

Tate: AFROFUTURISM: Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic that combines science-fiction, history and fantasy to explore the African-American experience and aims to connect those from the black diaspora with their forgotten African ancestry



Ellen Gallagher, *Bird in Hand* (2006), Tate

The term afrofuturism has its **origins in African-American science fiction**. Today it is generally used to refer to **literature music and visual art** that explores the African-American experience and in particular the role of slavery in that experience.

Central to the concept of afrofuturism are the science-fiction writers Octavia Butler and **Samuel R. Delany** and the **Jazz musician Sun Ra**, who created a **mythical persona** that **merged science fiction with Egyptian mysticism**. It is **this otherness** that is at the heart of afrofuturism. Those inspired by afrofuturism include the musician George Clinton, the artist Ellen Gallagher and the film director Wanuri Kahiu. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/afrofuturism>

Video – Afrofuturism Explained Not just Black sci-Fi



Narrator: What does it mean for Black people to have a future? What does that look like? In February 2018, Marvel’s “Black Panther” broke box office records and elevated the phrase Afrofuturism to the forefront of the American lexicon. But Afrofuturism is a practice that goes far beyond the aesthetic of Black people donning cool science fiction costumes. It is a genre of speculative fiction that highlights what regular science fiction can’t, and won’t.

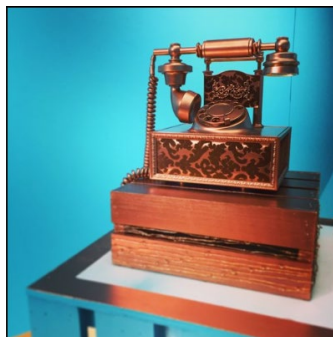


D. Denenge Duyst-Apkem, Associate Professor, Adjunct at School of the Art Institute of Chicago

- **D. Denenge Duyst-Apkem, professor of Afro-Futurism/Art:** “Greg Tate has spoken about how Black people have lived the alienation that science fiction writers imagined.

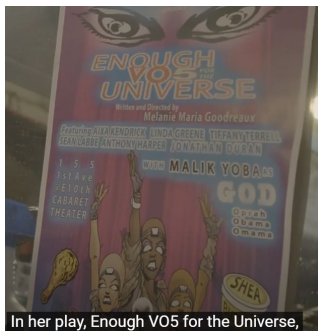


- **Narrator:** The parallels between Black life and science fiction story lines are blatant. Despite this, there has been a glaring exclusion of Black people from works of science fiction. As such, one might think that Black people would shy away from speculative fiction and instead opt to focus on the present.
- **D. Denenge Duyst-Apkem:** “We need to represent Blackness and Black people within every realm. We need to be able to see that that imagination is key and representation has to do with allowing ourselves to be able to let our imaginations take flight. That that creative impulse, that’s essential.
- **Narrator:** **Afrofuturism is an artform, practice, and methodology that allows Black people to see themselves in the future despite a distressing past and present.** It calls upon sci-fi imagery and futuristic ideas to call upon the marginalization of Black people. Practitioners conceptualize an array of visions of what Black future could look like
What do black futures look like?
- **Narrator:** We identify four unique Black Afrofuturist artists who have used their work to imagine Black life beyond its current state of global oppression.
- The 500-year history of colonialism, slavery, racism and segregation have left people of the African diaspora with a disjointed idea of **what it really means to be home.**



Jessica Valoris

- **Jessica Valoris, Visual Artist:** “Always feeling like, we ain’t from here. This is not our land. This is not our people. Being considered like this thing that is to be feared, like this thing that is unknown.”
- **Narrator** – Visual artist and hiphop MC Jessica Valoris uses speculative fiction and science fiction tropes to encourage people of the African diaspora to phone home. Her piece, “Phone Home,” named after the famous ET line uses audio soundscapes to allow people to audibly allow people to imagine what “home” might sound like.



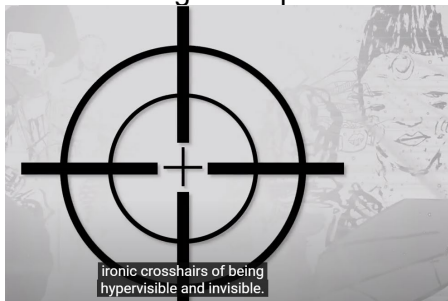
In her play, Enough VO5 for the Universe,

Melanie Goodreaux

- Narrator: In her play, “Enough VO5 for the Universe,” **Melanie Goodreaux** depicts a world 100 years into the future where God is a gender non-binary Black person. It is a vision of the future that celebrates Black real lives in spite of present-day queer and trans antagonism. A toxic soup of poverty, misogyny, anti-Blackness, and transphobia leave Black trans-gender and fems [singular: femme - lesbian whose appearance and behavior are seen as traditionally feminine] at an exorbitantly high risk for being murdered



- **Melanie Maria Goodreaux**: “I thought it was an **expansive image of God, to think of God as a man, who could also be a woman.** We have to expand our ideas of what Black maleness is or Black femaleness is.”
- **Malcolm X**: “The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman.”



- Narrator - **Black people are often caught in the ironic cross-hairs of being hyper-visible and invisible.** Black women, for example, are often hyper-sexualized, leaving them at a greater risk for sexual assault and violence. Yet, they have also been largely left out of conversations around sexual violence, even following the rise of 2017 hashtag #METOO movement.



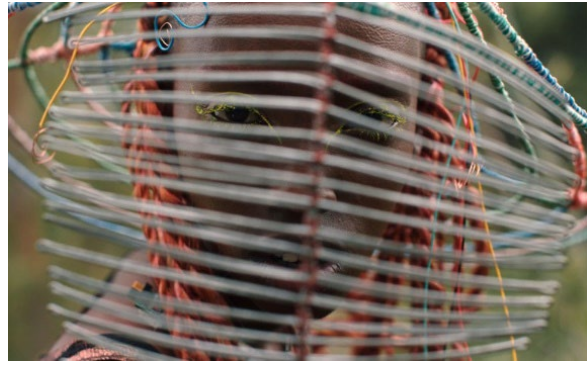
Delta Major

- Afrofuturist costume designer and cosplayer Delta Major reclaims the narrative of how her body is perceived in the world. She creates clothing that she defines as “wearable art,” the goal of which is to define her beauty and sexuality on her own terms, while incorporating strong shapes and patterns that emphasize physical strength. [Cosplay: Portmanteau of “**costume play**.” An activity and performance art in which participants called **cosplayers** wear costumes and fashion accessories to represent a specific character]
 - **Delta Major**, Cosplayer/Costume designer: ‘I feel I can totally be in Wakanda kicking some ass, taking some names.’



- **Narrator** – And whilst Afrofuturists are hard at work producing art that rethinks the present, some artists use the genre to re-imagine the past. In the graphic novel, “Maddie’s Rocket,” retro Afrofuturist Tim Fielder imagines a Jim Crow-era heroine named Maddie who flies rocket ships and fights back against the KKK and aliens with her trusty rifle.
 - **Tim Fielder**, Graphic Novelist: “There have always been gun-wielding, Jim-crow fighting Black women. Always. You just never saw them. **Retro-Afrofuturism is the filling in of those voids** through speculative fiction.”
- **D. Denenge Duyst-Apkem** – “**Afrofuturism is a pathway to Black liberation. It provides an avenue to be able to transform ourselves and our communities.**”
- **Jessica Valoris** – “The biggest Afrofuturist for me is Harriet Tubman. She had dreams about liberation. She had dreams about freedom.
- **D. Denenge Duyst-Apkem** – Black people have been engaging in Afrofuturism well before the term was coined by **Mark Dery** in 1993 in his book Flame Wars. Whether the state of Black life be perilous or prosperous, folks of the African diaspora will continue to imagine expansive ideas of Black life in the past, present and beyond.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=154XnA1xcis>

Hyperallergic: The Afrofuturist Musical Romance of *Neptune Frost*: Saul Williams and Anisia Uzeyman’s new film performs a radical intervention upon the science fiction genre.



From *Neptune Frost* (2021), dir. Anisia Uzeyman & Saul Williams (images: Kino Lorber)

Being the first Afro/cyberpunk musical to premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, *Neptune Frost*'s reputation precedes it. Shot on location in Rwanda, Saul Williams and Anisia Uzeyman's debut feature is a breathtaking achievement, a standalone movie that feels like it could spawn a new genre. The plot follows Matalusa (Bertrand Ninteretse), a young laborer at a coltan mine in an unnamed African country. After his brother Tekno is beaten to death by a guard, Matalusa joins a revolutionary movement against the mine bosses (referred to only as "The Authority"). This is where he meets Neptune, a gender-toggling hacker portrayed by both Elvis Ngabo and Cheryl Isheja. Their rebellion takes form in a massive computer hack that brings the exploitation of the workers to a global audience.

The way *Neptune Frost* blurs sociopolitical upheaval that is not necessarily Rwandan or Burundian (but still speaks directly to the last century and a half of Western domination of African interests) is one of its core strengths. It's not hard to see tropes from better-financed sci-fi/fantasy properties in this digital mosaic. Matalusa's evolution into the hacker persona *MartyrLoserKing* has shades of the "chosen one" trope that's been ubiquitous post-*Star Wars*, and the confluence of sexual and political awakenings harkens back to *The Matrix*.

But unlike those movies, *Neptune Frost* obstinately refuses a conventional narrative arc. Its real subject is the transhumanist utopia implied by Matalusa and Neptune's romance, as well as the exploitation suffered on the ground — coltan being essential to manufacturing smartphone and computer components. Williams and Uzeyman don't waste time probing the motivations of the bosses or the workers. Their outrage is a given, and the images — blotchy, digital, handheld — speak for themselves, often with a harsh and handmade majesty courtesy of production designer Antoine Nshimiyimana and costumer Cedric Mizero.

As a slam poet, rapper, actor, and performance artist, Williams has made a career of bucking whatever broader trends are besieging pop culture, so it's been especially sweet to see this film roll out across the country to unanimous critical acclaim. But some of the ecstatic reception feels almost defensive, as though the movie is being celebrated simply for existing, and for being so *sui generis*. As a viewing experience, *Neptune Frost* treads the line between hypnotic and repetitive. Some will find the movie poetic; others may simply be driven mad by its many callbacks to earlier songs and phrases.



From *Neptune Frost*

Beneath its Wong-Kar-Wai-like sense of shifting, dreamlike unease, what's most interesting about *Neptune Frost* is the way it addresses ecological and political crises with blunt force. Hopefully it may help more people recognize the costs of present-day capitalism, albeit through the scrim of so-called "science fiction." At a fraction of the usual cost, Uzeyman and Williams have performed a radical intervention upon a genre that has been massacred in recent years by the "cinematic universes" of Disney, Marvel, and so on. The movie is also a referendum — not on the meager trickle of African cinema that makes its way to the United States, but rather on the preponderance of images (many of them engineered in Western documentary labs) that depict the continent as a barren wasteland. In its most startling moments, *Neptune Frost* is a vivid reminder of the potential for new visions of old catastrophes. <https://outlook.live.com/mail/o/inbox/id/AQQkADAwATMwMAItNGM4Zio2ZDY1LTAwAiwMAoAEABjrF%2F8Xh8BTILvwVRYJ6yg>