

Karimah Ashadu: Tendered is presented in conjunction with the installation of the artist's work *Machine Boys* at the Art Institute of Chicago, on view September 11, 2026–January 3, 2027.

Upcoming Events

Screening: The African Film Institute presents *Sometimes It Was Beautiful*
Thu, Oct 15, 6pm
Logan Center for the Arts
Screening Room 201

In conjunction with Karimah Ashadu's exhibition, artist and filmmaker Christian Nyampeta and anthropologist Natacha Nsabimana will show two short films: *Sometimes It Was Beautiful* by Nyampeta, and *Fragments for Venus* by Alice Diop. They will be in conversation after the viewing. Nyampeta, based in New York, launched The African Film Institute, housed at e-flux, in 2019. Their conversation is part of an ongoing collaboration on African cinema.

Visit renaissancesociety.org for more information.

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KARIMAH ASHADU TENDERED

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The Renaissance Society presents *Tendered*, a solo exhibition by Karimah Ashadu, whose moving-image practice examines the conditions under which bodies are formed, disciplined, and rendered legible within contemporary systems of labor and value, especially within the cultural context of West Africa. Working across film and installation, Ashadu develops close, sustained encounters with people whose lives unfold within informal economies, attending to how aspirations are negotiated under material constraint.

***MUSCLE*, 2025**

Digital video, 22 minutes

The exhibition marks the U.S. debut of *MUSCLE*, a new moving-image installation centered on bodybuilders training in the heart of Lagos’s slums. The work situates bodybuilding within a broader field of exertion: the body as site of labor, investment, and self-fashioning. Having grown up between Nigeria and the United Kingdom, the artist situates her point of view within a constant negotiation of distance. In *MUSCLE*, she works with a sympathetic—and sometimes visceral—proximity to the subjects of the film, eschewing a documentary point of view with its potential air of detachment.

Reflecting on some of the central formal choices of the film, Ashadu says, “When I crop the frame tightly or allow the image to drift out of focus, it’s not necessarily about withholding, but about protecting the subject’s right to complexity. Historically, Black and African bodies have been overexposed and exploited. So there’s something radical, and also compassionate, about allowing a subject to evoke the mystery it holds.”

Paired with kinetic image sequences and the intense sounds of weightlifting, *MUSCLE* weaves together the spoken observations of multiple bodybuilders into a polyvocal voiceover. As Ashadu gathers the stories of men in this film, she extends an ongoing inquiry present in her earlier works, including *Machine Boys* (2024), *Plateau* (2022), and *Red Gold* (2016). Ashadu’s works resist simplified representations of male strength, instead revealing moments of intimacy, tension, pride, and fragility.

MUSCLE was co-commissioned and co-produced by Camden Art Centre, Fondazione In Between Art Film, and the Renaissance Society.

***Cotch I & II*, 2025**

Mixed media

MUSCLE is accompanied by sculptural works that draw directly from the film’s environments. *Cotch I & II* are based on

the stackable monobloc chair, one of the world’s most popular pieces of furniture, which is ubiquitous in the slums of Lagos where *MUSCLE* is set. With an instantly recognizable form, the chairs are signifiers of a certain social class and emblems of low-cost mass production. Here the chairs are partially transformed and elevated. Cast in clear resin and covered in a patchwork sleeve of recycled sports clothes with branded logos, they are fragile objects beneath the surface.

***Pure Rugged Water*, 2025**

Glass

Pure Rugged Water is a set of glass works replicating the water pouches consumed by the subjects in the film. Loosely regulated by the Nigerian authorities, anyone can start a ‘pure water’ company, even if the water isn’t free of impurities at all. Branded with the artist’s own pure water logo, these works allude to the extractivist economies around natural resources in Nigeria, both during, and after, its colonial occupation. As the artist explains, “I wanted to highlight how even water is embedded in capitalist structures and becomes a symbol of democratized access to economic independence.”

Karimah Ashadu: Tendered is organized within the framework of Unison, a biennial initiative established by the Fondazione In Between Art Film to commission and produce moving image-based exhibitions in collaboration with international institutions.

Curated by Alessandro Rabottini and Leonardo Bigazzi of Fondazione In Between Art Film with Myriam Ben Salah and Karsten Lund for its iteration at the Renaissance Society.

MUSCLE courtesy of the artist, Camden Art Centre, London; Fondazione In Between Art Film; the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago; and Sadie Coles HQ, London.

All other works courtesy of the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London.