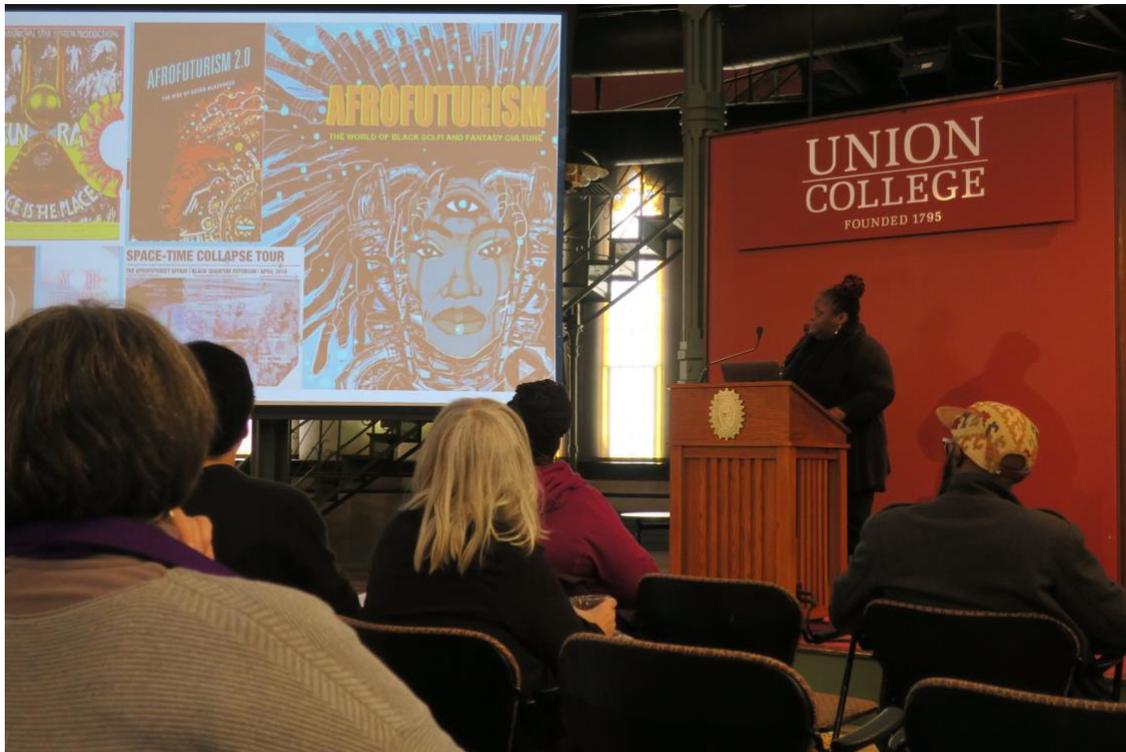


## Visiting artist brings 'Afrofuturism' to Mandeville Gallery

April 19, 2018



The past is only as important as its implications for the future, whether our estimations are imagined or real. This was precisely Nettrice Gaskins' thought process in creating her video installation entitled, "Afrofuturism Amplified in Three Dimensions," on display in Union's Mandeville Gallery as part of the Probability and Uncertainty exhibit until June 17, 2018.

As a self-identified Afrofuturist, Gaskins' goal is to create art that projects the past onto the future in a way that allows a specifically Black alternate utopia to flourish and invites the global Black community to join in celebrating a rebirth of culture.

At her Artist Talk in the Nott Memorial on April 11, Gaskins defined Afrofuturism for the audience as "a cultural aesthetic and creative practice that takes as its inspiration artifacts of the past and present to project into the future." These artifacts are comprised of both African artistic elements, such as triangular fractal patterns, and technological innovations of today for which a path of evolution into futuristic gadgets is crafted.

Gaskins cites comic series and film, "Black Panther," jazz composer Sun Ra, and the newest film adaptation of the children's book "A Wrinkle in Time" as examples of Afrofuturism across art and literature that peaked her interest in, as she says, "the wave [of Afrofuturism] that has died and is about to pick back up again."

Her personal fascination with Afrofuturist works gave her "the opportunity to come in on that wave with my own contribution, so I was able to...simulate Afrofuturism and explore themes that I thought were relevant to our current time using virtual reality, virtual free space."

What exactly does afrofuturism look like to the wider public? Well, if you've seen "Black Panther," you have some idea. The film is set in Wakanda, a fictional African country that escaped European colonization and used metal from a meteorite to develop technology uninfluenced by the Western world. The visual landscape of the film therefore explicitly and simultaneously adheres to traditional depictions of Africa and of futuristic societies. It evokes, to draw from Sun Ra's lyrics, "another place, another universe... under different stars" where black people can find the continuation of their unique cultural heritage while abandoning Western hegemony completely, as if departing for another planet.

The projection of the past onto an alternate future is thus given a space in the mainstream, in hopes of making works like Gaskins' installation more comprehensible to everyday consumers of media, and not just because it features "Black Panther" soundtrack composer Kendrick Lamar's "Never Catch Me," a collaboration with experimental artist Flying Lotus. The impact of the film is far-reaching, especially as it has grossed \$675 million at the box office and is the first film to be shown in Saudi Arabia in thirty-five years.

Delving deeper into the conceptual tenets of Afrofuturism. Gaskins notes the influence of W.E.B. DuBois' little-known 1908 science fiction story "The Princess Steel," in which a black scientist discovers that placing "plane over plane, dot over dot" produces a comprehensive and multidimensional historical view, and, "if these planes be curved around one center and reflected to and fro, we get a curve of infinite curvings which is the law of life." The parallels between this and Gaskins' installation are crystal clear, even for those without her educational background of digital art and computer science.

She explains that her motion-generated, code-based graphics are representative of the continuum of time produced by an endless process of energy exchange. The light cones in her work hold at their center the individual interacting with creation, with the affective past and the uncertain future at either end. This is the method by which Afrofuturist observations and projections are realized in art and technology — the past and present of Black history are filtered through the plane of infinity and given new meaning, transforming oppression into a vision for a future of black excellence.

Gaskins, who is now embedded in the fabric of the Afrofuturist movement as a one-of-a-kind artist and scientist, is excited about what's next for Afrofuturism, including but not limited to spinoffs such as Sinofuturism for the Chinese experience as well as the Afrofuturist movement coming to life in Africa and Black American communities, especially through youth engineering initiatives and new artistic and environmental innovations. For Gaskins, it is this upheaval and projection of the past onto the future that will propel the world into a groundbreaking new era of Black enlightenment, fueled by Sun Ra and sustained by the ever-developing digital age.