

BETWEEN US

Curated by: Ivy Mutuku

Curator Ivy Mutuku has drawn together seven artists to highlight the significance of friendship as a source of creativity and connection. The exhibition explores the unique nature of these relationships; from creating environments where friends relax, to depicting simple gestures of platonic love, these artists have captured an intimacy which is familiar.

BETWEEN US presents the complexities of friendships and how we navigate life with the companionship of our friends. The exhibition presents friendship as a spectrum and plays on moments of joy, discovery, support, loss and grief that we experience and process with our friends. Some fleeting. Some lifelong. Some past.

Artists Kemka Ajoku, Bella Loke, Christina Nwabugo, Najla Said, Tig Terera, John M Tubera and Ammar Yonis show friendship in playful and tender light in this stunning exhibition.

Opening: Wednesday 18 Jan, 6.30 – 8.30pm
Exhibition: 19 Jan – 19 Mar

BETWEEN US

by Kalu Oji

When we define platonic love what is most often highlighted is how it exists in the absence of many things; romantic desire, sexual attraction, physical expectations.

What this language sometimes fails to observe is that a platonic relationship is not a relationship built on absence, but one that's foundations lay rooted in abundance. Where a conversation can take place beyond words, and an experience can extend far beyond a sensory engagement.

There's a journal entry that I often return to. A memory, archived in my blue moleskine and in the recesses of my mind. It reads.

'we ate, and we drank, and we danced... and we laughed more than we had ever laughed before.'

Although the date is smudged, the memory is clear as day. Over time I would return to that place. Replaying the feelings over and over again, the joy and freedom experienced that evening now distilled down into a deep nostalgia.

Not predetermined by birth or bloodlines, this bond is one that's been found and built upon. Woven like our bodies that night, the rope that connects us has been pulled taut over time; its limits tested, its sanctity scrutinized.

Beyond familial love, platonic love is the first kind of love that most of us will experience. These relationships make up the fabric of our everyday life and are often the constant that our sense of self, and stability, hinges upon. Even before we are able to define the word we know the feeling.

a scene.

EXT. FIELD — SUMMER'S DAY

It's 2007 and the air is warm. In the distance, two children. Their bodies are brown, bronzed after a summer spent under the sun.

From across the field one calls to the other, roars as he chases him down. The sun catches their back as the two boys lay their shirts to the ground, bodies itchy from the grass. Neither one minds.

At 10 they don't yet know what love means - better yet, platonic love - or how one might attempt to intellectualise it. What they do know is that they have found something in each other. A mutual reciprocity.

Sat on the edge of the field there is nothing but warm air and the distant hum of traffic between them. In this relationship language takes on a different form; an understanding that their conversation is most clearly understood in the gaps between sentences. That the breaths after the words carry just as much weight as the words themselves.

end.

The symbiosis of platonic relationships lay the foundation for balance, safety, and joy in our lives.

My mother once told me that 'the more modest your sense of enough is, the greater your sense of abundance will be'. I believe this also stands true in the context of this essay — that a richness in love does not require a physical arrangement or an affair of sorts. That although the heart moves with a mind of its own, the most fruitful kind of relationship is the one that simply makes you feel like a child again. Not complicated by the cravings of the body nor blunted by the impulsivity of desire.

As children we practice this keenly. Somewhere along the way, more complex types of relationships are etched into our adolescence. When I look back at the many platonic loves I experienced growing up, and when I reflect on the relationships I have found myself in today, allowing these connections to flourish in their purest forms often means returning to that childhood place. To that 10 year old boy running through the grass with not a care in the world.

a scene.

EXT. APARTMENT — MIDNIGHT

It's 2022. We arrive at the time of the year between winter and spring; where daylight savings hasn't yet kicked in, and where in the morning you will still find the lawn frosted over though by noon you will look up to see specks of green making their way back to the branches.

From outside an apartment window the street is dead still. The curtain only half drawn offers us a glimpse inside — a ridge of bodies, silhouetted by the floor lamp, the room slightly hazed as used dinner plates and empty bottles decorate the coffee table and floor.

Like the tide washing in and out, our group moves with a steady yet unpredictable rhythm. The double glazed windows do much to keep the cold out and the sound in. With their faces shadowed we rely on body language to make out the mood of the room.

A hand on a shoulder... a head thrown back towards the ceiling...

One of our silhouettes jumps from the couch with excitement and at the moment, with the traffic quietened and the street dead still, we hear it ever so faintly.

Laughter. A laughter that feels like it might echo into eternity.

It's soon joined by more and more, voices weaving in on each other like lacework.

This sound is undying.

end.

Sometimes the joy becomes so heavy I think, 'I might never leave this place... I might anchor myself here'. There are many friends that have come in and out of my life. Many loves I have experienced. I'm warmed when I think about this in its whole — to love and be loved, one of life's greatest gifts.

In a world rife with expectation, we can spend so long desiring that we forget what it means to actually have. Platonic relationships, platonic loves, serve as a reminder of that. That sometimes just to have, is to have enough.



Front:

Kemka Ajoku, *Gestural Greetings* (from the series *Finding Common Ground*) (detail), 2021, Photography. Image courtesy of the artist.

Top to bottom, left to right:

Najla Said, *Sister! Sister!*, 2012, Digital Photograph. Image courtesy of the artist.

John M Tubera, *Angela & Kush*, 2021, 120 Film Photography. Image courtesy of the artist.

Christine Nwabugo, *Old Friends*, 2022, Digital Photography. Image courtesy of the artist.

Ammar Yonis, *Homage*, 2021, 35mm Film Photography. Image courtesy of the artist.

Join moderator Lydia Tesema and panellists Ivy Mutuku, Bella Loke, Chase Maccini, Daniel Olosoji and Noor Gabriel for a conversation about friendship and the fundamental issues that are at play when navigating connection.

Performance by Soli

Saturday 18 February, 2 – 4pm

Wyndham Cultural Centre theatre

