

# Press Kit

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**Christopher Kulendran Thomas**

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For image requests and text material, please contact our press office via [press@kw-berlin.de](mailto:press@kw-berlin.de)  
As of: 21 October 22 / Subject to change

# Press Release

## Berlin, 21 October 22

**KW Institute for Contemporary Art announces Fall Program 2022**

KW Institute for Contemporary Art is pleased to present its Fall Program of 22, which investigates the mechanisms of visual and popular culture through notions of reproduction, ownership and authenticity as exemplified within the work of **Michel Majerus**, **Christopher Kulendran Thomas** and **Atiána R. Kilfa**.



Michel Majerus, *Ohne Titel*, 1991, © Michel Majerus Estate, 2022. Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin and Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo: Jens Ziehe, Berlin

## **Michel Majerus** ***Early Works***

22 October 22 – 15 January 23

Curator: Krist Gruijthuisen

Assistant curator: Léon Kruijswijk

The exhibition *Michel Majerus – Early Works* at KW Institute for Contemporary Art seeks to uncover the earliest layers of Michel Majerus' (1967-2002, LUX) artistic practice by showing works he produced between 1990 and 1996. Many of these pieces are on public view for the first time.

The exhibition is dedicated to the beginnings of Majerus' nationally and internationally celebrated work. Majerus' artistic approach is already apparent in the early works created during his studies. These explore visual culture, time, speed and seriality as well as virtual and physical space. The artist's continuous observations of surface and space as well as his inquiries into materials and techniques were essential to his methodological way of illuminating how images are produced. This investigation formed the foundations of his reflections on the meaning and power of visual culture.

On its ground floor and main hall KW will show over 80 pieces from the artist's early works set in a site-specific exhibition architecture. Fragments of scaffolding will recall Majerus' first institutional solo show at the Kunsthalle Basel in 1996, wherein the artist created a scenography that integrated viewers into its visual space. This practice allowed Majerus to initiate a new and critical confrontation with the continuous hybridization of visual culture, and simultaneously disclosed the impossibility to escape the ever growing, pervasive presence of images and virtual space in the fabric of our daily life.

Besides the exhibition at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.), Kunstverein in Hamburg, Michel Majerus Estate, and the gallery neugerriemschneider in Berlin, will further explore Michel Majerus' oeuvre in all its complexity, in order to honor it on an unprecedented scale. Loans from the artist's estate, as well as from public and private collections, will offer new insights into Michel Majerus' early work as well as topical questions posed throughout his larger body of work. In parallel with these exhibitions in Berlin and Hamburg, thirteen museums throughout Germany will show works by Michel Majerus from their collections.

Opening twenty years after the death of Michel Majerus (1967-2002), the exhibition series *Michel Majerus 2022*, which unfolds across Germany, is dedicated to various phases and aspects of the artist's extraordinary oeuvre. His body of work has continued to influence subsequent generations of artists. In 2023, a comprehensive publication regarding this series of exhibitions will be released.

The exhibition is supported by Hauptstadtkulturfonds Berlin.

**Christopher Kulendran Thomas**  
***Another World***  
**in collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann**  
**featuring Aṇākuperuntinaivarkal Inkaaleneraam**  
22 October 22 – 15 January 23  
Curator: Krist Gruijthuisen  
Assistant curator: Sofie Krogh Christensen

*'How do you tell the story of the losing side of a conflict when history has already been written by the winners?'*

– Christopher Kulendran Thomas

The exhibition *Christopher Kulendran Thomas – Another World* at KW Institute for Contemporary Art explores an alternative approach to technology through the prism of the defeated revolution for an independent Tamil homeland.

During the Liberation War for Tamil Eelam (1983–2009), the de facto state of Eelam was self-governed by a revolutionary movement that, in the early years of the World Wide Web, used the internet to coordinate a globally distributed parallel economic system amongst the Tamil diaspora. However, the movement's political ambitions were eclipsed by a bitter military conflict and the autonomous state they led was brutally eradicated in 2009 by the Sri Lankan government.

Developed together with longtime collaborator Annika Kuhlmann, the exhibition features a major new commission, *The Finesse* (2022), that examines some of the lost legacies of this liberation movement in Kulendran Thomas' family homeland. The immersive film installation melts pop culture into political science and combines archive footage with AI-generated avatars. The work is choreographed across five monolithic mirrored screens and a projection that spans KW's first floor gallery to form an architectural hallucination. *The Finesse* traces the Tamil liberation movement's attempt to imagine a cooperative economy based on renewable energy, communal ownership and computational coordination. Blurring the boundaries between historical research and a sci-fi proposition for an alternate reality, it looks at how the art, architecture and technology that were lost with the defeat of the de facto state of Eelam could today inform radically different, and constantly shifting, ideas of the future. With parts of the work continually algorithmically generated anew, the film is never quite the same twice.

Across the second-floor gallery, KW presents a series of newly commissioned paintings that extend Kulendran Thomas' use of artificial intelligence technologies. Exhibited alongside ceramic works by Aṇākuperuntinaivarkal Inkaaleneraam, a leading light of the Eelam artistic resistance, the paintings are made using machine-learning algorithms trained on the memetic circulation of art historical influences from the Western canon to Sri Lanka's post war art world.

Bisecting the second-floor gallery is a new variation of Kulendran Thomas' 2019 video work *Being Human* which takes the viewer on an elliptical journey around the island, from the fallout of the war there to the biennial of contemporary art founded in its aftermath. Combining real people's lived experiences with algorithmically synthesized characters, the work traverses documentary and fiction to propose alternate possible realities from the front lines of the art-industrial complex.

*Christopher Kulendran Thomas – Another World* is initiated by Stefan Kalmár, produced in partnership with the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, Kunsthalle Zürich and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, and realized with the generous support of Filecoin Foundation and Filecoin Foundation for the Decentralized Web.

*The Finesse* (2022) by Christopher Kulendran Thomas is commissioned by the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, in partnership with Kunsthalle Zürich and KW Institute for Contemporary Art and realized with the generous support of Filecoin Foundation, Filecoin

Foundation for the Decentralized Web and Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg and with thanks to Samir Bantal, OMA|AMO, RadicalxChange Foundation, satis&fy and Adam Hall Group. The exhibition at KW is generously supported by KW Freunde and supported by Fluentum/Markus Hannebauer.

**Atiéna R. Kilfa**  
***The Unhomely***

22 October 22 – 15 January 23

Curator: Anna Gritz

Assistant curator: Sofie Krogh Christensen

Curatorial Assistant: Linda Franken

The exhibition *The Unhomely* at KW Institute for Contemporary Art marks the first institutional solo presentation by Atiéna R. Kilfa (b.1990, FR). Kilfa uses photography, sculpture, video, and installations to explore how personal and cultural memories tend to conflict and overlap. Her most recent work draws on her interest in the composition of models, dioramas, still lifes, and tableaux vivants, which she sees as sites loaded with inherited narratives and social codes, opening them up for collective review. *The Unhomely* stages a new video work alongside architectural fragments, transactional sound, and miniature sculpture, probing the memory of “home” as an impossible “virtual” architecture. Amidst an all-consuming installation that plays with scale and proportion, the eponymous video work, presented on an architectural stage, places the viewer behind the camera. The narrative of the video unfolds inside a staircase that is perceived as a *Huis Clos*, a never-ending loop, in which the viewer encounters “architectural ghosts”. These ghosts deviate from the stand-in human silhouettes that oftentimes populate contemporary architectural models, providing us with a sense of depth and scale. The figures in *The Unhomely* thus become actors themselves, pointing towards the daily lives of their imagined inhabitants, whether real or fictional, and uniting the past and the present. Two further elements of the installation implicate the presence of the viewer in the production of the work. A scaled miniature of the film’s staircase represents an impossible replica, leaving the viewer with a confusing desire to compare their own position to that in the film and the model. A quotation from both the film and the model, the architectural stage used by Kilfa functions as a Foley instrument that reacts and reverberates to the movement of the audience, adding a sonic and spatial dimension to the experience of the work. Traditionally, Foley is a postproduction technique used to enhance the audio quality in moving images by overlaying synchronized studio recordings of everyday sounds. In Kilfa’s work, however, it serves to further heighten the viewer’s sense of complicity in the production of the work.

The exhibition *The Unhomely* by Atiéna R. Kilfa is co-produced in partnership with Camden Art Centre in London, where an iteration of the exhibition will be staged from 27 January to 26 March 2023. The exhibition is generously supported by the Trampoline Association in support of the French art scene, Paris, as well as supported by Institut français Deutschland / Bureau des arts plastiques and Galerie Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt am Main.

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The exhibitions and projects in the Program Fall 22 take place in collaboration with and/or are supported by:



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BERLIN



Michel Majerus Estate

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NAB

# Michel Majerus

## *Early Works*

*Michel Majerus – Early Works* uncovers the first layers of Michel Majerus' (1967–2002, LUX) artistic practice, showing over 80 works he created between 1990 and 1996. Curated by Krist Gruijthuisen, the exhibition at KW Institute for Contemporary Art includes many pieces that have not been exhibited ever before and are yet to be art historically positioned within the artist's larger body of work. As such it is a first public attempt of an overview of the early stages of Majerus' practice prior to his international breakthrough, which was marked by his 1996 solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel.

Twenty years after his sudden death, *Michel Majerus – Early Works* is part of a major tribute to Majerus taking place all over the city of Berlin as well as Germany and Luxembourg. The program highlights the late artist's influence both on his peers as well as the generations succeeding him, by exhibiting both his reflections on painting as a medium and his groundbreaking vision of a world in which popular culture, advertisement, and the virtual realms of TV, videogames, and computers infiltrate the very essence of everyday life — a process that is only intensified by the developments in the digital realm.

Referencing the work of distinguished artists of previous generations, their reflections and strategies, Majerus was continuously shifting back and forth between historical, mundane, and contemporary imagery. By sampling fragments, creating series, embodying speed, and referring to the challenging statements made by his predecessors, Majerus' practice is characterized by continuous and unmitigated observations of surface and space – both physical and virtual – which he used to reflect on the meaning and power of visual culture at large.

### Room 1

In 1986, Michel Majerus started his artistic education at the Staatliche Akademie der bildenden Künste in Stuttgart, first as a student in K.R.H. Sonderborg's painting class, and, in 1991, moved to the class of Joseph Kosuth to finish his studies one year later. The practices of the two established artists would have a profound influence on Majerus' work throughout his career.

In 1992, together with his fellow students from Stuttgart Nader (Ahriman), Stephan Jung, Susa Reinhardt and Wawa (Wawrzyniec) Tokarski, Majerus co-founded the artist group 3K-NH for which they used the initials of their nicknames to form a cryptic code name. During its two-year lifespan, the group declared a need "to expose the uselessness of communication in general, and of advertising and art in particular" as well as to "embody the threat that the average person is not exposed to, but which he needs as a basis for his existence" (statement by 3K-NH, exhibition catalogue, Stuttgart 1992/1993). In the year after Majerus moved to Berlin into an apartment with Stephan Jung on Linienstrasse, a derelict street in the city center. Although dilapidated and socio-economically challenged, the city held a promising future after the fall of the Iron Curtain. 3K-NH held exhibitions both in Stuttgart and Berlin.

For his own artistic practice, Majerus continued to draw on the eclectic pop imagery and nihilistic thinking that had already influenced the group, combining them with a juvenile approach to rebelling against his bourgeois upbringing as well as a means of institutional and artistic critique. Although the addressee of the statement remains unclear, this approach can

be found in the work *Untitled* (1993), for example, which includes the phrases “loss of self-confidence / lack of culture.” The work *eins, zwei, drei* (1992) also features nihilist thought, in this case in relation to his country of birth. The details of his criticism, however, remain opaque. Exhibiting a penchant for making connections and networking, the ambitious young artist then became affiliated with the newly opened gallery *neugerriemschneider*, where he held his first exhibition in 1994. Using two canvases to increase the scale of the work, *der weg vom atelier zur galerie* (1994) does not only capture that achievement but also stylistically references Frank Stella, one of the artists Majerus admired and whose working technique he studied and sampled over and over again.

### Room 2 and 3

Painting was Majerus' medium of choice but only to question and stretch the confines of the medium as well as its present position, be it in relation to his art historical predecessors, his contemporaries, and to the larger visual culture of the time. His creative and inspirational horizons expanded to include many aspects of popular culture from computer games, digital imagery, film, television, and pop music, to trademarks, corporate logos, and text. Further, his work showed an appreciation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of painting, referencing the work and artistic methodology of a multitude of (exclusively male) artists, including Andy Warhol, Frank Stella, Gerhard Richter, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Julian Schnabel, Mark Rothko, Sigmar Polke, Willem de Kooning, as well as his mentors Kosuth and Sonderborg.

In general, the earlier works exhibited at KW reveal the first strands of a young but highly productive artist, eager to enter the art market and seeking his signature style by engaging in technical, visual, and conceptual experiments. Many of the countless techniques and motifs he used during these years reoccur throughout his oeuvre, sometimes emphasized in the shape of an interest in a particular subject, other times by deliberately exaggerating an image to lay bare the banality of modern capitalist society and the hollowness of its visual culture.

Specifically, the works in these rooms constitute the very first silk screen experiments Majerus had been undertaking. In the same reproductive vein as this technique, he borrows and reproduces existing images of the Roman figure Lucretia, the rock star Mick Jagger, the Disney version of Alice in Wonderland, but also robot monsters, poodles, or horses. The use of the face of Mr. Muscle, a universally recognized brand of cleaning products, can be linked to a symbolic dimension of cleanness and explicit clinical activities and diseases in other works, which may also be seen as instances of rebellion against bourgeois society and its way of life. His archive contained endless collections of magazines, newspapers, and encyclopedic cutouts, many of which were sampled in his works.

Some of the works from the early 1990s were made with fabric instead of the traditional stretched canvases typically used by painters due to financial constraints. Majerus used to buy smaller fabric pieces and sew them together to eventually produce one larger piece. In later works, he would apply a comparable method by using multiple canvases and hang them adjacent to each other to create a singular, large-scale work.

### Room 4 and 5

Through experimentation and production, Michel Majerus attempted to comprehend the materials, the techniques, and the symbols with which he could work. Presented here are small-format works, by Majerus' standards, which vary widely in terms of painterly materiality—from oil on wood, to offset on canvas, to a unique coloring book. The variation and sheer quantity of his works raise questions on authenticity, seriality, and hierarchy in relation to images and their carriers. The eclectic collection of depicted figures and motifs is borrowed from an equally multitudinous number of sources, including Sesame Street, Beavis and Butthead, Max and Moritz, Smarties wrapping paper, and a board game version *Sandmännchen*, the much-loved puppet from East German children's television.

*Oblatenschachtel* (1992) is a singular experiment Majerus conducted for the creation of an edition. The work contains images referencing the painting *Maria als Schmerzensmutter* (1495/98) by Albrecht Dürer, which are set on top of the packaging of sacramental bread. On the inside are images of the Ludwig Museum in Cologne and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in NYC, among others, printed on such bread. The work seemingly reflects on the functioning of the art market and the institutional sphere—and on Majerus' subjective position in relation to these dimensions of the art world. Next to the edition are cutouts, sketches, and slides for overhead projectors that Majerus would use to prepare new pieces. The cartoon cat appears in the *weisses Bild* (1994) work that is exhibited in KW's main hall.

## Halle

KW's main hall is dedicated to the larger works of Michel Majerus, which were created later in this early stage of his career. They make evident the extent to which he embraced a monumental scale as an artistic method. By doing so, he was likely referencing the scale of billboards as an attempt to represent the invasiveness of popular culture under capitalism in times of accelerating technological innovation. Working on such a scale, he challenged not only himself as a painter but also the spatial capacities of art spaces and institutions. Some works remain iconoclastic, like *Fuck* (1992), and continue to reflect on the position of today's painter and his medium. Consider, for example, the white planes of *Untitled* (year unknown) and *Untitled* (1994) exhibited on the scaffolding. Works from this stage also become more layered and complex in terms of style references and technique like *10 bears masturbating in 10 boxes* (1992) and *weisses Bild* (1994).

*Industrieboden* (1996/2022), a site-specific work, was first created at a 1996 exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel, curated by Peter Pakesch, that became Majerus' international breakthrough. At the time it was one of Majerus' most ambitious attempts to challenge the two-dimensionality of the painterly surface and integrate the spatiality of the exhibition space into his work. The young artist would continue to focus on this tension later on.

In 1999, at the invitation of curator Harald Szeemann, Majerus solidified his European reputation by painting the façade of the international pavilion in the Giardini of the Venice Biennale. In 2002, shortly after his return from a residency year in Los Angeles, USA, to Berlin, he put up *Sozialpalast*, his defining public artwork, for which he covered the face of Brandenburg Gate with in an 1:1 image of the Pallasium in Berlin Schöneberg. The Brutalist social housing block was once built as a new approach to urban life but had become virtually synonymous with high crime and urban decay by the turn of the millennium. On November 6, 2002, Majerus' life was suddenly ended by a tragic plane crash on a flight from Berlin to Luxemburg.

# Biography

Michel Majerus (1967 - 2002) produced a prolific body of work that represents some of the first examples of artistic engagement with the then-nascent digital age. Characterized by omnivorous visual sampling, Majerus' work draws freely on a wide range of motifs to create paintings, prints and installations that continue to resonate today, and have become part of the art history in their own right. He has been the focus of solo exhibitions at international museums and institutions including Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Bielefeld (2018); CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux (2012); Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Stuttgart (2011); Mudam, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg (2006); Kunsthaus Graz, Graz; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Deichtorhallen, Hamburg; Kestner Gesellschaft, Hanover (all 2005); Tate Liverpool, Liverpool (2004); Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2003); and Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (1996), and took part in the 48th Venice Biennale (1999) and Manifesta 2 (1998).

# Public Program

## **Michel Majerus x Pogo Bar**

Steven Warwick  
4 November 22, 8 pm

## **Focus Tour**

**with Raoul Zoellner**  
16 November 22, 5 pm

## **Walkthrough and screening**

**with Susa Reinhardt**  
17 November 22, 7 pm

## **Public tour with German Sign Language**

4 December 22, 2 pm

## **Curator's Tour**

**with Léon Kruijswijk**  
8 December 22, 7 pm

## **Art walk**

**with Raoul Zoellner**  
17 December 22, 2 pm

## **Art walk**

**with Raoul Zoellner**  
17 January 23, 2 pm

## **Michel Majerus x Pogo Bar**

PHILTH HAUS  
13 January 23, 8 pm

# Christopher Kulendran

# Thomas

# *Another World*

# in Kooperation mit Annika Kuhlmann

# und mit Aṇaṅkuperuntinaivarkal

# Inkaaleneraam

*'How do you tell the story of the losing side of a conflict when history has already been written by the winners?'*

– Christopher Kulendran Thomas

The exhibition *Christopher Kulendran Thomas – Another World* at KW Institute for Contemporary Art explores an alternative approach to technology through the prism of the defeated revolutionary struggle for an independent Tamil homeland.

The struggle stems from a civil conflict which erupted after British colonial rule, of the island now known as Sri Lanka, ended in 1948. The Tamil liberation movement was born as a response to discrimination, persecution and purges against the Tamil minority on the island. This movement led the formation of Tamil Eelam as an autonomous territory in 1983 in the Northern and Eastern part of the island. During that civil war, the de facto state of Tamil Eelam was self-governed by a liberation movement that, in the early years of the world wide web, used the internet to coordinate a globally distributed parallel economic system amongst the Tamil diaspora until the Tamil resistance was brutally eradicated by the Sri Lankan Army in 2009, sending a great number of people of Tamil descent fleeing into diaspora worldwide.

Developed together with longtime collaborator Annika Kuhlmann, the exhibition at KW features a major new commission, *The Finesse* (2022), that examines some of the lost legacies of this liberation movement in Kulendran Thomas' family homeland. It traces the Tamil liberation movement's attempt to imagine a cooperative economy based on renewable energy, communal ownership and computational coordination. The work is choreographed across five monolithic mirrored screens and a projection that spans KW's first floor gallery to form an architectural hallucination. The immersive film installation melts pop culture into political science and combines archive footage with AI-generated avatars. Blurring the boundaries between historical research and a sci-fi proposition for an alternate reality, it looks at how the art, architecture and technology that were lost with the defeat of the de facto state of Eelam could today inform radically different, and constantly shifting, ideas of the future. With parts of the work continually, algorithmically generated anew, the film is never quite the same twice.

Across the second-floor gallery, KW presents a series of newly commissioned paintings that extend Kulendran Thomas' use of artificial intelligence technologies. Exhibited alongside ceramic works by Aṇaṅkuperuntinaivarkal Inkaaleneraam, a leading light of the Eelam artistic resistance, the paintings are made using machine learning algorithms trained on the memetic circulation of art historical influences from the Western canon to Sri Lanka's post-civil war art world.

Bisecting the second-floor gallery is a new variation of the 2019 video work *Being Human* that takes the viewer on an elliptical journey around Sri Lanka, from the fallout of the civil war there to the biennial of contemporary art founded in its aftermath. Combining real people's lived experiences with algorithmically synthesized characters, the film features various guests of the Colombo Art Biennale as well as a brief appearance from Kulendran Thomas' uncle, a family hero who established the Centre for Human Rights in Tamil Eelam.

Together, *Being Human* and *The Finesse* form two parts of an ongoing trilogy probing alternative possible futures through the prism of diaspora and displacement. These post-cinematic works are not only distinguished by their form, production method, and experimental installation technique but are above all the result of an intensive creative development process involving numerous collaborations within the artists' sprawling, international network of artists, journalists, choreographers, actors, and architects. The works themselves form and perpetuate creative networks that lend voices to an ethnic community who have been and continuously are deprived of a place to speak from.

A variation of the exhibition runs simultaneously at ICA London. Together these exhibitions mark the launch of earth.net, a multidisciplinary studio established to devise shared tools for new ways of living. Launching November, a public program on decentralized societies, hosted jointly by KW and the ICA, will convene a research community to explore civic technologies for cooperative economies. To get involved, register at [earth.net](http://earth.net).

## Biography

**Christopher Kulendran Thomas** is an artist, of Tamil descent, who spent his formative years in London after his family left escalating ethnic oppression and civil unrest in the Tamil homeland of Eelam. Seeing, mostly from a distance, how an ascendent contemporary art scene in Sri Lanka blossomed from the ashes of ethnic cleansing on the island, he began examining the structural processes by which art produces reality. Now working across myriad disciplines, and often utilising advanced technologies, the artist's studio is a fluid collaboration that brings together technologists, architects, writers, journalists, designers, musicians, activists and artists to explore various, as yet unrealised, possibilities at the intersection of culture, technology and citizenship. Studio collaborators include Olga Abramova, Nevo Bar, James Beatham, Billy Coulthurst, Henry Davidson, Anne Fellner, Jan-Peter Giesekeing, Tobias Groot, Ilavenil Vasuky Jayapalan, Sophie Luck, Nivethan Nanthakumar, Justin Ng, Carl Rethman, Sonia Rettenmaier, Carla-Luisa Reuter, Julia Rosenstock, Emmy Skensved, Victor Stuhlmann, Mark Stroemich, Victor Payares and Ernie Wang.

**Annika Kuhlmann** is a curator, filmmaker and producer. She was director of Berlin's Schinkel Pavillon and has worked on exhibitions for Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin), BFI Miami, Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof and Gropius Bau (Berlin). As co-founder of the artistic research project New Eelam, she has collaborated with Christopher Kulendran Thomas on exhibitions and film installations for the 9th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, the 11th Gwangju Biennale, Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Tensta konsthall in Stockholm, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Institute of Modern Art Brisbane and Spike Island, Bristol. Kuhlmann is Artistic Director at earth.net.

**Aṇṇākuperuntinaivarkal Inkaaleneraam's** origins lie in Eelam and in the clandestine artistic resistance that opposed the state suppression of Tamil culture on the island. Understanding art as part of a social process, many artists involved in the Tamil liberation movement worked pseudonymously and relied on collective solidarity to evade the Sri Lankan government, utilising the modest materials that were available in the besieged Tamil homeland. Though very little of their work survived the brutal end of the civil war that wiped

out Eelam in 2009, the legacy of that creative scene now continues as a collaboration dispersed across the Eelam diaspora. *Anaṅkuperuntinaivarkal Inkaaleneraam* was and is an experiment in new forms of social organisation. It exists today as a Discord community, making use of technologies for DAOs (decentralised autonomous organisations) to collectively govern a distributed and fluidly autonomous collective inquiry into the lost histories and possible futures of Eelam art.

# Public Program

**Curator's Tour  
with Sofie Krogh Christensen**

27 October 22, 7 pm

**Digital conference:**

*Hyperstructures:*

*new operating systems for public goods*

13 November 22

**Focus Tour**

**with Anjouna Novak**

14 December 22, 5 pm

**Curator's Tour**

**with Krist Gruijthuijsen**

15 December 22, 7 pm

**Artist Talk:**

*Stateless nations –*

*planetary states*

15 January 23

# Atiένα R. Kilfa

## *The Unhomely*

The exhibition *The Unhomely* at KW Institute for Contemporary Art marks the first institutional solo presentation by Atiένα R. Kilfa (b. 1990, FR). Kilfa uses photography, sculpture, video, and installations to explore how personal and cultural memories tend to conflict and overlap. Her most recent work draws on her interest in the composition of scenes, dioramas, still lifes, and tableaux vivants, which she sees as sites in which inherited narratives and social codes and the tension between object and subject come to a head, opening them up for collective review.

The question of how standards produce identity, as imitable models and formulas or as technological settings and conventions that control our perception, lies at the core of Kilfa's practice. The question, ultimately, of who is welcomed by them and who is not. Through the complication of the binary notion of subjective inside vs. normative outside, it triggers a reflexive rewriting of existing systems and standards. *The Unhomely* stages a new video work alongside architectural fragments, transactional sound, and miniature sculpture, probing the memory of "home" as an impossible "virtual" architecture. Memory here is explored as a type of recollection that brings us closer to a truth than other documentary means because of its elastic nature, which weaves together occurrences, emotions, space, and place with a broader imaginary. Ultimately, the show is driven by the question of what home is, who belongs in it, and who is perceived as strange or foreign. It derives its title from a literal translation of the German word "das Unheimliche" (the uncanny) into English, highlighting the intrinsic connection between the home and the uncanny.

Amidst an all-consuming installation that plays with scale, material, and proportion, *The Landlords* (2022), a video work presented on an architectural stage made of used floorboards at KW, places the viewer inside the camera. The narrative of the video unfolds inside a staircase that is perceived as a *huis clos*, a never-ending loop. The slow, artificial movement of the camera creates a sensation that has the architecture moving around the protagonists, instead of the other way around. This renders the figures immobile while having the architecture appear as a flexible, temporally dependent, and formally unstable entity, which not only hosts but participates in the act of memory creation. Kilfa's protagonists cum "architectural ghosts" thus deviate from the stand-in human silhouettes that oftentimes populate contemporary architectural models, created solely to provide us with a sense of depth and scale. They prompt the question of how something that never had a claim on life can now be haunting the real. Fifty-some years ago, in 1970, the Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori came up with the now widely acknowledged concept of the "Uncanny Valley". It suggests that, when we interact with humanoid technological objects, there is a distinct moment when the made-up likeness to humans fails to convince us. This moment of realization, the capturing of the gap between the artificial and the authentic delivery of the rendered object, has us entering the Valley, an uncomfortable, anxiety-inducing space that leaves us doubting our grasp on reality. This sensation is not unique to human rendering but can be applied to the rendering of spaces, places and sounds alike.

Kilfa draws on contemporary race studies to draw a parallel between the Uncanny Valley and racism as "a place between passing and arrest," where one is moved from human to non-human due to a psychological twist in the perceived likeness. She draws a parallel between the creations that do not have a claim on being human and people who do not have a claim on being treated as equally human, who are what Frantz Fanon has called "ontologically void". Kilfa puts it thusly: "This proximity is for me deeply embedded in the French translation

of the term. Uncanny translates as 'l'étrange' (the strange), one 'r' away from 'l'étranger' (the foreigner)." What we perceive as uncanny is thus something that is intrinsically close to us, which is of the home, the familiar, the old established – and yet made to feel strange and unreal. "The other" is therefore not found somewhere else but is essentially part of our foundation.

Through the doubling of architectural spaces, Kilfa manifests the uncanny in a way that draws heavily on the strategies developed by Stanley Kubrick and Diane Johnson for the movie *The Shining* (1980). Like in the film, the installation has an architectural maquette doubling as a guide to the cinematic space. It also speaks of the possibility of a miniature to masquerade as a real space in film production, while creating a mapping mechanism for the physiological space. The conflation of these spaces, the movie space, the architectural space, and the mind space, is matched by the locales of the film, the home and the hotel, the familiar and the strange, as well as the presence of "the Other", seeing as both are built on an "Indian burial ground". Kilfa's film goes back to her own home, evoking motives from her childhood, which was deeply rooted in cinema. The role of "the Other" in European cinema of the 1970s was introduced to her home by her mother, a film scholar, in the shape of the films of Jean Rouch, among others. Akin to a process of auto and ethnofiction, the "scene" along with the "self" becomes a social process in which the protagonists, whose roles are uncertain but can be read as mother/widow/neighbor/landlord, and brother/father/neighbor/landlord, occupy the scene like living sculptures. These occupants are both ghosts haunting a memory and mental projections conjured by the trauma that was experienced.

A common trope in Kilfa's work is the avowed implication of the viewer alongside the technology in the production of the work. She habitually mimics cinematic conventions to obstruct the possibility of immersion and to instead keep the viewer in the technological space where the work is being produced. Here, digital technologies like false color edits, flattening of colors and lights, erasing details, and pushing highlights, alongside the casting and the styling, inhibit the escape from the violence that is part of (cinematic) capturing. The presence of the viewer is further implicated in the production of the work through two key elements of the installation. *Déjà Vu* (2022), the scaled miniature of the film's staircase, represents an impossible replica, leaving the viewer with a confusing desire to compare their own position to that in the film and the model. Further, the stage, entitled *4<sup>th</sup> Floor* (2022) and occupying much of the space, is a quotation from both the film and the model. It functions as a foley pit, an instrument of sorts that reverberates and creaks under the movement of the audience, adding a sonic and spatial dimension to the experience that renders the viewer an active and visible participant. Traditionally, Foley is a post-production sound effect technique that involves adding synchronized studio recordings of quotidian sounds to artificially enhance the audio quality in moving images. Here, however, it serves also to highlight how cinema produces affect through artificial means, while evoking a home where presence was always felt but could not be taken for granted.

# Biography

Atiéna R. Kilfa was born in Paris, France in 1990. She currently lives and works in Frankfurt am Main where she recently graduated from Staedelschule. In her practice, Kilfa uses photography, sculpture, video, and installations to explore how personal and cultural memories tend to conflict and overlap. *The Unhomely* at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin marks her first institutional solo presentation. An iteration of the show will open at Camden Arts Centre in London in early 2023.

# Public Program

**Curator's Tour**  
**with Sofie Krogh Christensen**  
27 October 22, 7 pm

**Curator's Tour**  
**with Linda Franken**  
10 November 22, 7 pm

**Workshop**  
**Nikhil Vettukattil**  
*The Institute for Scene Experiments*  
10–11 December 22

**Focus Tour**  
**with Jeanne-Ange Wagne**  
11 January 23, 5 pm

# Education and Art Mediation

KW Institute for Contemporary Art's education and art mediation program takes up themes and questions from the institution's wide-ranging artistic exhibition and event program and develops them further together with visitors, trying to expand in its own formats on themes sparked within the program.

This approach is applied in workshops, guided tours, and long-term cooperations with multiple groups. We work with high schools, universities, artists, art mediators, researchers and different communities from Berlin in various formats throughout the year.

## **Short tours with KW Guides**

Our KW Guides are in the exhibitions during regular opening hours and offer free guided one-on-one tours for individuals. Our KW Guides can be contacted at any time for individual tours or if you have any questions. The short tours are free of charge.

## **Public guided tours on weekends**

KW offers free public guided tours in the current exhibitions. Each guided tour lasts 60 minutes. Please register on the day prior to the tour at our counter desk. Please note, that you also need to buy a time-slot ticket for the exhibitions at KW or book a time slot for the Museum Sunday Berlin.

### ***Michel Majerus – Early Works***

Saturday, 22 October 2022, 4pm / in English  
Sunday, 23 October 2022, 4pm / in German  
Saturday 12 November 2022, 4pm / in English  
Sunday, 13 November 2022, 4pm / in German  
Saturday, 26 November, 2022, 4pm / in English  
Sunday, 27 November 2022, 4pm / in German  
Saturday, 10 December 2022, 4pm / in English  
Sunday, 11 December 2022, 4pm / in German

### ***Christopher Kulendran Thomas – Another World***

Saturday, 5 November 2022, 4pm / in English  
Sunday, 6 November 2022, 4pm / in German (Museum Sunday Berlin)  
Saturday, 3 December 2022, 4pm / in German  
Sunday, 4 December 2022, 4pm / in English (Museum Sunday Berlin)  
Saturday, 7 January 2023, 4pm / in English  
Sunday, 8 January 2023, 4pm / in German

### ***Atiéna R. Kilfa – The Unhomely***

Saturday, 29 October 2022, 4pm / in English  
Sunday, 30 October 2022, 4pm / in German  
Saturday, 19 November 2022, 4pm / in English  
Sunday, 20 November 2022, 4pm / in German  
Saturday, 17 December 2022, 4pm / in English  
Sunday, 18 December 2022, 4pm / in German  
Saturday, 14 January 2023, 4pm / in English  
Sunday, 15 January 2023, 4pm / in German

### **Guided tours for private groups**

For groups in German and English, further languages upon request

60 Minutes

Price: 70 € / reduced 55 € + reduced admission fee (Free admission to visitors up to and including 18)

For inquiries regarding the booking of private group tours, please contact Museumsdienst Berlin.

### **Museumsdienst Berlin**

Tel.: +49 (0)30 247 49 888

Mon–Fri: 9 am–4 pm, Sat–Sun: 9 am–1 pm

E-Mail: [museumsdienst@kulturprojekte.berlin](mailto:museumsdienst@kulturprojekte.berlin)

# Upcoming Exhibitions

## **BPA // Berlin program for artists exhibition**

3 December 22 – 22 January 23

Curator: Leon Kruijswijk

## **Pause: Alexis Blake**

### ***Crack Nerve Boogie Swerve***

27 – 29 January 23

Curator: Léon Kruijswijk

Curatorial Assistant: Lara Scherrieble

## **Martin Wong**

### ***Malicious Mischief***

25 February – 14 May 23

Curators: Krist Gruijthuisen, Agustín Pérez Rubio

Assistant Curator: Sofie Krogh Christensen

## **Win McCarthy**

### ***Common Ruin***

25 February – 14 May 23

Curator: Krist Gruijthuisen

Assistant Curator: Léon Kruijswijk

Curatorial Assistant: Linda Franken

## **Karen Lamassonne**

### ***Ruido / Noise***

25 February – 14 May 23

Curator: Krist Gruijthuisen

Assistant Curator: Léon Kruijswijk

Curatorial Assistant: Linda Franken

# General Information

**KW Institute for Contemporary Art**  
KUNST-WERKE BERLIN e. V.  
Auguststraße 69  
10117 Berlin  
Tel. +49 30 243459-0  
info@kw-berlin.de  
kw-berlin.de

## **Opening Hours**

Wednesday–Monday 11 am–7 pm  
Thursday 11 am–9 pm  
Closed on Tuesday

## **Admission**

8 € / reduced 6 €  
berlinpass holders 4 €

Reduction is valid for students, those in community service, BBK members, unemployed, and disabled persons (at least 50 % “GdB”) upon presentation of relevant identification.

Free admission to people up to and including 18, Friends of KW and Berlin Biennale, KW Lover\*, on Thursday evenings from 6–9 pm, and during Museum Sunday Berlin.

## **Accessibility**

The courtyard of KW is paved with cobblestones.  
Please ring the designated doorbell at the main entrance gate (underneath the doorbell panel), our staff members will assist you while entering the building as well as Café Bravo. Please find more information on accessibility [here](#).

For further information, please contact our staff at +49 30 243459-69.

## **Hygiene measures**

In accordance with the applicable standards of the State of Berlin, comprehensive hygiene measures have been taken to protect visitors and staff. The total number of visitors permitted into each floor of the exhibition is limited and depends on the current regulations. Updated information will be available on our website. Wearing a FFP2 mask is obligatory during your stay at KW.

We look forward to your visit!