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HEART  
BEATING  
IN THE  
WORLD

DIASPORA PAVILION 2

22 May - 17 October 2021

Image credit: Daniela Yohannes, *Atopias: I Have Left that Dark Cave Forever, My Body has Blended with Hers*, 2019, single channel HD video, stereo sound, 22min, 1sec.  
Courtesy the artist.

We pay our respects to the Dharawal people who are the traditional custodians of the land, whose deepening connection to culture and customs have cared for this country for over 60,000 years. We acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging for their immense spiritual connection to place which was never ceded.

Dharawal land has always been recognised as a meeting place for people from other lands, and in this spirit we respectfully continue this tradition through the bringing together of our communities through arts and culture.

Always was and Always will be Aboriginal land.

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DIASPORA PAVILION 2

In partnership with 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art and the International Curators Forum (ICF), Campbelltown Arts Centre presents *I am a heart beating in the world: Diaspora Pavilion 2*.

The exhibition considers the navigations, imaginings and lived experiences of six artists based in Australia, the UK and the Caribbean: Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, Kashif Nadim Chaudry, Lindy Lee, Leyla Stevens, Zadie Xa and Daniela Yohannes.

# IAMA HEART BEATING INTHE WORLD

## DIASPORA PAVILION 2

*I am a heart beating in the world: Diaspora Pavilion 2*, Sydney presents the navigations, imaginings and lived experiences of diasporic subjectivities through the works of six artists based in Australia, the UK and the Caribbean: Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, Kashif Nadim Chaudry, Lindy Lee, Leyla Stevens, Zadie Xa and Daniela Yohannes. The exhibition is part of an ongoing mapping of the rich and complex material cultures, mythologies, alternative histories and re-imagined landscapes that are born from the distinct and yet shared reality of belonging to a diaspora.

The exhibition begins with works by **Zadie Xa**, who grapples with the diasporic experience through storytelling, mythology and world building. Sampling and layering knowledge are fundamental to Xa's work, seen in the textile garments *A*

*Pilgrimage 2 Family Through the Portal of a Green Ghost* (2019) and its counterpart *A Pilgrimage 2 Family Through the Portal of a Blue Ghost* (2019), which present the possibility of shapeshifting through costume and performance. For Xa, water and nature are gateways to parallel worlds and past generations, which she brings into dialogue with folklore, creation myths and Korean Shamanism to consider trans-Pacific narratives between Korea, Canada and beyond.

At the entrance to the Main Gallery we see **Abdul-Rahman Abdullah's** hand-carved and painted sculpture *Merantau* (2016), which depicts a doppelganger of the artist and a rooster seated aboard a five-metre-long *perahu*, a small boat made for navigating rivers of the Malaysian peninsula. Abdullah's sculptures interrogate the artist's

relationship to his diasporic heritage and this work was particularly informed by a trip he took to South Sulawesi, Indonesia where he sought to trace his maternal ancestry from his mother's birth village of Kampung Linggi, Malaysia back to the seaside town of Palopo in South Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Mirroring Abdullah's sculpture, at the entrance to Claire St Claire, we see a large-format photograph of **Lindy Lee** taken at Campbelltown Arts Centre in 2007. This seminal work, *Birth and Death* (2002), is part of Lee's ongoing investigation of intergenerational connections within her family archive to reflect on the past and imagine possibilities of the future. In the photograph, Lee is depicted meditating cross legged within a sea of family photographs where she contemplated the fleetingness of the present and possibilities and imaginings of both the past and the future.

In Claire St Claire **Zadie Xa** has also created an underwater realm featuring *Cellular Portal* (2019), five conch shell sculptures functioning as beacons and metaphors for home, leading to the centre of the gallery where a large, soft whale sculpture *Granny* (2019) lies, named after the oldest orca known to have swum in the northeast Pacific Ocean. *Child of Magohalmi and the Echoes of Creation* (2019) is a video work inspired by Korean creation myths centred on the goddess Grandmother

Mago (Magohalmi). Exploring the power of ancestral matrilineal knowledge, these works subvert the side-lining of the role of female deities in the formation of the universe by patriarchal systems.

In Gallery 3 **Daniela Yohannes'** film *Atopias: I Have Left that Dark Cave Forever, My Body has Blended with Hers* (2019) is presented in an intimate bedroom-like setting. The work, filmed in the French-Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, offers a meditation on one's relationship to the environment. Guadeloupe's terrain provides rich means for the artist to consider her body and consciousness, and the survival stories of displaced people. *Atopias* references geopolitical borders and frontiers, which the protagonist steadfastly traverses. The sea and land signal the fortitude of nature and the lengths the protagonist will travel for freedom. With questions of identity often linked to where one considers 'home', such atopias can be compromises for those denied the chance to ever feel they have one.

In the Main Gallery, **Daniela Yohannes** presents a selection of digital collages from *a series of self-truths* (2018), which blends personal, learnt and imagined histories and realities, using family photographs, hieroglyphics, maps and found material to create new images that each represent a visual and symbolic layering of her heritage. The ongoing process of activating and re-

dressing the relationships and stories they depict centralises them within wider historical narratives from the Horn of Africa. Yohannes' use of family photography enables her to explore other spheres of existence, whilst offering up her experiences in search of shared ones with other diasporic peoples.

Alongside the collages hang a selection of recent works by **Lindy Lee**. *Twinning Through Jade Bamboo* (2015) illustrates the convergence of her familial archive and continued experimentation with steel as an artistic medium. A darkened family portrait printed onto black steel is punctured by fire, leaving gaps and holes reminiscent of the slow erasure of memory over time. This experimentation with absence is further explored in three new works - *Fire in the Immanence of Unfolding* (2020), *Fire and Dew*, (2020), and *Quiescent Mind* (2020). Here paper washed with Chinese ink is again punctured by fire leaving a series of spherical forms across the works' surfaces. Each puncture leaves an absence but also constructs an intricate web that becomes a new and surprisingly resilient form. This tension between erasure and creation is informed by Lee's artistic practice and is an extension of her practice of Zen Buddhism.

Also in the Main Gallery **Leyla Stevens** explores family histories in a photographic diptych, *Safe Passage* (2013), which evolved from research

conducted in Yogyakarta, a city in Indonesia's largest island Java around the local lighthouses, whose keepers were largely itinerant workers and many of whom wore masks on the back of their heads to ward off tigers. Stevens' maternal grandfather was a lighthouse keeper and worked along the East coast of Australia with his family in relative isolation throughout his career. As a performative evocation, *Safe Passage* simultaneously looks ahead whilst watching the past recede.

In the Marsden Gallery, and also engaging with mythological and historical metaphors, the sculpture, *Buraq* (2020) by **Abdul-Rahman Abdullah** represents the enigmatic winged horse that is woven into Islamic folklore as the creature that transported the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from Mecca to Jerusalem in a single night. For Abdullah, the journey of the Buraq is central to his understanding of his own family history where movement and mobility were undertaken in the search for imagined futures.

Movement and mobility are quite literally enacted by *Cabal* (2020), a kinetic sculpture by **Kashif Nadim Chaudry**. The conical shape of the work is inspired by the whirling dervish skirt, and the surface features damask fabric with a floral pattern and layers of intricate applique elements alluding to a garden. Its motions offer a satirical enactment of the solitary dance of devotion practiced by the whirling dervish



and reflect Chaudry's interest in the discomforting monotony of automata. At the sculpture's base Chaudry has fixed Ken doll legs, which appear to kick out. This playful gesture suggests that there is an exclusive celebration happening underneath the embellished surface.

In Gallery 1 we see another example of **Kashif Nadim Chaudry's** dynamic use of form and materials, and ongoing repurposing of fabric passed down from his mother. *Hareem* (2010) presents figures in a state of arousal, cloaked in opulent fabric that covers the supine bodies and flows fluidly along the floor. Inspired by Islamic geometry, *Hareem* creates an eruption of colour and texture when first encountered, and then the figures slowly come into view as if being unearthed as you move around the work. The figures represent unrequited desire and Chaudry's experience of never feeling fully accepted into gay, heteronormative or Pakistani cultures.

A reference to splendour mediated through humour is also enacted by **Abdul-Rahman Abdullah** in the sculpture *Throne Room* (2021), inspired by his visit to one in the Kingdom of Luwu that was resplendent in kitsch adornment to distant relatives, where the attrition of power was palpable. In Abdullah's version, the throne has been replaced by a stack of archival boxes that retain the power to inform an understanding of both the historical and the familial. The boxes bunch and ruffle a tiger rug epitomising conquest and

power. In an act of casual dismissal, two monkeys perch atop and alongside, their indifference to the boxes is similarly indicative of indifferences to humanity's folly.

**Leyla Stevens'** single-channel video *Our Sea is Always Hungry* (2018) also speaks to the process of unearthing and explores the space between documentary and speculative fiction. The film continues Stevens' investigation into contemporary connections to the anti-communist Bali killings of 1965-66, grounded in the memories of her father - who was a young witness to the bloody devastation - which prompted her research. The video intertwines witness recollections, as well as those of the spirits that haunt him. Steven's characteristic single vantage point lingers on landscapes that are populated with non-human and human presences. Through bringing form to the *niskala* (unseen), Stevens evokes an archive of trauma that exists embedded within the landscape.

This exhibition is the first of an unfolding series of peripatetic events that will interrogate and complicate the term diaspora across various curatorial formats in Sydney, London, Venice and online, culminating in ICF's *Diaspora Pavilion 2* presented in partnership with 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art and Campbelltown Arts Centre.

# ARTISTS

## **Abdul-Rahman Abdullah**

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah (b. Port Kembla, Australia 1977 lives and works in Perth, Australia) is a sculptor whose practice explores the different ways that memory can inhabit and emerge from familial spaces. Drawing on the narrative capacity of animal archetypes, crafted objects and the human presence, Abdullah aims to articulate physical dialogues between the natural world, politics and the agency of culture. Recent exhibitions include *The National*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia (2019), *Dark Horizons*, Pataka Art + Museum, Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand (2017) and *Magic Object; Adelaide Biennale of Australian Art*, Adelaide, Australia (2016).

## **Kashif Nadim Chaudry**

Kashif Nadim Chaudry (b. Nottingham, United Kingdom 1976 lives and works in Nottingham, United Kingdom) is informed by his family heritage in tailoring which has influenced and focused his practice around the importance of materiality and craftsmanship. His work is characterised by the working, shaping and moulding of physical objects through the use of elaborate textile-based techniques to create monumental installations from fabric and found objects. Negotiating his identity as a British born gay man of Pakistani Muslim heritage much of Chaudry's work questions how people choose to position themselves in the world. In relation, it is increasingly the sculptural and three-dimensional possibilities within his work that address the idea of positioning power, the sacred and the ceremonial. Recent exhibitions include *What is Home* at National Trust Croome Court, Worcester (2019), *The Three Graces*, Turner Contemporary, Margate, UK (2016), and *Swags & Tails* as part of the Asia Triennial, Manchester, UK (2014).

## **Lindy Lee**

Lindy Lee (b. Brisbane, Australia 1954 lives and works in Byron Bay, Australia) has an expansive practice that explores her Chinese ancestry through Taoism and Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism – philosophies that see humanity and nature as inextricably linked. Symbolic gestures and processes that call on the element of chance are often used to produce a galaxy of images that embody the intimate connections between human existence and the cosmos. Rather than singular visual statements, they are thoughtful objects where meaning emerges from sustained meditation. Notable exhibitions include the major survey exhibition *Lindy Lee: Moon in a Dew Drop*, Museum of Contemporary Art (2020-2021), the group exhibition *Divided Worlds: Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia (2018), *Lindy Lee: The Dark of Absolute Freedom*, The University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane, Australia (2014)

## **Leyla Stevens**

Leyla Stevens (b. Cooroy, Australia 1982, lives and works between Bali, Indonesia and Sydney, Australia) is an Australian-Balinese artist and researcher who works predominantly within moving image and photography. Her practice is informed by ongoing concerns around gesture, ritual, spatial encounters, transculturation and counter histories. Working within modes of representation that shift between the documentary and speculative fictions, her work deals with a notion of counter archives and alternative genealogies. In 2021, Stevens was awarded the 66th Blake Prize for her work *Kidung/Lament*. Recent exhibitions include her solo presentations *Dua Dunia*, curated by Rachel Ciesla, at PS Art Space, Perth Festival (2021), *A Line in the Sea*, West Space, Melbourne, PHOTO 21 Festival (2021), *Their Sea is Always Hungry*, UTS Gallery, Sydney, Australia (2019). Recent group exhibitions include The National 2021, Art Gallery of New South Wales (2021), *Breathing Room* (collaboration with Woven Kolektif), Cement Fondue, Sydney, Australia (2019), *BEAUT 19, Brisbane & Elsewhere Art UnTriennial*, Brisbane, Australia (2018) and the *John Fries Award*, UNSW Galleries, Sydney, Australia (2018).

## Zadie Xa

Zadie Xa (b. Vancouver on unceded Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territory 1983, lives and works in London, UK.) produces work informed by her experiences within the Korean diaspora, as well as the environmental and cultural context of the Pacific Northwest. Forces of distance and relation—familial, cultural, spiritual—shape her constantly evolving notions of self. Her work often features garments, including cloaks and masks, used for performance, protection or ceremony. Xa's practice is highly collaborative, and she has developed ongoing exchanges with dancers, musicians and actors. Since 2006, Xa has worked closely with artist Benito Mayor Vallejo. Recent solo projects include, *Moon Poetics 4 Courageous Earth Critters and Dangerous Day Dreamers*, Remail Modern, Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of Métis, Saskatoon Canada (2020-21), *Child of Magohalmi and the Echoes of Creation*, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, UK (2020), Art Night London 2019 and *Meetings on Art* performance program for the 58th Venice Biennale 2019. Xa was one of the recipients of the Sobey Art Award in 2020, which for the first time was awarded to all 25 nominees.

## Daniela Yohannes

Daniela Yohannes (b. 1982, lives and works in Guadeloupe in the French Caribbean) uses her own Ethiopian-Eritrean heritage as a lens in her work to reflect upon the racialised movement and conditional belonging of African diaspora. Through abstract portraiture and storytelling across multiple media, Yohannes explores the overlap of individual and collective subconscious and desire, and the destruction caused by displacement. Her work dwells on alternative Black realities, considering the bonds between herself, her family and other communities through magical symbolism. By embracing forms of hybridity and considering the artefacts of diaspora as a means of travel in themselves, she has built a dedicated interdimensional machine from emotionally charged objects.



Image credit: Leyla Stevens, *Our Sea is Always Hungry* (still), 2018, single channel video, stereo sound, 13:16 mins, courtesy the artist.



# CURATORS

## Adelaide Bannerman

Adelaide Bannerman (she/her) is a freelance curator from London. She works for International Curators Forum, arts and science commissioning agency, Invisible Dust and commercial gallery Tiwani Contemporary who exhibit and represent practitioners and contemporary art from Africa and its diaspora. Covering curation, project management, mentoring and consultation, Bannerman has been practising for 22 years, producing commissions, exhibitions, events and learning. Institutions that she's worked for include: Iniva (Institute of International Visual Art), Autograph ABP, Arts Council England, Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, Tate, Live Art Development Agency, South London Gallery, Platform London, and the 198 Gallery. She initiated the research residency programme, Never Done in 2018, and is a trustee of Idle Women, Lancashire, UK and PUBLICS, Helsinki, Finland.

## Mikala Tai

Mikala is a curator, researcher and academic specialising in Australian and Asian art and is currently the Head of Visual Arts at the Australia Council for the Arts. Most recently she was the Director of 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art where she collaborated with local, national and international organisations to strengthen ties between Australia and Asia. Recent curatorial projects include *Nusra Latif Qureshi: Strategies of Intent* (2019), *Xiao Lu: Impossible Dialogue* (2019) co-curated with Claire Roberts and Xu Hong and *Justine Youssef: All Blessings, All Curses* (2018).

She has taught at undergraduate and postgraduate level at Monash University, Melbourne University and Royal Melbourne Institute for Technology and regularly contributes to publications and catalogues such as *Abdul-Rahman Abdullah: Everything is True* (John Curtin Gallery, 2021), *She Persists* (NGV, 2020), Ocula, Art Collector, Art Monthly, Vault and Photofile. In 2015 she received her PhD from UNSW Art & Design examining the influence of the Global City on China's local art infrastructure.

## Jessica Taylor

Jessica Taylor is a Barbadian curator and producer based in London. As the Head of Programmes of ICF, Jessica managed the *Beyond the Frame* and *Diaspora Pavilion* professional development programmes, and co-curated the 'Diaspora Pavilion' exhibitions in Venice and Wolverhampton. She has co-curated film and performance programmes such as *Migrating Cities* as part of the Spark Festival in Hong Kong, *Sensational Bodies* as part of the Jerwood Staging Series, and *Monster and Island* with artist Sheena Rose at the Royal Academy London. Jessica also produced the exhibition *Arrivants: Art and Migration in the Anglophone Caribbean World* at the Barbados Museum and the multi-site programme *Curating the International Diaspora* in Sharjah, Barbados and Martinique.

Taylor's curatorial practice stems from an interest in testing and developing contemporary exhibition models for exploring matters of cultural contact and exchange, migration and movement, and transnationalism.

She received a BA in Art History and Philosophy from McGill University in Montreal and an MA in Curating Contemporary Art from the Royal College of Art in London, the dissertation for which is part of an ongoing research project on the development of national art institutions in the English-speaking Caribbean. Her research at the RCA was linked to her work around collections and archives at the Barbados Museum, which aims to underscore both the continued relevance and renewed tasks of national art institutions, as well as the importance of constantly re-developing infrastructures to support and complicate local, regional and global narratives around national identity.

# PARTNERS

## **Campbelltown Arts Centre (C-A-C)**

Located on the edge of Sydney, Campbelltown Arts Centre (C-A-C) is in a unique position to forge collaborative exchanges between artists, disciplines and communities through the creation of new curatorial situations and challenging streams of practice.

Using the edge as a starting point, Campbelltown Arts Centre creates a secure platform for communities and artists to take risks, challenge perceptions, confront issues and raise questions through the commissioning of new works. These new works invite collaboration, partnership, local, national and international dialogue, the juxtaposition of new and traditional techniques and cross-disciplinary approaches. Contemporary artists are at the forefront of Campbelltown Arts Centre's programming and through consultation with communities, we deliver a program that profiles contemporary visual arts, performance, dance, music, live art and emergent practices.

Campbelltown Arts Centre is a cultural facility of Campbelltown City Council and located on Dharawal land. Campbelltown Arts Centre is assisted by the NSW Government through Create NSW and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its funding and advisory body, and receives support from the Crown Resorts Foundation, the Packer Family Foundation and the Neilson Foundation.

## **4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (4A)**

4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (4A) is an independent not-for-profit organisation based in Sydney, Australia. 4A fosters excellence and innovation in contemporary culture through the commissioning, presentation, documentation and research of contemporary art. Our program is presented throughout Australia and Asia, where we ensure that contemporary art plays a central role in understanding and developing the dynamic relationship between Australia and the wider Asian region.



4A's activities facilitate cultural dialogue between Australia and Asia in the belief that Asian cultural thinking significantly shapes the world today and will have an important impact on the future. In Australia we showcase stories, present a multiplicity of perspectives, and explore contemporary concerns and ideas that influence how we, as a nation, engage with Asia. We have a particular focus on art that addresses Asian-Australian experiences and the contributions that diverse Asian migration has made – and continues to make – in shaping Australia. 4A's focus in Asia is to promote the breadth of Australian artistic talent, seeking to build an image of Australia that is open, progressive and fundamentally connected with our Asian neighbours.

4A has been a leader in Asian contemporary art in Australia since 1996. In the decades since, we have established a highly respected reputation among artists and audiences, and within an expanding network of international art institution peers. Our long history and ongoing work across Asia is recognised as having raised awareness of Asian-Australian art and culture we continue to celebrate Australia's diverse cultural heritage and growing links throughout the wider Asian region.

### **International Curators Forum (ICF)**

International Curators Forum (ICF) was founded by artists and curators in 2007 to offer a dynamic and evolving programme that responds to the conditions and contexts impacting creative practitioners through commissions, exhibitions, projects, publications and events. We provide tools and platforms for professional development and facilitate an open peer-to-peer network inviting participants to be part of a generative system of skills and knowledge transfer. Across all of our work, both critically and practically, we aim to challenge the barriers to equality and inclusivity within our industry.

Through all aspects of our programme we engage with diaspora as a critical framework through which we can address and complicate public discussion, test and explore new innovative curatorial models, and create space for artistic and discursive interventions into historical narratives and systems of representation. Based in London, ICF has conceived and produced projects with artists, curators and thinkers who engage with diaspora across the UK, Europe, the Caribbean, Asia, the Middle East, and now Australia.



Image credit: Daniela Yohannes, *Atopias: I Have Left That Dark Cave Forever, My Body has Blended with Hers* (2019) Still from single channel video with colour and stereo, 22:01. Directed by Daniela Yohannes and Julien Beramis, cinematography by Ludovic Claire, macro videography by Tilly Mint, colour grading by Yannig Willmann and sound design by Basile Andrieu. Image courtesy



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One Art Gallery Rd Campbelltown  
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Located on Dharawal land, Campbelltown Arts Centre is proudly owned by the people of Campbelltown. A cultural facility of Campbelltown City Council, assisted by the NSW Government through Create NSW and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. Campbelltown Arts Centre receives support from the Crown Resorts Foundation and the Packer Family Foundation and the Neilson Foundation.