

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum
of American Art
Press Office

99 Gansevoort Street
New York, NY 10014

pressoffice@whitney.org
(212) 570-3633

PRESS RELEASE

WHITNEY MUSEUM LAUNCHES BANNED SKILLS, A NEW DIGITAL ART COMMISSION BY ARTIST DUO INFANT ON WHITNEY.ORG



Artist duo INFANT offer a portal to an aesthetic approach for exploring new understandings of cultural representations in new digital work BANNED SKILLS.

New York, NY, August 22, 2025 — The Whitney Museum of American Art launched [BANNED SKILLS](#), a digital art project by artist duo [INFANT](#), sidony o'neal and Bogosi Sekhukhuni, on artport, the Whitney's online gallery space for Internet and new media art. Commissioned for artport, the work serves as the portal to engage with *INFANT*'s evolving conceptual framework, XENOFORMALISM. The artists designed *BANNED SKILLS* as an interactive entry point to explore new speculative understandings of formal systems like math, science, and design. The project reveals how seemingly contrasting ideas can align to generate new aesthetic or ideological orders.

BANNED SKILLS is a nonlinear aesthetic narrative that prompts viewers to consider various aspects of humanity and established understandings of objects or histories. Unfolding along two distinct paths, the work's primary navigation tool utilizes the psychological phenomenon of the bouba-kiki effect. The phenomenon, first presented in the 1920s, reflects deliberate associations between speech sounds and visual shapes with the word bouba often associated with smooth,

rounded shapes and kiki with sharp, angular ones. Within *BANNED SKILLS*, users begin their experience in a “NEST” where the kiki and bouba forms exist, selecting one of the two shapes to take them along different paths. Along these journeys, users interact with a range of artifacts from art, architecture, design, and sound to explore cultural representations through unexpected groupings, placing the objects in conversation with one another. Encounters with juxtapositions of cultural artifacts—from the Gameboy Advanced SP Tribal Edition to the necklace made from precisely designed whale bones—invite users to gain new perspectives and draw connections. In the top-left corner of the screen, an interactive virtual music device lets users toggle between the kiki- and bouba-coded soundscapes, further emphasizing the visual juxtapositions. After users explore both spaces, a final third environment will appear.

“*BANNED SKILLS* hopes to use participation as a way around the problem of ‘talking at’ the viewer, working with, not against, postures of engagement from the early 2000’s gaming boom that feel familiar and nostalgic simultaneously,” said David Lisbon, Curatorial Assistant at the Whitney. “This is the first artport project that dives into this cross-section of the post digital and is a form of practice that garners attention because of its utility across levels of understanding. Considering the intersections of art and design have become a prominent narrative for emerging forms of contemporary engagement.”

The artists designed the virtual experience of *BANNED SKILLS* as a starting point for exploring their concept of XENOFORMALISM (XF). The prefix “XENO,” meaning strange or foreign in Greek, suggests an unfamiliar type of formalism. XF can be imagined as a category of filters to guide users in unpacking and connecting histories of visual aesthetics, sonic landscapes, and science. The work offers an aesthetic approach to new understandings of cultural representations, using histories of science fiction and digital culture—including gaming and computer graphics—as speculative introductions. The branching sequences *INFANT* has formed in *BANNED SKILLS* encourages viewers to reexamine how meaning is formed and reinforced within art, art history, design, science, and science fiction, and how these fields shape and contribute to collective cultural memory.

INFANT’s *BANNED SKILLS* was organized by David Lisbon, Curatorial Assistant at the Whitney Museum, and commissioned for artport, the Museum’s online gallery space for Internet and new media art commissions. artport is organized by Christiane Paul, Curator of Digital Art at the Whitney. More information about artport can be found at whitney.org/artport.

ABOUT INFANT

Sidony O’Neal (b. 1988) is a conceptual artist whose work and interdisciplinary research is informed by mathematics, architectural systems, and the histories of objects, from 15th Century locking mechanisms to plastic industrial pallets. Their works explore human relationships to objects, labor, and technology.

Their work has been featured in exhibitions at Et al., San Francisco, CA; Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton University, Princeton, NJ; Dracula’s Revenge, New York, NY; Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Portland, OR; Veronica, Seattle, WA; Third Born, Mexico City, Mexico; ICA at Maine College of Art and Design, Portland, ME; and Sculpture Center, Long Island City, NY. O’Neal has had residencies at MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA; and Banff Centre, Banff,

AB, among others. Their performances have been featured at Kunstverein Düsseldorf, Volksbühne Berlin, and Performance Space New York. O'Neal is the recipient of awards and fellowships including the Oregon Arts Commission's Joan Shipley Award and a Hodder Fellowship from the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton University. In 2023, they were awarded a Hallie Ford Fellowship. O'Neal is co-founder of design firm INFANT.

Bogosi Sekhukhuni (b. 1991) is an artist and designer who reflects on cultures and histories of technology. Working across a range of media such as sculpture, video, set design, furniture design and performance, Sekhukhuni suggests ways to think about the mechanics of futurity.

Since 2012, Sekhukhuni's work has been featured in both solo and group exhibitions, including Role Play, Fondazione Prada, Milan; Age of You, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai; Art in the Age of Anxiety, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah; The Art Happens Here: Net Art's Archival Poetics, New Museum, New York; Bogosi Sekhukhuni, Foxy Production, New York; Rencontres de Bamako, African Biennale of Photography, Mali; and Simunye Summit 2010, Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg. They have been awarded the Prix Net Art Award, Rhizome, New York (2017). Sekhukhuni is a founding member of the artist group NTU and has worked closely with CUSS Group. Sekhukhuni is co-founder of the design firm INFANT.

ABOUT ARTPORT

artport is the Whitney Museum's portal to Internet art and an online gallery space for net art and new media art commissions. Launched in 2001, artport provides access to original commissioned artworks, documentation of net art and new media art exhibitions at the Whitney, and new media art in the Museum's collection. Recent commissions include Ashley Zelinkskie's *Twin Quasar* (2024); Maya Man's *A Realistic Day In My Life In New York City* (2024); Holly Herndon and Mat Dryhurst's *xhairymutantx* (2024); Nancy Baker Cahill's *CENTO* (2024); Peter Burr's *Sunshine Monument* (2023); Rick Silva's *Liquid Crystal* (2023); Auriea Harvey's *SITE1* (2023); Amelia Winger-Bearskin's *Sky/World Death/World* (2022); Mimi Onuoha's *40% of Food in the US is Wasted (How the Hell is That Progress, Man?)* (2022); and Rachel Rossin's *THE MAW OF* (2022). Access these and more projects at whitney.org/artport.

PRESS CONTACT

For press materials and image requests, please visit our press site at whitney.org/press or contact:

Meghan Ferrucci, Senior Publicist
(212) 671-8346
Meghan_Ferrucci@whitney.org

Whitney Press Office
whitney.org/press
(212) 570-3633
pressoffice@whitney.org

ABOUT THE WHITNEY

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney’s mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

Whitney Museum Land Acknowledgment

The Whitney is located in Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape. The name Manhattan comes from their word Mannahatta, meaning “island of many hills.” The Museum’s current site is close to land that was a Lenape fishing and planting site called Sapponckanikan (“tobacco field”). The Whitney acknowledges the displacement of this region’s original inhabitants and the Lenape diaspora that exists today.

As a museum of American art in a city with vital and diverse communities of Indigenous people, the Whitney recognizes the historical exclusion of Indigenous artists from its collection and program. The Museum is committed to addressing these erasures and honoring the perspectives of Indigenous artists and communities as we work for a more equitable future. To read more about the Museum’s Land Acknowledgment, [visit the Museum’s website](#).

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Public hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:30 am–6 pm; Friday, 10:30 am–10 pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Visitors twenty-five years and under and Whitney members: FREE. The Museum offers FREE admission and special programming for visitors of all ages every Friday evening from 5–10 pm and on the second Sunday of every month.

Image credit:

INFANT, still from *BANNED SKILLS*, 2025

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