

**Sharjah Biennial 15:
Thinking Historically in the Present
7 February–11 June 2023**



**March Meeting 2023:
The Postcolonial Constellation:
Art, Culture, Politics after 1960
9–12 March 2023
Africa Hall, Sharjah ***

The Postcolonial Constellation: Art, Culture, Politics after 1960 examines the forces that have shaped the production and reception of art across the world from 1960 to the present, reconfiguring the cartographies of global modernism and contemporary art. It will offer discursive space to explore artistic, political and cultural positions traversing subalternity and self-determination, first nation and Indigenous practices, creolisation, hybridity and supranational formations, such as the Black Atlantic, diasporas, exile and statelessness. It will thus constitute a dynamic intersection of artistic, ideological and philosophical perspectives on decolonisation—a field of scholarship originally developed within postcolonial studies.

Delineating a moment in which the notion of a consolidated nation-state is challenged by the remarkable resilience of individual, non-state and counter-institutional models of sovereignty, autonomy, identity and subjectivity, *The Postcolonial Constellation* studies the global political, social and economic systemic and structural shifts that have characterised our world since the 1960s. It does so by revisiting and reanimating the archives and histories of this period; by examining contemporaneous artistic and political practices, theories and cultural production testifying to that time and by presenting ideas, artists, artworks and critical theory that offer parallax views of our convulsive world.

The Postcolonial Constellation reflects on the movements and interactions of artists, filmmakers, performers, thinkers, writers, philosophers, public intellectuals, activists, guerrilla movements and other societal actors within and beyond the limiting framework of the 'sovereign nation-state'. To the extent that *The Postcolonial Constellation* understands the global present as intimately tied to histories of the postcolonial, MM 2023 and the other platforms of SB15 constitute critical spaces for 'thinking historically in the present'.

**The talks, panels and presentations will take place at the Africa Hall while the performances and film screenings will take place at Sharjah Art Foundation venues and partner institutions. All times listed are Gulf Standard Time (GMT +4).*

This programme is made possible through support from the Terra Foundation for American Art and the International Biennial Association.

Tuesday, 7 March

- 11:30 am–1:00 pm **Tour of Al Hamriyah venues**
(Shuttle will depart from Information Centre, Al Mureijah Square to Al Hamriyah at 11:00 am)
- 1:30 pm–2:00 pm **Tour of The Flying Saucer**
(Shuttle will depart from Al Hamriyah to The Flying Saucer at 1:00 pm)
- 4:00 pm–4:30 pm **Tour of Khalid Bin Mohammed School (The Africa Institute)**
(Shuttle will depart from The Flying Saucer to Khalid Bin Mohammed School (The Africa Institute) at 2:00 pm)
- 4:30 pm–5:30 pm **Tour of Old Al Jubail Vegetable Market**
(Shuttle will depart from Khalid Bin Mohammed School (The Africa Institute) to Old Al Jubail Vegetable Market at 4:30 pm)
- 6:00 pm–8:00 pm **Tour of Bank Street Building, Al Hisn, Calligraphy Square**
(Shuttle will depart from Old Al Jubail Vegetable Market to Calligraphy Square at 5:30 pm)
- 8:30 pm–9:00 pm **My Land My Memory**
Performance by **Marwah AlMugait**
Calligraphy Square

Wednesday, 8 March

- 11:30 am – 1:30 pm **Tour of Al Mureijah Square venues
(Galleries 1–6 and Heritage Houses)**
- 3:30 pm–4:30 pm **IBA Stage: Sharjah Biennial 15**
Talk
Hoor Al Qasimi (President and Director, Sharjah Art Foundation);
Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons (Cornelius Vanderbilt Endowed Chair Professor of Fine Arts, Art AS | Vanderbilt University); and
Octavio Zaya (Art critic and curator)
Moderator: **Christian Oxenius** (Writer and curator)
Sharjah Institute of Theatrical Arts, Al Mureijah

In the first IBA Stage in front of a live audience, Hoor Al Qasimi, president of International Biennial Association (2017–present), will discuss her vision in developing Sharjah Biennial 15: Thinking Historically in the Present and her collaboration with the late Okwui Enwezor.

5:00 pm–7:00 pm **Tour of Arts Square venues**
(Bait Al Serkal, Sharjah Art Museum, Bait Obaid Al Shamsi)

7:00 pm–7:45 pm **Yet Still Moving**
Performance by **Naiza Khan**, accompanied by **Asma Mundrawala**,
Nabeel Al Mazem and **Haider Rahman** on flute.
Bait Obaid Al Shamsi, Arts Square

Thursday, 9 March

9:30 am–10:00 am Registration

10:00 am–10:15 am Welcome remarks
Hoor Al Qasimi (President and Director, Sharjah Art Foundatin)

10:15 am–11:00 am **Renewing African Art Discourse
within the Postcolonial Constellation**
Keynote
Terry Smith (Professor, European Graduate School; Emeritus
Professor, University of Sydney and University of Pittsburgh)

11:00 am–1:00 pm **Revisiting the Global 1960s**
Panel
Mahvish Ahmad (Assistant Professor in Human Rights and Politics,
London School of Economics); **Zeina Maasri** (Senior Lecturer,
History of Art, University of Bristol, remotely); **Jelena Vesić**
(Independent curator, writer, editor and lecturer); and **Zoé Whitley**
(Director and Curator, Chisenhale Gallery)
Moderator: **Christopher J. Lee** (Professor of African History, The
Africa Institute)

The period spanning the late 1950s to early 1970s was marked by major transformations and turbulent events worldwide. Yet, the bulk of the scholarship on it has remained predominantly western-focused, with emphasis on counterculture movements such as the hippies, or events such as Woodstock festival, the Cold War rivalry, the space and arms race, and the Civil Rights Movement in the USA and North America. There is also a corpus of literature on European events such as the Prague Spring or the May 68 student uprising in Paris. However, emerging scholarship on the 1960s has begun to offer more transnational perspectives.

This panel focuses on parallel events in other parts of the world, including the decolonisation and independence movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America as well as the resistance to settler colonialism within the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and the ongoing Palestinian struggle against the brutal Israeli occupation. Lesser-studied landmark events such as the international solidarity with the Vietnamese people in their struggle against American occupation and aggression; the 1966 Tricontinental conference in Havana; the Cuban revolution; the Algerian war for independence; and the

much-ignored war in Biafra, Nigeria will also be under purview. Panelists will reflect on these momentous historical events in relation to the literary, aesthetic and artistic practices of the late twentieth century while contextualising their relevance to the present.

1:00 pm–3:00 pm Lunch

3:00 pm–5:00 pm **States of Exception and States of Emergency:
Art and Visual Culture since the 1970s**

Panel

Patrick Flores (Professor of Art Studies, University of the Philippines); **Anthony Gardner** (Professor of Contemporary Art History, The Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford); **Atreyee Gupta** (Assistant Professor of Global Modern Art; Modern and Contemporary South and Southeast Asian Art, Berkeley); and **Anissa Rahadiningtyas** (Assistant Curator, National Gallery of Singapore)

Moderator: **Iftikhar Dadi** (John H. Burris Professor in History of Art, Cornell University)

The decades following the 1970s were characterised by the crises of newly independent nation-states around the world. This was further complicated by the implementation of structural adjustment and neoliberal policies prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, eventually leading to the privatisation of the public sector and educational systems. In Africa, Asia and Latin America, these policies resulted in enlarged security apparatuses, vicious cycles of military coups, internal ethnic strife and civil wars, and, in some cases such as in Somalia, a total collapse of the state.

In the arts and culture arenas, the post 1980s period marked a rising interest from western museums as well as private and public institutions in exhibiting and collecting works by contemporary non-western artists. However, this trend unfolded within a xenophobic environment shaped by anti-immigration legislation, the closing of borders to non-western people and the criminalisation of solidarity with the legitimate struggles of dispossessed communities in the Global South. This continued in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the total disregard for lives lost in the mass exodus of non-western people crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

Panelists will assess this paradox in the context of the mushrooming of biennials and contemporary art forums in places like Havana, Dakar, Sharjah, Kochi, Singapore, and Gwangju, that have served as alternatives to western-oriented platforms such as the Venice Biennale and documenta. Speakers will discuss the implications of such paradoxical phenomenon for the writing of new art histories and more inclusive narratives.

8:30 pm–9:30 pm **Still We Rise**, a film by **John Harvey**
Screening
Mirage City Cinema, Al Mureijah Square
(Shuttle will depart from Africa Hall to Al Mureijah Square
at 6:00 pm)

Friday, 10 March

9:30 am–10:15 am Registration

10:15 am–11:00 am **Building the Postcolonial Imaginary:
The Early History of the Institute of International Visual Arts
(Iniva) 1994–2004**
Keynote
Gilane Tawadros (Director, Whitechapel Art Gallery, remotely)

11:00 am–1:00 pm **Global Art Cartographies and New Art Histories**
Panel
Anna Arabindan-Kesson (Associate Professor of African American and Black Diasporic Art, Princeton University and Senior Research Fellow, Art Gallery of Western Australia); **Eddie Chambers** (Professor of Art History and African Diaspora Art, The David Bruton, Jr. Centennial Professorship in Art History, University of Texas at Austin); **Mithu Sen** (artist); and **Nina Tonga** (Curator of Contemporary Art, Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand)
Moderator: **Salwa Mikdadi** (Professor of Practice of Art History, NYU Abu Dhabi and Director and Principle Investigator, al Mawrid Arab Center for the Study of Art)

For most of the twentieth century, art historical discourse remained Eurocentric and was defined by a linear narrative spanning ancient to medieval to modern and contemporary. Faculty and curatorial positions in most western institutions have been premised on such a chronological periodisation. Consequently, few art history specialists of Asia, Africa and Latin America have been afforded the opportunity to research, teach and curate their areas in a comparative register that situates them as an integral dimension of global modern art historical narratives. In the past two decades, the pushback against such a hegemonic perspective towards Eurocentric art history has yielded a more global and comparativist approach that considers these imperatives and exists in dialogue with the parallel emergence of queer, feminist and Indigenous art histories.

Accordingly, the panelists will reflect on the cartographies of art history and the efforts towards more global and comparativist approaches to the discipline. They will reflect on the nature and critical discourses of what could be described as ‘new art histories’ in the making.

1:00 pm–3:00 pm Lunch

3:00 pm–5:00 pm **Megacity: Urbanisation, Challenges and Opportunities**

Panel

Nadi Abusaada (Postdoctoral Fellow, Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture, ETH Zürich); **Nancy Lin** (Klarman Postdoctoral Fellow, Cornell University); **Pamela Nguyen Corey** (Associate Professor of Art History, Fulbright University Vietnam); and **AbdouMaliq Simone** (Senior Professorial Fellow, Urban Institute, University of Sheffield; remotely)

Moderator: **Kamran Ali** (Professor of Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin)

In the neoliberal era, cities pose novel challenges and offer previously unimagined opportunities for its inhabitants, such as educational and professional advancements as well as living circumstances that are no longer circumscribed by rural societal formations. Still, new urban migrants face persistent discrimination, highly unequal access to housing and services and increasingly toxic environmental conditions. Growing and sprawling urban settlements also enact extractive relationships with the informal labour economy and with the natural resources around them. Urbanisation, arguably, deeply shapes the most innovative and emergent cultural formations, in music, cinema, art and media.

The panelists, whose expertise represents a wide range of practices and theoretical positions, will reflect on the above-mentioned issues related to urbanisation, ranging from the rise of megacities and their histories, to the current challenges of inequalities and environmental issues.

7:00 pm–7:45 pm **Resetting Birds' Memories**

Performance by **Kiluanji Kia Henda**

Sharjah Performing Arts Academy

(Shuttle will depart from Africa Hall to Sharjah Performing Arts Academy at 6:00 pm)

Saturday, 11 March

9:30 am–10:15 am Registration

10:15–11:00 am **By Any Means Necessary:
When Black Abstraction Becomes Black Representation**

Keynote

Margo Crawford (The Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Professor for Faculty Excellence, University of Pennsylvania)

11:00 am–1:00 pm **The Archive and Art History**

Panel

Jihan El Tahri (Director, Big Sister Productions); **John Tain** (Head of Research, Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong); **Krista Thompson** (Mary

Jane Crowe Professor in Art History, Northwestern University); and **Simon Soon Sien Yong** (Senior Lecturer in Southeast Asian Art History, Universiti Malaya)

Moderator: **Elizabeth Harney** (Associate Professor of Art History, University of Toronto)

The archive, as we traditionally understand it, is a record of documents and artefacts that provide information and enable researchers to construct art historical narratives. It is assumed to be indispensable in preserving the past, recording our present and preserving knowledge for the future. Offering insights on artists, their lives and their artworks, alongside overall societal transformations and processes, the archive is presumably a repository of truth. Yet, the archive is always incomplete, marked as it is by the absence of voices of marginalised individuals and communities. Such voices are often non-existent or totally ignored due to lack of access or power, especially in the context of the Global South.

In his masterful book, *Silencing the Past* (1995), Michel-Rolph Trouillot has shown that there are episodes of historical documentation in which histories, truths and experiences are deliberately 'silenced or persistently forgotten'. These silences have resulted in the exclusion of women, non-western and Indigenous artists, among other gendered or racialised minorities, from larger art historical narratives. To address these issues, theorists such as Saidiya Hartman have introduced the concept of 'critical fabulation', which involves combining historical and archival research with critical theory and fictional narratives to fill in the silences and erasures in historical records. The archive, when recontextualised, may facilitate the reanimation of history by combining existing records with critical fabulations and other methodologies to address such gaps. The panelists will discuss the archive within this critical framework and in relation to knowledge-making, control, access and potential.

1:00 pm–3:00 pm Lunch

3:00 pm–5:00 pm **Art in the Age of Migration, Ecology and Environment**

Panel

Tayeba Begum Lipi (Artist, Co-Founder and Trustee of Britto Arts Trust); **Heather Igloliorte** (University Research Chair in Circumpolar Indigenous Arts, Concordia University); **Sonal Khullar** (W. Norman Brown Associate Professor of South Asian Studies, University of Pennsylvania); and **Charlene Villaseñor Black** (Professor of Art History and Chicana/o Studies, UCLA)

Moderator: **Terri Geis** (Visiting Associate Professor of Art and Art History, NYU Abu Dhabi)

Wars, repressive regimes, economic crises and deepening environmental catastrophes in recent decades have triggered unprecedented large-scale human migration from the Global South (Asia, Africa and South and Central America, the Syrian war and the epic scale crisis it triggered) to the Euro-American North. How have artists, writers and visual cultures responded to these developments?

This panel will explore the possibilities and responsibilities of cultural production and policy making in response to mass migration, the politics of immigration, human capital flight, labour conditions and the resulting rise in new forms of slavery and indenture. Panelists will discuss new theories, critical perspectives and practices that have emerged in recent years that provide pathways for rethinking our understanding of the biosphere and our human interaction with the changing, increasingly hostile environment.

7:00 pm–8:00 pm **Windows of Displacement**
Performance by **Akeim Toussaint Buck**
Bait Obaid Al Shamsi, Arts Square
(Shuttle will depart from Africa Hall to Bait Obaid Al Shamsi, Arts Square at 6:00 pm)

Sunday, 12 March

9:30 am–10:15 am Registration

10:15 am–11:00 am **Black Radicalism and the Archive: Inventories of Fire**
Keynote
Brent Hayes Edwards (Peng Family Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University)

11:00 am–1:00 pm **Reparations and Repatriation: New Developments and Discourses**
Panel
Esra Akcan (The Michael A. McCarthy Professor, Cornell University); **Manthia Diawara** (Distinguished University Professor, New York University); **Suha Hasan** (Architect, Researcher and Founder, ASH); and **Salamishah Tillet** (Henry Rutgers Professor of African American Studies, Rutgers University)
Moderator: **Chika Okeke-Agulu** (Robert Schirmer Professor of Art and Archaeology and African American Studies, Princeton University)

International debates and advocacy around the repatriation of artefacts, human remains and cultural heritage acquired by colonial powers and held in western museums and institutions have accelerated over the past few years. Many state and private institutions in Europe and the United States have pledged or signalled their support of repatriation, yet, it is far from clear how it fits into broader and more consequential questions of restitution. Moreover, what new tactics and approaches are needed to confront the conscription of repatriation and restitution of cultural heritage by neo-nationalist policy makers in defence of their colonial heritage?

This panel will also delve into the historical question of racial reparations related to the enslavement of Africans between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the United States the promise of reparative land redistribution during and after the Civil War has

remained largely unfulfilled. What are the possibilities and challenges facing racial reparation in former slaveholding societies? And how might the recent gains in cultural repatriation and restitution compromise or catalyse arguments and campaigns for racial reparation?

1:00 pm–3:00 pm Lunch

3:00 pm–5:00 pm **The Return of stolen First Nation people and culture**

Panel

John Harvey (Writer, Brown Cabs); **Matthew Lutton** (Artistic Director, Malthouse Theatre); and **Jason Tamiru** (Director and Cultural Custodian, Malthouse Theatre)

Moderator: **Surafel Abebe** (Assistant Professor, Performance Studies and Theory, The Africa Institute)

The Return is a play about the theft of First Nation Australian bodily remains and culture in the past, and the importance of returning and repatriating cultural artefacts and Indigenous bodily remains to their spiritual home in Australia. Creators of *The Return*, including cultural custodian and director Jason Tamiru, writer John Harvey, and co-director Matthew Lutton, discuss the culture and ceremony of Indigenous Australians that is the foundation of the play, the five-year writing and research process that was undertaken, and how the story was brought to life onstage through a collaboration with a major theatre company in Australia. Presentations will feature music, image, storytelling, and discussion.

9:00 pm–10:00 pm Performance by **Abdullah Ibrahim**
Sharjah Performing Arts Academy
(Shuttle will depart from Africa Hall at 6:00 pm)

Monday, 13 March 2023

10:00–11:00 am **Tour of Khorfakkan Art Centre**
(Shuttle will depart from Information Centre, Al Mureijah Square to Khorfakkan Art Centre at 8:30 am)

12:00 pm–1:00 pm **Tour of Kalba Kindergarten**
(Shuttle will depart from Khorfakkan Art Centre to Kalba Kindergarten at 11:00 am)

3:00 pm–4:00 pm **Tour of Kalba Ice Factory**
(Shuttle will depart from Kalba Kindergarten to Kalba Ice Factory at 1:00 pm)

5:30 pm–7:00 pm **Tour of Al Dhaid venues**
(Shuttle will depart from Kalba Ice Factory to Al Dhaid at 4:00 pm)