

DIASPORA PAVILION 2: VENICE

A new commission by
Shiraz Bayjoo
in collaboration with
Nicolas Faubert and
Siyabonga Mthembu



Zot Konn – Yeman / They know – the wise / Lo conoscono – il saggio

20 — 22 April

Performances held daily

12-12:30, 15-15:30, 18-18:30

Teatrino Groggia / Groggia Theatre
Cannaregio 3150, Venice, Italy

For ICF's Venice iteration of our trans-national Diaspora Pavilion 2 project, Shiraz Bayjoo has developed a new performance and installation in collaboration with Nicolas Faubert and Siyabonga Mthembu. This new commission, conceived by Bayjoo, features moving image, sculptural installation, choreographed movement enacted by Faubert and vocal performances by Mthembu.

The title of the commission, Zot Konn – Yeman, brings together Mauritian Creole and the Bantu language Fang, merging the two African languages spoken by Bayjoo and Faubert's ancestors. Translated as 'they know – the wise' the title refers to a collective questioning of existing systems of knowledge and a pursuit of future silos for ancestral knowledges. The work juxtaposes sites of origin and extraction, methodologies of preservation and domination, and the global interconnection and fragmentation rendered by colonialism.

The installation features eight fabric sculptures hung from the ceiling and a film projected onto large screens at either end of the theatre. The still and moving images featured in these works were captured and compiled by Bayjoo, and chart an active and responsive mapping of collections that are relics of empire from a diasporic perspective, and the landscapes that

bore witness to that history. The footage brings together multiple journeys and lines of enquiry, most notably a body of research that Bayjoo has been conducting at the Botanic Gardens at Kew in London into the the transplantation of species from Mauritius to the UK during colonial rule and their current place in the nation's archives. The film contains five chapters: beginning with the discovery of the immensity of these colonial collections and an interrogation of the extraction their existence is dependent on; an acknowledgement of the beauty of the objects and stories held within these collections; a grappling with the inaccessibility of the archive to those represented within it and the hypocrisy of that structure; fostering connections with the ancestral objects held within the archive; and a realisation of the depth of erasure, as well as the possibilities of re-birth inherent in this process.

In response to these chapters, Bayjoo and Faubert have developed a dance piece which is an unfolding bodily engagement with the featured landscapes and plants, a navigation of the glass houses that hold them, and a response to the magnitude of such a collection. Faubert takes up the role of negotiator, tracing and moving with these dislocated plants, objects and archival fragments. Mthembu responds to the installation through song, which is performed live alongside a soundscape developed in collaboration with Nobuhle Ashanti. Together, these visual, spatial and sonic elements explore the emotional resonance and symbolism of these institutions and the practices of resource mining and knowledge production upon which they are built.

The presentation of Zot Konn – Yemen in the Groggia Theatre will span ten performances over four days, and alludes to the relationships between entertainment, the act of collecting, and the circulation of knowledge in the formation and preservation of empires.

ICF's Diaspora Pavilion 2 is a trans-national, collaborative project that advances the organisation's engagement with diaspora as a critical concept following the first Diaspora Pavilion held during the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017. Rather than presenting a singular, static exhibition for the duration of the 59th Biennale, we made the decision to interrogate and complicate the term diaspora across various curatorial formats showcasing work by a global cohort of artists through new partnerships with organisations in Sydney, London and Venice.

Each iteration of the project has been unique and site-specific, aimed at supporting new commissions rather than maintaining and touring a large-scale exhibition. The exchanges we are having as the project unfolds all contribute to 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. Our presence in Venice this year maintains a critique of the model of a national pavilion and the exclusivity of the Biennale, continues our commitment to fostering spaces where artists can critically respond to such framings, and seeks to do so through more sustainable approaches to working internationally.

Curated by Jessica Taylor.

Zot Konn – Yeman is informed by research Bayjoo undertook during a residency with Delfina Foundation and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew with support from Cockayne - Grants for the Arts and The London Community Foundation.

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