

Samantha Modder, *Of All the Worlds We Could Have Dreamed*

August 22–November 7, 2025



Of All the Worlds We Could Have Dreamed, installation shot

Mountain of Rest

*One night on the Mountain of Rest
My hair spoke to me while I slept
She asked, of all the worlds we could have dreamed
Why had we chosen this?*

Personal Mythologies

Curatorial Essay by Shirley Verrico

Filling the gallery from floor to ceiling, Sam Modder's *Of All the Worlds We Could Have Dreamed* unfolds as a subjective Black woman's fairytale and as a way to process and confront interlocking systems of oppression. Filling the gallery with expansive works, Modder

transforms imagined narratives into immersive environments. Rooted in her early love of poetry, storytelling, and cartooning, Modder's practice merges writing and drawing to create deeply personal mythologies that resist external definitions of identity.

From the beginning, Modder has moved fluidly between text and image, often drawing with the same ballpoint pen she uses to write. Whether it is the narrative or the images that come to her first, she constructs visual worlds that give her fiction tangible form. Like a storybook expanded into a mural, these digitally manipulated ballpoint pen drawings follow a recurring protagonist—a Black woman in a nightdress and striped socks—through a world populated only by her duplicates. The result is an allegory for the contemporary condition, engaging questions of power, exploitation, and resistance.

Early in her career, Modder faced pressure to create work that reflected her Sri Lankan and Nigerian heritage or directly addressed cross-cultural heritage. While these aspects of her identity are integral to who she is, Modder resists the notion that her complex and personal identity could be distilled into a representation of



Mountain of Rest, 2025, digitally manipulated ballpoint pen on adhesive paper (detail)

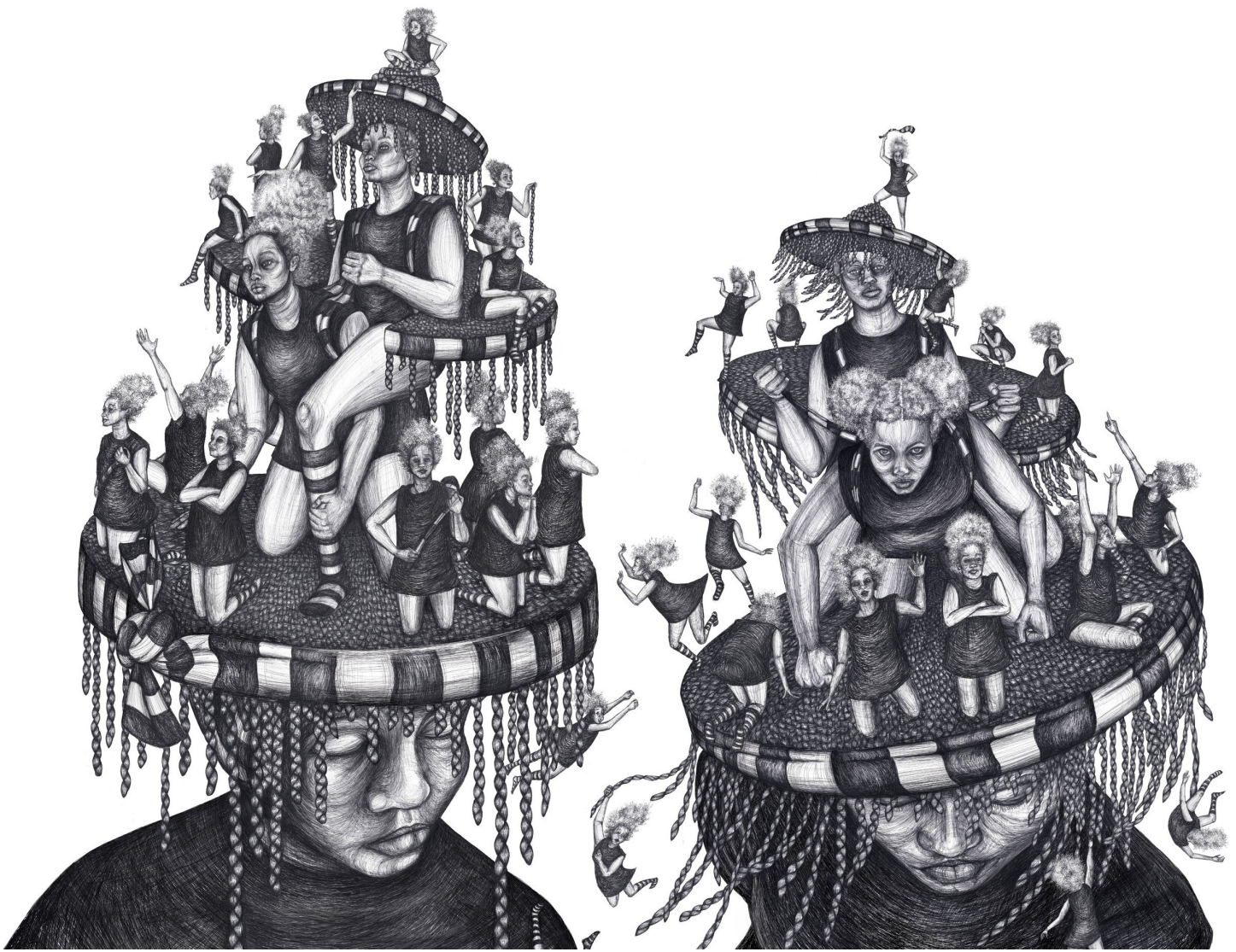
a larger, more generalized experience. Instead, she discovers freedom in the realm of the imaginary, using fantastical figures to explore her lived experience on her own terms. This approach allows cultural threads to emerge naturally, without conforming to imposed narratives, and ensures that she retains full authorship over her stories.

Her refusal to be confined by external expectations extends to the scale and ambition of her work. Modder gravitates toward large drawings, so vast they must be created in sections to keep the digital files manageable. She aims for an encounter akin to facing a mountain: both intimate and monumental. In installation, light and space become vital components, often functioning like a theatrical spotlight to heighten the work's physical and emotional presence.

Although her experience as a Black woman informs every aspect of her practice, Modder resists the narrow categorization that often comes with such identity markers. Black artists, she notes, are frequently expected to produce figurative work centered on explicitly “Black” themes. While she does draw people, her imagined worlds allow her to step outside these constraints.



A Field of Lost Hair Ties, 2023, digitally manipulated ballpoint pen on adhesive paper (detail)



Jagunjagun, 2024, digitally manipulated ballpoint pen on adhesive paper

“This is my experience, and if you connect with it, that’s amazing, but people don’t get to dictate how I view it. For me, taking up space means both physically—creating large works that demand attention—and conceptually, believing in my story and making it real through art.”

As an installation artist, Modder is acutely attentive to how her work interacts with architecture and public space. Within the gallery, her constructed worlds envelop viewers, inviting them into spaces where personal mythologies can become shared experiences. *Of All the Worlds We Could Have Dreamed* embodies

her ongoing negotiation between the interior landscapes of imagination and the external realities of lived experience. It reflects her belief that art is sustained not by fulfilling others’ expectations but by remaining true to one’s self.

For Modder, the privilege of making art carries both responsibility and joy. She recognizes that many people are never afforded the time, support, or circumstances to create. For those who can, she believes the least one can do is to make the most of that opportunity by honoring the impulse to build worlds that only they could have imagined.



Artist Sam Modder installing *Of All the Worlds We Could Have Dreamed*

In this exhibition, Modder invites viewers to inhabit these worlds alongside her, not as passive observers but as co-creators of meaning. Each piece serves as a point of connection between the artist's imagined tales and the audience's individual experiences, forming a space where the boundaries between personal and collective narratives begin to dissolve.



A Field of Lost Hair Ties, 2023, digitally manipulated ballpoint pen on adhesive paper (detail)

Artist Biography

Sam Modder, a Nigerian-Sri Lankan artist born in Lagos (1995) and raised in Sri Lanka, lives and works in Tampa, Florida. She earned a BA in Studio Art and Engineering from Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH (2017), and an MFA from Washington University in St. Louis, MO (2022). Modder is currently an Assistant Professor of Art and Design at the University of Tampa. Her work has been exhibited in museums, galleries, and public spaces, including the Sarasota Art Museum, FL (2024); African American Museum of Dallas, TX (2023); Catskills Art Space, Catskills, NY (2024); Morris Museum, Morristown, NJ (2024); and the Catalina Hotel during No Vacancy 2023 at Miami Beach Art Week, Miami, FL (2023).

Major support provided by: The Cameron and Jane Baird Foundation, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, Erie County Cultural Funds, M&T Bank, Ovation Stand for the Arts, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and through the New York State Council for the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature. Additional exhibition support provided by Marketing Tech and individual donors.



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