

Curating Art in Challenging Times

Level 3 Eranda Studio, The Photographers' Gallery

Friday 21 April 2023, 14.00-18.00

In this half-day seminar, we examine and reflect on some of the existing restrictions of creative freedom. This event is an excavation of elements, from financial to legal, that undermine the artistic and therefore political ambitions of today.

In all guises and forms, the relation between intention and achievement can be easily thwarted. The accounts from speakers, working in contrary and perhaps even contradictory political contexts, will cover a range of case studies addressing this issue. Censorship can be sometimes obvious; however, it is the more disguised forms of discouragement, unavailability, economic and practical rationing that add up to thwarted ambitions.

By showcasing first-hand experiences, we hope to map the political and practical difficulties faced by the artists, writers and curators to reflect on how to remain active and achieve convincing creative representation, with integrity of message. Gathered accounts will give insight into strategies that we can learn from and carry forward.

Programme

- 14.10 Welcome and introductions by **Sacha Craddock**
- 14.20 Drawing from her curatorial experience spanning between US, UK and continental Europe, **Sylwia Serafinowicz** will look at the ambiguity of the social function of art at a time when the notion of 'truth' is so often weaponised. She will discuss the case studies of curatorial collaboration on Andres Serrano's portraits of Donald Trump (2004–2022), and the project *Silencio* (2018–) by collective Democracia.
- 14.40 **Gabriela Salgado** will look at the challenges currently faced by the arts sector that generate an oppressive environment, where survival displaces good intentions. The post-pandemic human crisis, and the subsequent economic recession impacting lower-income communities most, made it more visible than ever that arts and culture are among the most at-risk sectors. While oppression may be generally defined as deliberate censorship or cancellation of other worldviews, it is clear that it can also manifest itself as the subtle dissolution of integrity and purpose caused by insufficient resources.
- The presentation includes some images by renowned photographer and activist Shahidul Alam, whose work against human rights abuses and freedom of speech in Bangladesh resulted in an ongoing judicial process following his 107-day arrest in 2019.
- 15.00 **Erin Li** will reflect on recent experiences of curating and realising contemporary art projects in Hong Kong. She will delve particularly into the strategies she developed based on the specific institutional role she played amid the drastic shift of socio-political climate in the past decade.

- 15.20 **Elena Sudakova** will ask what it means to run a cultural institution at the times when its namesake, Pushkin, is weaponised by the Russian state and the author's portraits are installed on the facades of shelled buildings in the occupied Ukrainian territories. Where does one go from such experience as a cultural organisation, and how does an independent institution mobilise in the face of a war unleashed by the country whose culture it represents?
- 15.40 Coffee break
- 16.00 Rodrigo Duterte brought about an era of political instability, terror and human rights abuses during his six-year reign as president. He facilitated the deaths of over 30,000 people as part of his War on Drugs and legalised censorship through the Anti-Terror Law (2020). **Marv Recinto** will examine curatorial projects organised by artists and cultural workers in defiance of oppression, both within conventional exhibition spaces and other alternative forms of presentation such as protest, radio and community workshops.
- 16.20 **Goshka Macuga** will touch upon over a century of oppression in Poland highlighting the methods used to circumnavigate censorship: from Aesopian language, via post 1989 changes in Polish society to current conditions of art making.
- 16.40 **Elisa Rusca** will share impressions on the current contemporary scene in Saudi Arabia, with a focus on the work of Muhannad Shono. She will question whether the restrictions experienced by the new generation of Saudi artists generate a "more fertile ground, where expression grows stronger". Rusca will also ask how, as European curators, we can work with and promote young Saudi artists?
- 17.00 **Sarah Beddington** will speak about making a film based on over 15 years of friendship with a refugee in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in Lebanon.
- 17.20 Roundtable discussion chaired by **Sacha Craddock**
- 18.00 Event end

BIOGRAPHIES

Sarah Beddington is a British artist and filmmaker based in London. Her films and works in other media focus on creating a multi-layered sense of place within which exile and dispossession are often present. Her work has been shown internationally in multiple exhibitions and film festivals and is represented in private and public collections including Arts Council England. Her first feature documentary, *Fadia's Tree*, released in UK cinemas in 2022, was nominated for a British Independent Film Award (BIFA) and won the Amnesty International Award for Best Feature in Donostia-San Sebastián HRFF. The film weaves together a portrait of Fadia, born into a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, a quest to find a sacred mulberry tree and the homing instinct of millions of birds migrating through the eastern Mediterranean.

Sacha Craddock (b. 1955) is an art critic, writer and curator based in London. Her commitment to contemporary art encompasses curating, organising, promotion, setting up structures, education, critical writing and creating new networks designed to bring artists and audiences together. Sacha is co-founder of ArtSchool Palestine, member of Abbey Council, and co-founder of the Contemporary Art Award at the British School at Rome, Trustee of the Shelagh Cluett Trust and President of AICA-UK, the British section of International Association of Art Critics. She was Chair of the Board of New Contemporaries and selection process from 1996 until December 2021. After completing a degree in fine art painting at Central Saint Martins, and a postgraduate painting degree at Chelsea School of Art, Craddock began writing art criticism for *The Guardian* in 1988. Sacha has judged art prizes, including the Turner Prize in 1999 and the John Moores Painting Prize in 2008.

Selected critical writing includes essays on Alison Wilding, Laura Ford, Mark Boulos, Benjamin Senior, Angus Fairhurst, Richard Billingham, Jose Dávila, Chantal Joffe, Mustafa Hulusi, Heri Dono, Wolfgang Tillmans, Rosa Lee, Young In, Alberto Savinio and Adam Henein, which is part of Misk Art Institute's the Art Library series. She was the co-founder of Bloomberg Space and its curator from 2002-2011. More recently, her curatorial contribution includes Turner Prize Hull 2017, Strike Site at Backlit Gallery, Nottingham 2018, the SPECTRUM Art Award at Saatchi Gallery May 2018, and Creekside Open and Exeter Open, 2019.

Erin Li is a curator at Delfina Foundation. Li recently relocated from Hong Kong to London. Her recent curatorial practice ferments everyday processes, emotions and relations into collaborative, multidisciplinary art projects. Currently Residency Curator at Delfina Foundation, she has also worked as Asymmetry Curatorial Fellow at Whitechapel Gallery (London), Associate Curator at Tai Kwun Contemporary (Hong Kong), Art Manager at Duddell's (Hong Kong & London) and Development Coordinator & Project Researcher at Asia Art Archive (Hong Kong). She has realised numerous exhibitions and art events, including curating *Sipping Dreams* (2023), *Polyphonic Bodies* (2022) and *emo gym* (2022), as well as co-curating *Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940 – 1970* (2023). Li is also a member of AICA Hong Kong. Her published articles have appeared in *Artforum* and *ArtReview*.

Goshka Macuga's practice connects different areas and methods of research. Her inquiries are often focused on institutional histories proposing unconventional associative readings of their social and political histories. Her strategic orchestration of existing materials, collectables and archival documents support the reframing of established narratives.

Born in Poland in 1967, Macuga has lived and worked in London since 1989. She has exhibited extensively internationally in solo exhibitions at MUSAC, Leon, Spain (2022), MoMA, NYC, USA (2019), Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2012), Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2011),

Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw (2011), Whitechapel Gallery, London (2010), Kunsthalle Basel (2009), and Tate Britain, London (2007). Macuga's work was also included in dOCUMENTA (13) (2012), the 53rd Venice Biennial (2009), the 5th Berlin Biennial (2008) and the Liverpool Biennial (2006). In 2008 she was nominated for the prestigious Turner Prize contemporary art award. In 2019. She was commissioned to create a new, large site-specific work for MoMA. Her most recent project GONOGO is currently exhibited at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, Italy.

Marv Recinto is Managing Editor of *ArtReview* and *ArtReview Asia*. Her previous writings have focused on political art in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. She is the editor of the forthcoming books *Pio Abad: Fear of Freedom Makes us See Ghosts* (2023); *Norberto Roldan* (2024); and *Black Artists in Asia 2021* (2024).

An art historian specialising in photography and the contemporary period, **Elisa Rusca** is Director of Collections & Exhibitions at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva, while pursuing a PhD in visual cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. Since 2014, she has created numerous exhibitions and cultural events in Europe and abroad, and participated in conferences and symposia in Europe, Brazil, South Korea and Taiwan. She was co-director of DISKURS Berlin (2016-2017), and is co-founder of the ongoing online platform Daydreamers Project. Currently editor for *Kunstbulletin*, Switzerland's leading contemporary art magazine, she contributed to the edition of *The New Dictionary of Photography* (Thames & Hudson, 2015), and her writings have been published by Goethe Institut Verlag, Textuel and Mimesis, among others.

Gabriela Salgado is an Argentine-born, London-based curator and Director of The Showroom in London. She holds an MA in Curating Contemporary Art from the Royal College of Art and has curated international exhibitions including the 2nd Biennale of Thessaloniki, Greece (2009) and La Otra Bienal in Bogotá, Colombia (2013). She has lectured in over 20 countries, contributed to exhibition catalogues and artists publications and was awarded curatorial residences with HIAP Finland; Lugar a Dudas, Colombia; and San Art, Vietnam. Previously, she was Curator of the Latin American Art Collection at Essex University, UECLAA (1999-2005); Curator of Public Programmes at Tate Modern (2006-2011); and Artistic Director of Te Tuhi, in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand (2017-2020).

Sylwia Serafinowicz is Managing Director of Blessed Foundation, mentor at New Inc. in New York and a writer. Serafinowicz uses exhibitions, public programmes and digital platforms to forge better, equal futures. Serafinowicz graduated with a PhD in History of Art from the Courtauld Institute of Art and an MA in History of Art from the University of Warsaw, Poland. Her PhD thesis was dedicated to the dynamic relationship between photography, moving image and performance. Serafinowicz continues to work at the intersection of visual, ephemeral arts and new technologies. Curated exhibitions include *We Protect You From Yourselves* featuring collectives Democracia and Syrena, *Labor Relations*, 2016, *Wild at Heart*, 2018. Her texts appeared in *Artforum*, *Afterall Art School*, and *Art and Documentation* amongst other outlets.

Elena Sudakova is Director of Pushkin House since 2021, an art historian and curator. From 2012 to 2020 she was the founder and Director of Grad, a Kunsthalle focused on Russian and Eastern European art. Best known for premiering in London historical and archival materials from museums, cultural institutions and private collections in Russia, Grad also commissioned full scale installations by contemporary artists Olga Chernysheva, Irina Korina and ZIP art group. After 2014 Grad was one of the few art organisations to comment on the annexation of Crimea through an art commission by Zhanna Kadyrova. Elena has also worked with Nikita Kadan, Mykola Rydnyi and Lada Nakonechna.