* (stills), 2022.
Courtesy the artist

The two films presented, *Party on the CAPS* and *Life on the CAPS*, are a mixture of live footage shot on cameras and phones and animation. They imagine a future of travel through teleportation and follow the inhabitants of a fictional island and refugee detention camp the CAPS (short for Capsule), in the middle of the Atlantic. The camp has developed into neighbourhoods and a bustling, but isolated supercity.

In this world borders are enforced by gigantic magnetic fields and an army of drone troopers, people undergo age reversals and buy new bodies, so they sometimes appear to be the same age as their children. As people's teleportation journeys are intercepted their bodies and those of their descendants are sometimes altered and distorted, and residents live with afflictions like "plastic face syndrome". Themes of privacy, protest and displacement emerge through almost documentary film sequences mixed with playful animation. Bennani offers joy, music and humour as forms of resistance.

Gallery 1

Episode 1: Party on the CAPS, 2018-19. 25 minutes, 28 seconds.

The film is shown on multiple projections in a darkened, carpeted space with silver stools and benches to sit on. Luminous green spotlights shine from behind the projections, so the space isn't very dark. The soundtrack is full of music, clapping, chanting and party noise. It is shot in Rabat, Morocco with Bennani's friends and family - including her mother, as the inhabitants of the CAPS.



Installation view of Meriem Bennani, *Party on the Caps* (2019). Image: Ben Davis.

In the first chapter, we meet Fiona, an animated crocodile and mascot of the CAPS who describes how the CAPS came about and introduces us to life and people on the island. Many of the scenes are set in the Moroccan neighbourhood at an 80th birthday party for a woman who has undergone treatment to become young again. The characters in the film speak a mixture of Arabic, English and French. There are subtitles. There is also some swearing.

Gallery 2

Episode 3: Life on the CAPS, 2022. 33 minutes, 53 seconds.

In this sequel to *Party on the CAPS*, Bennani has collaborated with musician and producer Fatima Al Qadiri. The film, shown on one big screen in a darker space continues Bennani's exploration of displacement, biotechnology and resistance. Young CAPS inhabitants dive down into the ocean around the island and disrupt the internet cables sending information to the rest of the world. Fiona the crocodile is now the symbol of the CAPS inhabitants' freedom movement. The film culminates in a performance of a Moroccan musical tradition - synchronised clapping as a form protest and resistance.



Meriem Bennani, *Life on the CAPS* (stills), 2022. Courtesy the artist