

## 'Aims of Art', Samra Mayanja, 2020

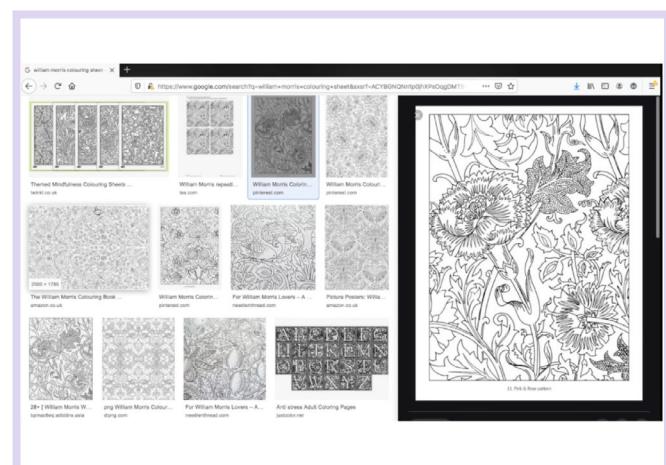
### WHAT

*Aims of Art* is a video work and collaborative project created by Samra Mayanja for 'The Arts and Crafts of Politics,' an exhibition at Blackwell Arts and Crafts House in the Lake District in 2020. Mayanja was commissioned to make a work in collaboration with a community group chosen by Blackwell Arts and Crafts House, however when this group were unable to participate, Mayanja decided to work with staff, volunteers and one board member at the organisation.

The project ran as a series of workshops, asking staff to imagine an object that could benefit them and use at work. The workshops were generative, with the sketches of each providing the starting materials for the next. Mayanja's entire material budget was given over to participants to develop their idea, and they opted for an item that would encourage them to take regular breaks during working hours. The resulting video work *Aims of Art* shares a reflection of the project, which uncovered the contradictions that can arise when organisations commission socially-engaged practice yet do not extend its ethics to their own team. The title for the work is borrowed from a William Morris text of the same name which explores the connection between labour and pleasure and condemns societal acceptance of poor working conditions.

### COMMISSIONS

*Aims of Art* by Samra Mayanja was a series of collaborative workshops which are reflected in its resulting video work. A letter from the artist to participants forms the narration for the video.



Video still from *Aims of Art*, Samra Mayanja, 2020.



Video still from *Aims of Art*, Samra Mayanja, 2020.

## ARTISTS

Samra Mayanja is an artist and writer based in Leeds whose work spans writing, performance and film. Informed by her background in Economics, Mayanja's work researches, through experiments, modes of collectivising wealth (and debt), as an attempt to address disparity and to explore what it feels like to (mis)trust. Mayanja has exhibited at Signal Film & Media, Barrow-in-Furness and MAMA, Rotterdam, Netherlands. Mayanja has performed at Centre for Live Art Yorkshire (CLAY), Leeds and Kampnagel, Hamburg, Germany.

## CURATORS

*Aims of Art* was commissioned by Blackwell Arts and Crafts House. Designed by noted architect Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott, this Grade I listed building is one of the UK's finest examples of Arts & Crafts architecture, and is a practice that is inspired by the natural world, while embracing traditional craft skills in an age of increasing mechanisation and mass production. *Aims of Art* was one of three new commissions, alongside Sam Pickett and Julia Parks as part of the exhibition The Arts & Crafts of Politics. The exhibition explored the idea that socialist politics was at the heart of the Arts & Crafts Movement in the late 19th century, this exhibition traced an evolving line of political thought through the writings, designs and illustrations of key Arts & Crafts luminaries including John Ruskin, William Morris and Walter Crane.

## WHY

The point of departure for *Aims of Art* was Mayanja's identification of a contradiction between organisations championing and carrying out socially engaged work with community groups outside of arts organisations, and their inability to extend those principles to their organisational structures to effect change.

## WHERE

Blackwell Arts and Crafts House, Bowness-on-Windermere, LA23 3JT.

## HOW

- £300 production budget
- Participation came directly from Blackwell Arts and Crafts House, where *Aims of Art* was later exhibited.

## IMPACT

- *Aims of Art* redrew the parameters of socially engaged commissions by inviting participation from within the organisation, identifying its workforce as a community
- The project provided a reflection on its staff working experience, for Blackwell House
- Its workshops enacted collaboration between staff members of differing organisational hierarchies, and as these were generative, participants had to genuinely use and connect with one another's ideas

## IMPACT INDICATORS

- Samra worked with 15 participants from within Blackwell House, rather than engaging external participants to extend the ethics of socially engaged practice to the organisation itself

*"It felt to me like the organisation wasn't able to hold the contradiction of precarity, stress or insecurity in their workplace whilst presenting a show exploring the socialist politics of the Arts and Crafts Movement."*

- SAMRA MAYANJA