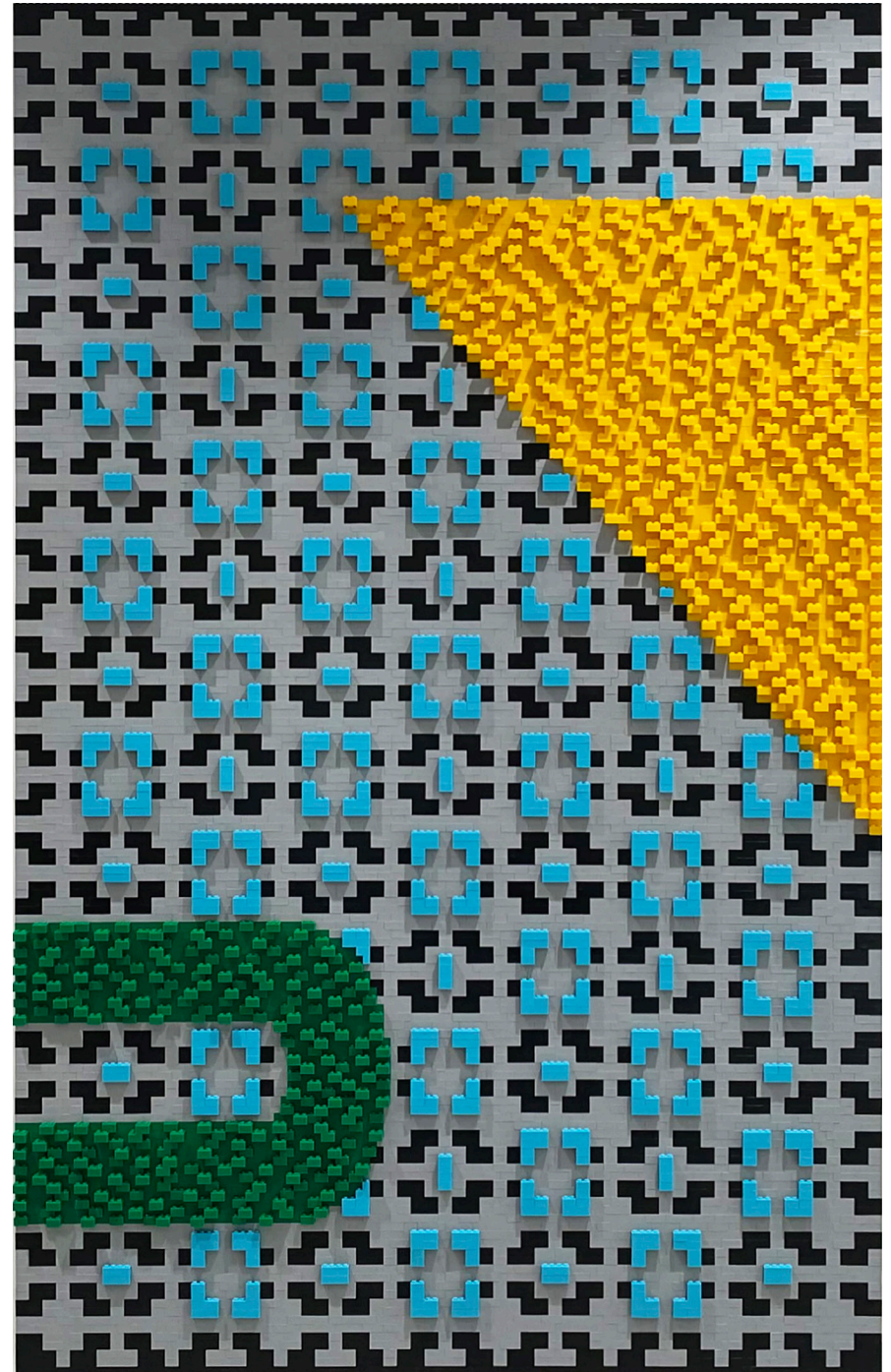


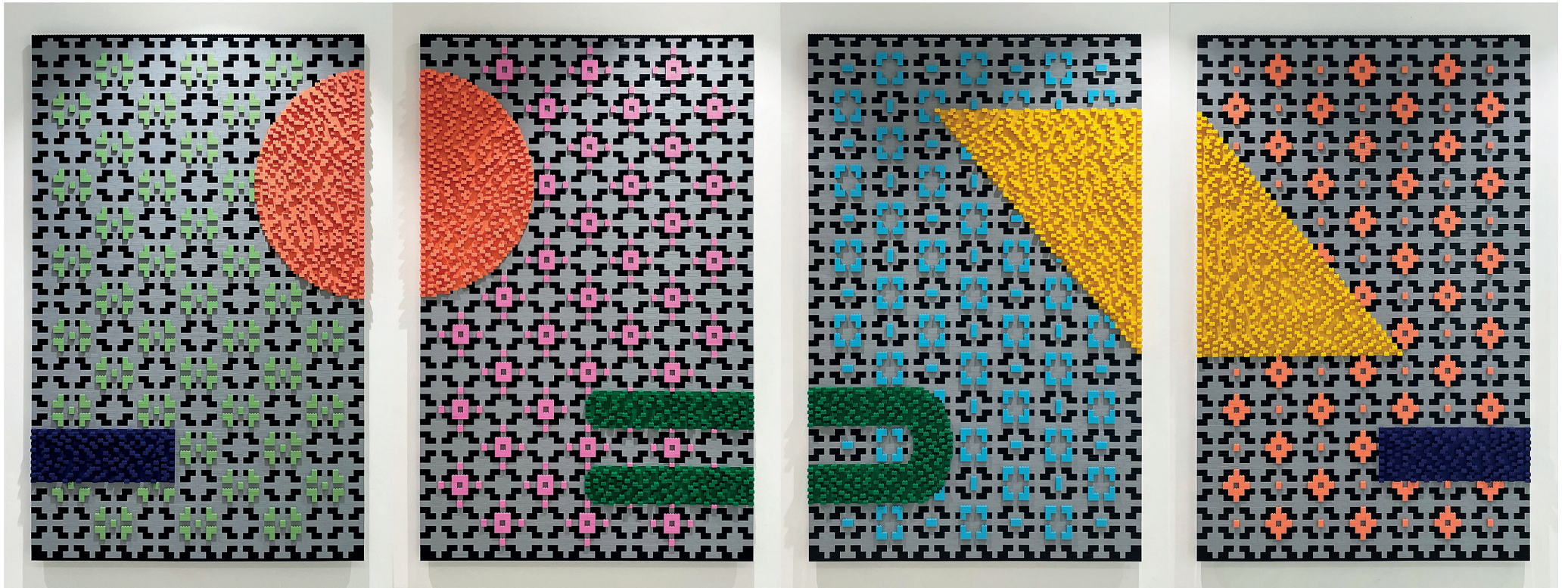
Faatimah Mohamed-Luke 'Come as You Are'

by Chiara Mzizi



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
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Faatimah Mohamed-Luke,
Come As You Are (2022).
Quadriptych made with building blocks.
Installation View.
University of Cape Town.
Photo by: Chiara Mzizi

The University of Cape Town's Works of Art Committee is pleased to present Faatimah Mohamed-Luke's 2022 quadriptych *Come As You Are*. Emphasising collaborative thinking, *Come As You Are* sits in pertinent dialogue with its architectural site, where the university commissioned the piece for the recently built *Hasso Plattner School of Design Thinking Afrik*a*. Here, the artist makes use of various creative disciplines and disrupts normative assumptions around identity, art and notions of play.

HS School of Design Thinking (shortened to d-school) aims to centralise innovative problem-solving within its pedagogical approach. In this instance, design thinking describes engaging with the world through forms of collaboration and play. It is a type of practical and creative lens that complicates the lines between artistic disciplines and scholarly borders. As such, Mohammed-Luke was the perfect choice for this form of speculative inquiry.

Her art is best encapsulated by what scholar Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung terms "disciplinary decadence", which imagines a co-existence of various academic and creative practices (Ndikung, 2020: 280). Thus, from its methodological approach and visual appeal, *Come As You Are* presents an amalgam of design, fine art, and patternmaking; a process emergent from the artist's background in fashion and textile work. In this way, fine art becomes "just another medium" amidst a plethora of creative possibilities for the artist.

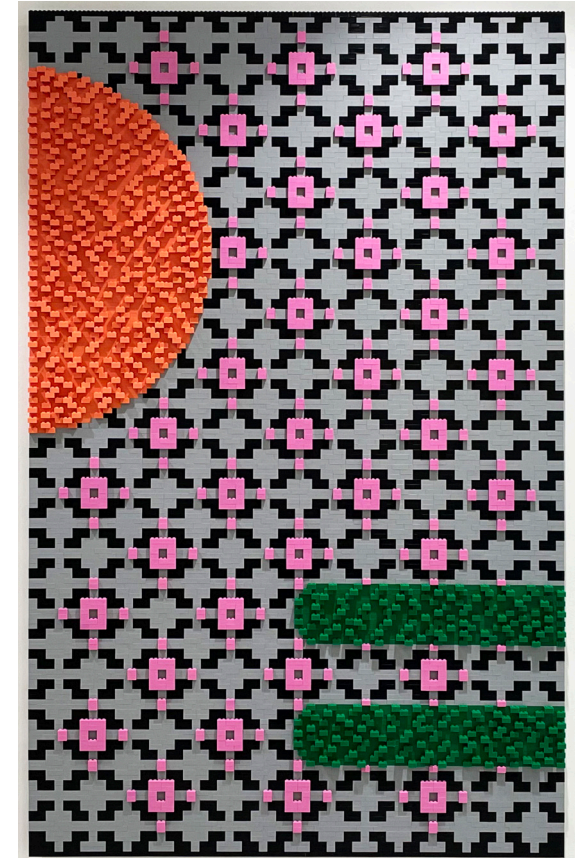
"These worlds [art and design] really aren't that different. You create the pattern in your head, you create it digitally, and then it physically exists in the world".

Mohammed-Luke's history of pattern-making comes to life in this particular piece. Each of the four panels begins with the same design. Here, small lego-like building blocks of grey and black connect together, revealing a symmetrical Z-shaped motif throughout. The staggered rectangular blocks work well to create a neutral repetitive pattern. For Mohammed-Luke, this visual layer constitutes the metaphorical "design

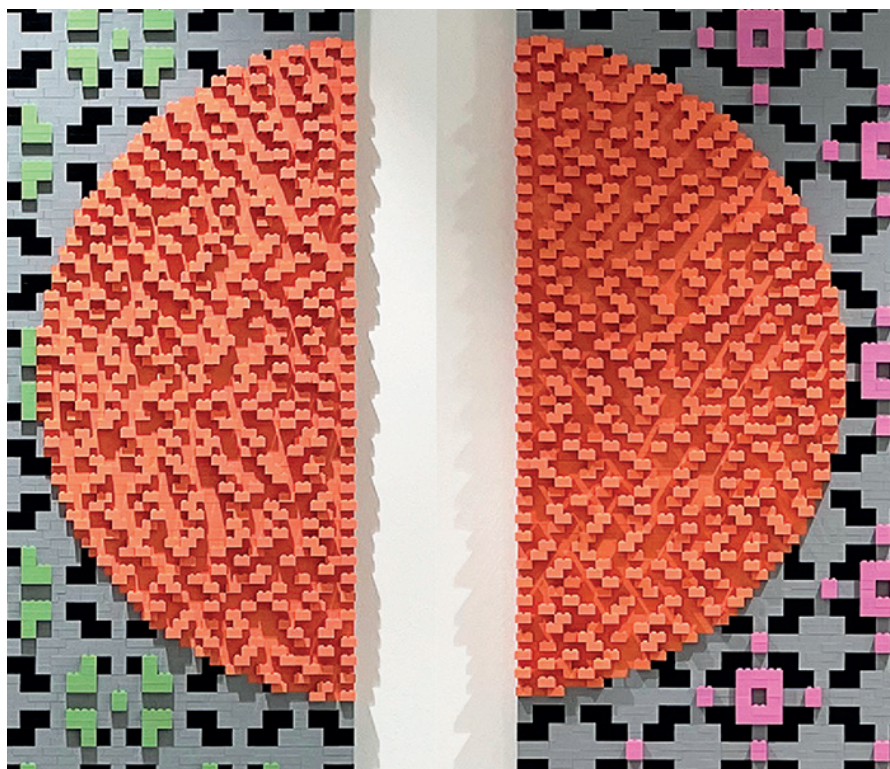
brief", where parameters, materials and tools prompt particular design projects. In this sense, the artist sees them as the "black and white rules that we need to abide by".

However, *Come As You Are* reveals secondary patterns emerging from this first base layer. Here, vibrant hues of pink, orange and green represent the individuality that any design process requires. Mohamed-Luke illustrates that creative innovation can emerge from a set of parameters that inevitably push certain things out of us. In this figure of thought, the artist sees design thinking as a process that:

"forces you to bring your best self into the room because if you don't come as yourself, you don't get to create that secondary pattern."



Subsequently, the openness of her trans-disciplinary approach juxtaposes the universal versus the local, ushering in a negotiation between opacity and particularity. By either zooming in on the work - or out of it - different layers of contextual and formal interpretations begin to emerge. Zoom out of the piece, and the gaps that separate each block begin to disappear, leaving space for the totality of the composition to form. However, zoom in on the piece, and one is aware of the artist's meticulous attention to sculptural detail. From this lens, Mohammed-Luke highlights slight colour variations and spatial 'warps' within the different tonal areas of the panels. Thus, despite the piece's geometric complexity, she reifies its human-made quality, drawing attention to her emphasis on individuality. In this light, the various building blocks (and the patterns produced from them) come to symbolise the complexity of the human condition.



Importantly then, the artist does not regard identity as a fixed position, stating that: “None of us fit neatly into a box. We all have elements that blur”. Thus, although zooming in on the work allows for its detail to arise, it equally distorts the composition. Akin to the artist's view of identity, the closer one goes towards the individual, the more pixelated the shapes become. In this case, *Come As You Are* invokes Édouard Glissant's view of identity as always being in flux. Glissant sees any form of identity relations as comprising individuals as open totalities constantly evolving upon themselves (Glissant, 1990: 191). Subsequently, Mohammed-Luke works to visualise the blurriness of totality alongside the importance of individuality. As she notes: “It is in between the spaces of grey and black that the individual pattern emerges, and that is you; that is what you bring to the space”. Within the piece, each building block represents a whole, but when put together, these shapes morph to form innovative relations amongst each other.

Such is the case with the heterogeneity of the panels themselves. Each individual panel works as a harmonious and balanced piece, but by adding the panels next to each other, new layered patterns begin to form. Remarkably then, despite its geometric structure, there is no sense of stasis guiding the piece. As with the nature of multi-panelled wall art, a level of impermanence and play drives the curatorial display. This playful functionality echoes the broader ethos of the architectural site where much of its furniture is mobile and subject to manipulation. This allows different variations of the building to unfold. And so, as part of the site's emphasis on movement, *Come As You Are* offers viewers a similar sense of dynamism and fluidity.

Indeed, there is an air of accessibility that characterises the piece, where the lego-like building blocks lend themselves to this form of practical and aesthetic openness. The work invites viewers to engage with its physicality because (as Mohammed-Luke reminds us) lego resonates with all of us. “People always want to touch it as we all had those memories, when we were little, sitting on the floor in the lounge [and]

making something that brought us joy”. In this regard, the artist draws attention to the medium’s invocation of nostalgia and the power of this emotion to break down the invisible barriers that halt our tactile experience of art.

Therefore, in Mohammed-Luke’s colourful world, viewers are reminded to emphasise disciplinary decadence as an aesthetic and ethical framework. This type of relational exchange complicates the unspoken ‘rules’ that seem to characterise creative practice. As bell hooks would put it, it is a type of aesthetic praxis that sits on the margins of radical openness (hooks, 1990: 148). The artist invites us to take part in playful speculation, where the boundaries that distinguish creativity from practicality and art from design begin to fade.

Chiara Mzizi is an art writer and academic based at the University of Cape Town

Reference List:

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Quoted material from Faatimah Mohamed-Luke has been taken from the writer’s interview with the artist on the 16th of November 2022 at The University of Cape Town.