

Songs to Sound Worlds, Stories to Rewrite Them: On Gender, Storytelling, and Myth

Master Symposium

As part of the symposium series *Gender and Equality in the Arts*

10 – 11 November 2022

10 am – 5.15 pm

Institute Art Gender Nature HGK FHNW, Basel

On-site and online

Auditorium D 1.04, FHNW Academy of Art and Design in Basel

With contributions by Jumana Emil Abboud, Bani Abidi, Ruanne Abou-Rahme and Basel Abbas, Christian Campbell, Astrit Ismaili, Saodat Ismailova, Acaye Kerunen, Tessa Mars, Marie H el ene Pereira, Sheelasha Rajbhandari and Hit Man Gurung, Tracey Rose, Kara Springer and Fran oise Verg es

Moderated by Chus Mart inez and Quinn Latimer

Research: Marion Ritzmann

Press: Anna Francke

The symposium is open to the public and will be held in English.

More information and program: dertank.ch

→ [Livestream 10 – 11 November 2022](#)

In memory of Etel Adnan

Etel Adnan once wrote, spectrally and spectacularly, “Mountains are spaceships.” And: “Mountains are women.” What else are mountains? What else womxn? Whose spaceship? And why collapse them into one story? To critically and virtuosically address the world—that is, to narrate and thus create it—from such mythic and counterhegemonic positions means to face colonial histories and neocolonial realities, as well as their denial of ancestral and speculative ways of perceiving and shaping that very world. The autumn Master Symposium at the Institute Art Gender Nature HGK FHNW, in Basel, is devoted to artists and thinkers whose work addresses the importance of retelling and reinterpreting stories and myths that regard identity and gender with all their ecological and spectral entanglements intact. Such myths—narratives we might variously call mytho-historiographies or critical fabulations—often transcend colonial binaries, offering life-generating languages that employ fiction and fantasy, poetry and song. Many of these myths predate the systems imposed by hetero-modernity and its patriarchization of our most foundational stories.

There are myriad reasons why storytelling about identity and its many avatars has become increasingly theorized again. Consider the autofictions that dominant both contemporary literary and moving-image practices, or the digital technologies that have us performing

ourselves every day, writing ourselves down for some desired audience, all economy; consider, much earlier, the invention of the printing press and all of its economies. Each of these technologies and their specific narrative possibilities have fostered, explicitly or paradoxically, certain fictions of the self, in which one might reflect on one's radical subjectivity in a collective world where space for real resistance, experimentation, collectivity, and non-normativity are rare. Perhaps, too, storytelling has reemerged as an important form and gesture because it resists the endless contemporary performance of the solitary self, instead situating the protagonist in a communal world of older entanglements at once social, political, and ecological. Finally, storytelling always implies an audience, a receiver who, in their listening, allows the narrative to be rewritten in their reception and memory of it.

If storytelling is an act of connecting through the materiality of the voice—its character, its expression—that expression might, sometimes, become an anti-colonial force. It is one that stresses the common feeling of the collective, acting against the systemic isolation imposed by capital and its racial-patriarchal orders. Listening to that voice is an active act of co-imagining and remaking the world with the storyteller. In this symposium at the Institute Art Gender Nature, we would like to stress the political and gnosiological importance of the production of storytelling, and mythological narratologies. In this way we might surpass Northern ways of codifying gender as well as the many hierarchies it intersects with and the oppression and marginalization it is made to support. Equity and equality depend on legislation, yes, but in legal systems built on such vast disenfranchisement, a more just society also must be capable of connecting to the past through language—so often patriarchal and restrictive—with an eye and ear toward a more nonbinary future. So much depends on language. So much depends on being able to narrate nonhegemonic worlds in which we might relate, might *identify*, instigating the desire that could lead to a necessary transformation of how we live together and how we tell (yes) that story.

Songs to Sound Worlds, Stories to Rewrite Them: On Gender, Storytelling, and Myth continues our semiannual series of Master Symposia at the Institute Art Gender Nature, begun in 2018 with *Promise No Promises!* and whose most recent iteration, called *Ages of Receivership: On Generous Listening*, was held in spring 2022. In each of the symposiums thus far, current artistic practices are examined and articulated within the framework of questions of contemporary import, be they political, theoretical, ecological, emotional, linguistic or other.

Technical team

Arsshanth Appapillai, Karin Borer, Lovis Dalla Libera, Katharina Kemmerling, Kristina Pavlovic, Stefanie Rohner, Konrad Sigl, Kim Surenthiran, Suresh Surenthiran

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Media partner: arttv.ch

PROGRAM

(subject to alterations)

DAY I – 10 November 2022

On-site and online → [livestream](#)

Part 1

10.00 am	Welcome by Chus Martínez & Quinn Latimer
10.15 am	Reading by Quinn Latimer
10.25 am	Tessa Mars , performative talk
11.00 am	Saadat Ismailova , screening and conversation
12.00 pm	Lunch break

Part 2

2.00 pm	Acaye Kerunen , performance talk and conversation
2.45 pm	Jumana Emil Abboud , reading and conversation
3.30 pm	Bani Abidi , keynote presentation
4.15 pm	Tracey Rose , artist talk (online)
5.00 pm	Round up of DAY I by Chus Martínez & Quinn Latimer
5.15 pm	End of DAY I

DAY II – 11 November 2022

On-site and online → [livestream](#)

Part 3

10.00 am	Welcome by Chus Martínez & Quinn Latimer
10.10 am	Reading by Quinn Latimer
10.20 am	Sheelasha Rajbhandari & Hit-Man Gurung , artist talk
11.00 am	Françoise Vergès , talk (online)
11.40 am	Christian Campbell , poetry reading
12.00 pm	Lunch break

Part 4

2.00 pm	Welcome by Chus Martínez & Quinn Latimer
2.10 pm	Astrit Ismaili , performative artist talk
2.50 pm	Marie Hélène Pereira , curatorial conversation
3.30 pm	Kara Springer , performative artist talk
4.00 pm	Ruanne Abou-Rahme & Basel Abbas , screening and conversation (online)
4.40 pm	Round up DAY II by Chus Martínez & Quinn Latimer
5.00 pm	End of DAY II

BIOGRAPHIES OF PARTICIPANTS

JUMANA EMIL ABBOD was born in Shefa-'Amr, Galilee. Her artistic practice constellates personal stories and collective mythologies, weaving folklore and contemporary tales to navigate themes of memory and dispossession. Employing drawing, video, performance, objects, and text, she surveys place and resilience amidst the topography of Palestine. She lives and works in Jerusalem and London.

BANI ABIDI was born in Karachi, Pakistan. She studied painting and printmaking at the National College of Arts, in Lahore, and later attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her work addresses, in part, forms of nationalism amid the Indian-Pakistani conflict and the violent legacy of partition.

BASEL ABBAS and **RUANNE ABOU-RAHME** investigate the political, visceral, and material possibilities of sound, image, text, and site. Their works, from multi-media installations to live sound/image performances, probe the slippages between actuality and projection, fiction and myth and desire. Abbas was born in Nicosia, Cyprus. Abou-Rahme was born in Boston. They live and work in New York City and Ramallah.

CHRISTIAN CAMPBELL is a Trinidadian Bahamian poet, essayist, and cultural critic who studied at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar and received his PhD from Duke University. He is the author of *Running the Dusk* (2010), which won the Aldeburgh First Collection Prize. In 2015 *Running the Dusk* was translated into Spanish and published in Cuba as *Correr el Crepúsculo*. He lives and works in New York City but is currently based in Basel.

ASTRIT ISMAILI was born in Kosovo and is based in Amsterdam. Their artistic practice features bodies that consist of both imaginary and material realities, using alter egos, body extensions, and wearable music instruments to embody possibilities for becoming. In the act of singing they explore the role of voice in pop culture and identity politics, asking what it means to make audible a body politic.

SAODAT ISMAILOVA was born in Uzbekistan. In her moving-image works, which blur fictional and documentary practices, myth and the real, Ismailova draws from the specific cultural identity and history of Central Asia, often through ancestral knowledge and epic folklore stories featuring women as protagonists, to reveal a broader understanding of what it is to be human.

ACAYE KERUNEN is an artist, performer, storyteller, writer, and activist based in Kampala, Uganda. She graduated with a BSc in Mass Communication from the Islamic University in Uganda, Mbale. Her installation works—featuring hand stitching, appending, knotting, and weaving—are often made with local craftswomen, querying the line between fine art and craft, and centering methodologies of performance, collaboration, social work, and environmental consciousness.

QUINN LATIMER was born in Venice, California; she lives and works in Basel and Athens. A poet, critic, editor, performer, and sometimes curator, she is Head of the MA at Institute Art Gender Nature. Her books include *Like a Woman: Essays, Readings, Poems* (2017) and *Rumored Animals* (2012). She was editor-in-chief of publications for documenta 14, and she recently curated the exhibition *SIREN (some poetics)*, which explores technologies of myth and mouth, earth and alarm, at Amant, in New York.

TESSA MARS was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. In her painting and performance practice she proposes storytelling and image-making as transformative strategies for survival, resistance, and healing. Her work is centered around Tesselines, her hybrid alter ego based on the leader of the Haitian revolution, Jean-Jacques Dessalines; through her, Mars investigates gender, history, tradition, and narrative. She is a resident fellow at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam.

CHUS MARTÍNEZ was born in Spain and studied philosophy and art history in New York. A writer and curator, she is Head of Institute Art Gender Nature, FHNW Academy of Art and Design in Basel. She is curator of Ocean Space, in Venice, for TBA21–Academy, and curatorial director of der TANK, in Basel. Her books include *Like This: Natural Intelligence As Seen By Art* (2022), *Corona Tales: Let Life Happen to You* (2020), and *Club Univers* (2017).

MARIE HÉLÈNE PEREIRA was born in Senegal. She is Director of Programs for RAW Material Company–Centre for Art, Knowledge and Society, in Dakar. Her curatorial projects often concern the politics of identity and migration histories, and include *Scattered Seeds*, in Cali, Colombia, as well as *Canine Wisdom for the Barking Dog/The Dog Done Gone Deaf: Exploring The Sonic Cosmologies of Halim El-Dabh*, at the Dakar Biennale of Contemporary African Art, in 2018.

SHEELASHA RAJBHANDARI and **HIT MAN GURUNG** are Nepalese artists and curators based in Kathmandu. Rajbhandari was born in Kathmandu; her practice surveys Nepal's history and geopolitical positioning through traditional folklore, oral histories, mythology, performance, and ritual. Gurung was born in Nepal; his work concerns mass migrations of Nepalese laborers, urban development, and the legacies of the Nepalese Civil War and its Maoist insurgencies.

TRACEY ROSE was born in Durban, South Africa. Her performative practice often translates to and is accompanied by photography, video, installation, and digital prints. At once anarchic and carnivalesque, Rose's work explores issues around post-coloniality, gender and sexuality, race and repatriation. In 2004 Rose attended The South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance and later obtained her Master of Fine Arts, Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK in 2007. She lives and works in Johannesburg.

KARA SPRINGER is an artist of Jamaican and Bajan heritage, who was born in Bridgetown, Barbados, and raised in Southern Ontario, Canada. Her work is concerned with care and armature—the underlying structure that holds the flesh of a body in place. Working with photography, sculpture, and site-specific interventions, she surveys forms of structural support within urban infrastructure and systems of institutional and political power. She is a current resident of Atelier Mondial in Basel.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS was born in Paris and grew up in La Réunion and Algeria. A writer, thinker, activist, and public educator, she holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of California, Berkeley. The author of many books, including *A Decolonial Feminism* and *Wombs of Women*, she writes on postcolonial theory, creolization, psychoanalysis, slavery, and economies of predation. She has directed films about Aimé Césaire and Maryse Condé, as well as organized exhibitions on legacies of slavery and gender at the Louvre, Paris.