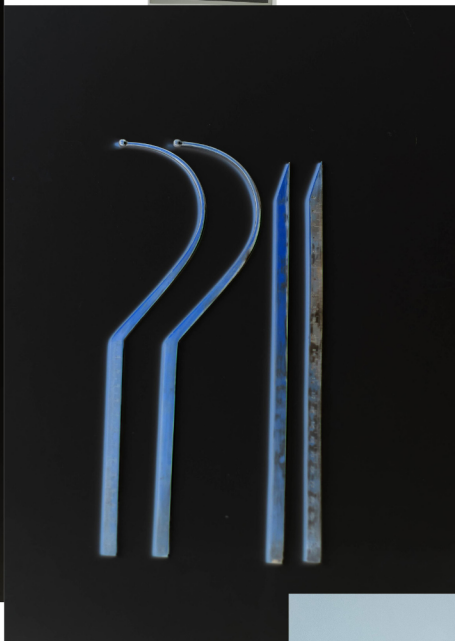
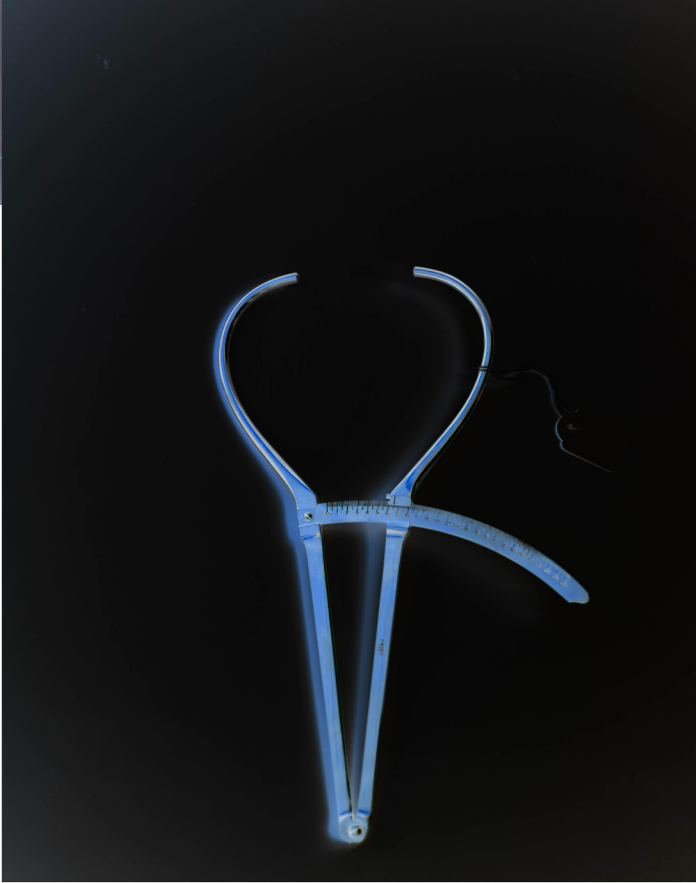
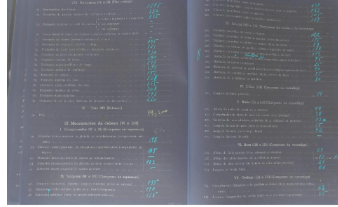




skin color scale



LIGHTER SKIN TONES GIRLS ARE MORE
 SWIMMABLE FOR MARRIAGE - "BLONDE FASCINATION" "LIGHTER
 IS BETTER"
 "white passing ideal". EXOTIC LOOK - TOO BLACK -
 You don't look black, you look spanish -
 "BROWN PAPER TEST" DON'T TAN TOO MUCH, OR YOU'LL
 BE TOO DARK - "The straighter the
 FAIRNESS IS BEAUTY. They're so pretty, hair, the better"
 "DON'T TAN!" they're so white - "snow white complex".
 LIGHT EYES ARE PRETTIER THAN DARK
 ONES - "TAN, BUT FAIR". HE HAS SUCH LIGHT
 HE HAS THE PERFECT NOSE - SKIN HE COULD ALMOST
 PASS FOR EUROPEAN -
 She would look better if her lips were THINNER

The racial classifications and physical
 measurements imposed by the colonizers not
 only created persistent stereotypes but also
 colonized the minds of the formerly colonized,
 who internalize these ideas and establish
 hierarchies based on these same criteria.
 This affects not only perceptions and behaviors
 toward certain ethnic groups but also the way
 the colonized perceive their own identity and
 history.

MY MOM ALWAYS
 TELL ME TO
 PUT ON A HAT
 OR A JACKET
 FOR MY TODDLER
 OR SHE'LL GET TOO
 DARK & IT WON'T
 BE PRETTY

"DARK EYES ARE PLAIN"
 HER FEATURES ARE SO DELICATE
 AND PURE, WITH HER BLONDE
 HAIR AND BLUE EYES - IF SOMEONE IS
 "WHITE IS PURE" FAIR COLORED ONLY
 "Fair THEN HE/SHE'S GOOD
 your hair looks is beautiful" LOOKING FOR MY FAMILY.
 too wild - IT'S JUST A PERSONAL PREFERENCE -

YOU'RE SO PRETTY FOR A DARK GIRL.
 if YOU HAVE A GIRL, HOPEFULLY SHE'LL BE PALE,
 LIFE WILL BE EASIER THAT WAY. "too kinky"
 "Your nose is too wide" YOU'RE LUCKY, YOU LOOK
 MORE EUROPEAN.
 why don't you BLEACH YOUR SKIN? H'D MAKE
 YOU MORE ATTRACTIVE

Colonial Aesthetics & its contemporary Traces:

Colonial dynamics → thru practices such as
- population classification / - anthropometric measurements
- racial hierarchization, have profoundly shaped aesthetic & social norms, leaving a lasting imprint on individual & collective identities in postcolonial societies -

Imposed during colonization, these standards have been internalized over time & continue to influence, often unconsciously, perceptions of beauty and identity.



Even today, these influences are evident in the promotion of Eurocentric ideals in Fashion / cinema / media as well as practices such as skin lightening or hair straightening -



These norms also shape social interactions within formerly colonized communities → Perpetuating implicit hierarchies that assign aesthetic & social value to certain physical features. This research thus aims to question the internalization of these norms & explore ways to break free from them in order to rethink beauty & identity beyond the colonial lens.



Fair & Lovely?



The global cosmetics industry earns billions by exploiting beauty standards shaped by colorism. By promoting light skin as the dominant criterion of beauty, it drives strong demand for skin-lightening products and “unifying” treatments, often formulated with toxic substances known to have harmful effects.

Yet, this type of pigmentation constitutes a minority worldwide, as the majority of populations have darker or intermediate skin tones. This phenomenon is sometimes contrasted with tanning, common among lighter-skinned people, which, although dangerous due to risks associated with sun exposure, is neither a colonial legacy nor a tool of racial domination.

While light skin is indeed rare and perceived as a distinct ideal, other physical traits, such as red hair or heterochromia, are also uncommon. However, this biological rarity does not translate socially or culturally in the same way. Light skin occupies a particular place, rooted in historical and colonial constructions that have made it a symbol of power, racial hierarchy, and systemic oppression. Thus, rarity alone cannot explain this excessive valorization: it is its embedding in systems of power, privilege, and exclusion that gives it a unique symbolic charge. This distinction clarifies why colorism cannot be reduced to a mere aesthetic preference but must be understood as a deeply entrenched social and political phenomenon.

Despite inclusive rhetoric, multinational corporations profit from these inequalities by marketing products that feed the identity insecurity of millions of dark-skinned individuals. This commercial system constitutes a form of contemporary oppression, demanding a rigorous deconstruction of the imposed beauty standards.

INVISIBLE LEGACIES: The Lasting Impact of Colonial Science on Our Perceptions of Beauty & Identity -

As an artist with French-Tunisian heritage, I am deeply affected by issues of memory, identity and the body. Colourism, this implicit hierarchy of skin tones within non-white societies, emerged for me as a particularly insidious blind spot - often normalized, sometimes denied, but whose effects are everywhere -

This research stems from both a personal and political necessity - I didn't grow up in a family environment directly affected by colourism - within my family or close circles, I didn't experience discrimination related to my skin color - Rather, it was through the media, the narratives around me, and certain seemingly harmless cultural expectations that I began to discern its presence. For instance, the idea that one should "avoid tanning" before marriage, or the overwhelming dominance of light skin and Eurocentric features in valued representations -

I saw these norms at work in people's gazes, in everyday conversations, and even in comments that I didn't immediately recognize as violent. Once, someone with very dark skin said to me "Before you were dark-skinned & ugly, now you're light-skinned and beautiful", even though I'd simply taken on a shade of tan -- Another time, someone praised the fact that my hair is naturally straight. These small remarks, made without apparent malice, are revealing of how deeply colourism is embedded in collective thinking.

With time and observation, I came to understand that these preferences aren't neutral. They are the legacy of centuries of colonial domination, still perpetuated today through the media, the cosmetics industry, romantic ideals & professional opportunities. To explore colourism is to question how colonial aesthetic standards have shaped perceptions that are deeply ingrained in both body and mind. It also means trying to uncover how our gazes, our choices and our judgements have been shaped by systems of power.

I believe it's essential to make these invisible mechanisms visible, to name them in order to deconstruct them. This research feeds into my artistic practice, shedding light on the tensions between invisibilisation and representation, between heritage & reappropriation. It helps me understand how bodies have been coded, categorized, sometimes denied, and how, through artistic creation, they can reclaim voice, dignity and a multiplicity of forms.

Captions Image 1:
From left to right
[Ficha de exame antropométrico], 1940. Arquivo Histórico dos Museus da Universidade de Lisboa, Fundo Museu Bocage.
Collection of the Center for Anthropobiology Studies - Skull meter Inv. n. °: UL/IICT/ANTROP-17.
Collection of the Center for Anthropobiology Studies - measuring instruments Inv. n. °: UL/IICT/ANTROP-017 .
EMP 11 [Ficha de exame antropométrico], 1940. Arquivo Histórico dos Museus da Universidade de Lisboa, Fundo Museu Bocage.
EMP8 [Ficha de exame antropométrico], 1940. Arquivo Histórico dos Museus da Universidade de Lisboa, Fundo Museu Bocage.
Collection of the Center for Anthropobiology Studies - measuring tape Inv. n. °: UL/IICT/ANTROP-017.
EMP 11 [Ficha de exame antropométrico], 1940. Arquivo Histórico dos Museus da Universidade de Lisboa, Fundo Museu Bocage.
Tropical botanic garden, University of Lisbon.
EMP 11 [Ficha de exame antropométrico], 1940. Arquivo Histórico dos Museus da Universidade de Lisboa, Fundo Museu Bocage.
[Ficha de exame antropométrico], 1940. Arquivo Histórico dos Museus da Universidade de Lisboa.
Collection of the Center for Anthropobiology Studies - Anthropometry box Inv. n. ° : UL/IICT/ANTROP-017.
CFT164.280950 (Aldeia dos Bijagós e Pavilhão da Guiné_ Ft. Horácio Novais.
Skin color scale Inv. n. °: UL/IICT/ANTROP-025, Universidade de Lisboa/MUHNAC.
Research conducted as part of the residency at the National Museum of Natural History and Science of Lisbon, 2025.

Captions Image 2 :
Online ads
SkinWhite PowerWhitening soap.
SkinWhite PowerWhitening, The Power Of Instant White.
Advertisement image of a skin lightening product called EYFAN.
The cosmetic product visuals shown here are used for critical and artistic purposes, as part of a reflection on colourism and beauty standards rooted in colonial history. These images are not used for commercial purposes.