

PRESS RELEASE

The Institutum Unveils Translations: Afro-Asian Poetics, a Multifaceted Art Exhibition Exploring Cultural Connections Through Art



[Singapore, January 8, 2024] – The Institutum proudly unveils its most ambitious and visionary exhibition to date, "Translations: Afro-Asian Poetics," set to captivate audiences across six venues in Gillman Barracks from January 18 to 30, 2024. This expansive show delves into the vibrant and interconnected narratives of the African and Asian diasporas through the lens of modern and contemporary art.

Featuring an ensemble of approximately 100 internationally acclaimed artists representing diverse voices from both the African and Asia continents, "Translations" draws from

prestigious private collections across the region. This rare assemblage provides an unprecedented opportunity for art enthusiasts and the public alike to engage intimately with an array of mediums such as paintings, photography, sculptures, moving images, textiles, installations, and performance art.



El Anatsui, *Tse*, 2016; bottle caps. Image courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery (Cape Town, Johannesburg, London and New York)

At its core, "Translations" aims to celebrate the inherent commonalities between the African and Asian diaspora cultures, transcending geographical and colour divides by emphasizing shared experiences, trials and tribulations, spiritual practices, and more. The exhibition also serves as a catalyst for cultural understanding and unity, resonating profoundly within Singapore's multicultural fabric.

"We seek to illuminate the threads that weave us together as people, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers," notes Dr. Zoé Whitley. "Singapore, with its rich tapestry of cultures and identities, serves as an ideal platform to celebrate and amplify these connections."

Notable artists in the exhibition include Theaster Gates, whose concept of Afro-Mingei takes aspects of African-American vernacular craft and merges it with Japanese philosopher Soetsu Yangagi's *mingei* concept. This concept celebrates and honors the humility of quotidian objects made by unnamed craftspeople, a notion conceived alongside ceramicists Kanjiro Kawai and Shoji Hamada. Ogawa Machiko, another luminary in the exhibition, broke new ground as one of the first women to study ceramics at Tokyo University of the Arts. Her

distinct approach to ceramics, honed during her intensive study of West African methods of forming and treating clay in Burkina Faso, adds a rich layer to the exhibition.

The exhibition also ventures into themes of migration and displacement, language and identities, among others. In a remarkable juxtaposition, Singaporean artist Yanyun Chen and Nigerian artist Ifeyinwa Joy Chiamonwu share in their parallel explorations around perspectives of scars and scarring in their respective cultures. In their evocative works, Igshaan Adams, Do Ho Suh and Zarina Hashmi each explore notions of home, weaving personal narratives into rich tapestries, ethereal sculptures and map-like drawings. Other highlights include works by Tuan Andrew Nguyen and The Otolith Group, who continue to offer nuanced and comprehensive perspectives into historical moments and movements that both complicate and expand the Afro-Asia framework. This confluence of diverse artistic explorations demonstrates the many connections and similarities shared across practices of different geographies.

By alighting on poetics, “Translations” proposes synergies and affinities across the artists featured in the exhibition and beyond, and acts as a continuation to the interconnectedness of Afro-Asia and its peoples. This spotlight on African art and culture is more than an indication of its existence or contribution to society. Instead it facilitates a larger discourse about historical marginalization, re-emergence and re-evaluation of South-South cultural narratives, not unlike the National Gallery Singapore’s recent Tropical exhibition. Curatorially speaking, much is to be credited to pioneering figures like Nigerian curators Bisi Silva and Okwui Enwezor as well as Singaporean curator Tan Boon Hui, in whose memory this show is made. Hou Hanru is another important curator to note for his work on the Asian diaspora and upholding the concept of hybridity in exhibitions with such themes.

Moreover, the exhibition also proudly announces its collaboration with esteemed partners ShanghART Singapore, Michelin-starred Restaurant Nouri and boutique ice cream brand Creamier. This partnership will see the convergence of culinary artistry as Chef Ivan Brehm of Nouri and Ghanaian Chef Selassie Atadika present a distinctive "Crossroads of Afro-Asian flavours" four-hands dinner. Complementing this fusion of cultural tastes, Creamier will unveil a new flavour inspired by the exhibition's essence during its tenure at Gillman Barracks.



Theaster Gates, *Afro-Ikebana*, 2019; cast bronze, clay and tatami mats. Image courtesy of the artist and White Cube (Theo Christelis).

Internationally acclaimed curator Dr. Zoé Whitley, director of Chisenhale Gallery, London, leads the curation of "Translations," alongside Singapore-based Clara Che Wei Peh, serving as the assistant curator. Together, they orchestrate an immersive experience, bringing forth the works of eminent artists such as El Anatsui, Theaster Gates, Do Ho Suh, Haegue Yang, Tang Da Wu, Nick Cave, Vibha Galhotra, Apichatpong Weerasekathul, The Otolith Group, Zarina Hashmi, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Misheck Masamvu, Robert Zhao, Sonia Boyce, Prabhavathi Meppayil, and many others.

Dr. Zoé Whitley and Clara Peh graciously offer their insights and expertise, available for inquiries and discussions via email or Zoom.

For further information and media inquiries, please contact the Institutum's marketing team at marketing@theinstitutum.com. Stay tuned for forthcoming updates and announcements regarding this exciting exhibition.



Do Ho Suh, *Stove, Unit 2, 348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA*, 2015; polyester fabric, stainless steel wire and glass display case with LED lighting. Photo by Taegsu Jeon. Image courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London



Yanyun Chen, *Scar Writings*, 2023; mild steel and red wires. Photo by Joseph Nair. Image courtesy of the artist.

About The Institutum

The Institutum is a non-profit institution based in Singapore dedicated to expanding the horizons for Singapore art by developing relationships with the global contemporary art community through international projects that respond to the local and South East Asian context. Notable projects include the commissioning of “SEA: Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia”, edited by Ute Meta Bauer, Karin Oen and Tan Boon Hui, published by Weiss Publications (2023), a five-year partnership with Gasworks in London supporting residencies for Southeast Asia artists, and presenting the installation “Justice For All: Yinka Shonibare” at The Arts House, Singapore (2019).

Starting September 2023, The Institutum embarks on a new chapter at Gillman Barracks with a six month pop-up exhibition space. This exciting endeavor will feature a dynamic line-up of exhibitions bringing an approach to contemporary art that focuses on bridging people and places. The Institutum aims to bring a number of collaborations to Gillman Barracks to contribute to the arts ecosystem in Singapore.

About The Curators



DR ZOÉ WHITLEY is Director of Chisenhale Gallery, a leading non-profit space founded by artists in London's East End. She writes widely on contemporary artists and 20th century designers, including children's books, and has served on the 2020-22 Arts Council Collection committee in England.

In 2020, Zoé curated Frieze London's special themed section, *Possessions*, exploring spirituality and contemporary art, and co-curated Elijah Pierce's *America* at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, USA. Previous exhibitions to her credit include curating the British Pavilion presentation of Cathy Wilkes at the Venice Biennale (2019) and co-curating the award-winning international touring exhibition *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (2017-2020).

Zoé also serves on the boards of Creative Access, the only organisation in the UK dedicated to recruiting under-represented talent in the creative industries, and Decolonising Arts Institute, University of the Arts London. She's formed part of international arts juries for the Wolfgang Hahn Prize(2022), Turner Prize (2021), Preis der Nationalgalerie Berlin (2021) and Future Generation Art Prize selection committee, among numerous others.

Her previous professional roles include Senior Curator (Hayward Gallery); Curator, International Art (Tate Modern); and Curator of Contemporary Programmes (V&A).



CLARA CHE WEI PEH is an independent curator and art writer in Singapore. Her research and practice focus on new media, emerging technologies, and the intersections of art and money.

She was recently Curator for Art Dubai Digital 2023 and Guest Curator at ArtScience Museum, where she co-developed, “Notes From the Ether” (2023). Her work has been published on Yishu: Journal of Chinese Contemporary Art, Asian Art Biennale Reader, The Brooklyn Rail, Hyperallergic, The Art Newspaper, among others. She was a member of Shanghai Curators Lab 2023 and is currently a Asia Collection Fellow at KADIST.