

JUNE 5 – AUGUST 10, 2024

AMINA AGUEZNAY  
SEBA CALFUQUEO  
IV CHAN  
TAMAR ETTUN  
SERENE HUI  
SIREN EUN YOUNG JUNG  
MÔNICA VENTURA  
OSÍAS YANOV

CURATED BY: ROXANA FABIUS,  
KOBE KO, AND BEYA OTHMANI

# Cantando Bajito Incantations

WITH CURATORIAL  
ADVISORY GROUP:  
ISIS AWAD, MARÍA CARRI,  
ZASHA COLAH, MARIA CATARINA  
DUNCAN, MARIE HÉLÈNE  
PEREIRA, MINDY SEU, AND  
SUSANA VARGAS CERVANTES

**Ford  
Foundation  
Gallery**

*Cantando Bajito: Incantations* is the second movement of three exhibitions.

Translated into English as “singing softly,” the series title is drawn from a phrase used by Dora María Téllez Argüello,

a now-liberated Nicaraguan political prisoner, to describe the singing exercises she did while incarcerated in isolation. Helping her to conserve her voice and defeat the political terror she endured, Téllez’s quiet singing became a powerful strategy for survival and resistance. Conceived in three movements, *Cantando Bajito* features artists who explore similar forms of creative resistance in the wake of widespread gender-based violence.

1 Scholar Yanira Zúñiga Añazco explains her use of the term feminized bodies, writing: “The female body is conceived as the opposite of the sovereign territory — the male body — and, consequently, it is treated as a territory to occupy. The same occurs, by extension, with other bodies, those that do not accommodate themselves to the ideal male body, which is, therefore, feminized” (217). Throughout this

*Cantando Bajito: Incantations* brings together artists who consider ancestral, contemporary, and future-facing networks of care and support that provide feminized bodies with communities, spaces to retreat to, and tools for preparing against potential violence.<sup>1</sup> These networks have often existed in the private sphere, sometimes in the shadows, and have been channeled, not through history books, but through material

project, we use the term feminized bodies to refer to a state of embodied vulnerability without conforming to specific gender norms. In using this term, we also reflect an understanding of vulnerability defined, not only by gender, but also by social, material, and geopolitical relations. Yanira Zúñiga Añazco, “Cuerpo, Género y Derecho. Apuntes para una teoría crítica de las relaciones entre cuerpo, poder y subjetividad” (“Body, Gender and Law. Notes for a critical theory of the relationships between body, power and subjectivity”), *Ius et Praxis* 24 (3) (2018): 209–254. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-00122018000300209>.

- 2 Silvia Federici, Liz Mason-Deese, and Susana Draper, introduction to *Feminicide and Global Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Common Notions, 2021), 12.

and immaterial forms of transmission such as rituals, secret languages, crafts, and tales.

*Incantations* evokes the repeating of magical words carrying the power to alter reality through unseen or concealed effects. Inspired by the subversive potentials of such practices, the exhibition considers feminized systems for preserving and concealing information over centuries — such as Nüshu, a script traditionally transmitted from mother to daughter in China, symbols used in Moroccan Berber culture, or mushroom foraging within Mapuche communities in Chile — as vital tools that turn violent contexts into places for creating new solidarities, and that move beyond resistance and survival into ‘re-existence.’

*Incantations* is a tribute to the concept of ‘re-existence,’ coined by Global South feminist activists who resist profound violence in their everyday lives. Introducing the book *Feminicide and Global Accumulation*, the editors explain re-existence as turning spaces of violence into ones for weaving new alliances, strengthening analyses, and fostering commitment to the practical struggle, writing that “re-existence goes beyond resistance and the reproduction of already-existing forms of life to imagine other forms of collective existence.”<sup>2</sup>

*Incantations* reflects the potentials of the occult in fostering modes of re-existence. ‘Incantation’ originates from the Latin word *incantare* (‘to enchant’) and is derived from *cantare* (‘to sing’), indicating that chanting has always been associated with magical rituals, just as singing has with resistance. Tales of witches and feminine deities often ascribe them with monstrous and “devilish”

characteristics, suggesting their transgressive positioning outside patriarchal norms. Can we reconsider these mythical figures as immaterial traces embodying a transgenerational struggle? How can they be reclaimed in contemporary practices of re-existence? In Tamar Ettun’s sculptural work, *Purple Placenta* (2024), the artist revisits Lilit, a feminine spirit demon with origins in ancient Mesopotamia and appearances in Judaic mythology whose likeness was used in protective rites. Building on Lilit’s long-standing significance in the artist’s life, Ettun conjures Lilit out from misogynistic associations into a fluid, multiform being symbolizing the strengths of complexity, empathy, and vulnerability. Similarly, IV Chan’s installation *Ritual rehearsal : the Sacred and the Profane* (2020–2024) reinterprets the myth of the rebirth of Nezha, a protection deity in several Chinese traditional religions. In Chan’s piece, Nezha’s symbolic return of his flesh and bones to his parents gives rise to a transfiguration into lotus roots, pods, and flowers, releasing the body from family ties into a powerful, gender-fluid being.

In conceiving *Incantations*, we also explored other terms, such as ‘*conciliabules*’ (a French word for a secret conversation) and ‘whispers,’ reflecting the exhibition’s focus on concealed resistance. “Conciliabules” is the title of a chapter in the novel *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* by feminist author Assia Djebar that interweaves her own life experiences with feminized experiences of the 20th-century Algerian struggle for independence. In “Conciliabules,” the author describes her encounter with five Algerian widows who had been raped by French soldiers and who used metaphors instead of direct language to recount the violent details of the

3 Assia Djebar, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, trans. Dorothy S. Blair (London: Quartet, 1985), 178.

aggression. This *conciliabule* (‘secret conversation’) uses obscuring language in an act of self-protection from violent memories. In another chapter, “Whispers,” the author ponders the value of concealment in surviving violence, writing that “...elected silence implies resistance still intact...”<sup>3</sup>

How, then, might silences and invisibility be understood as subversive practices driven by vulnerability? The exhibition considers strategies used by feminized bodies to encode knowledge of resistance and survival, such as disguise, impersonation, ornamentation, symbols, alphabets, etc.

In Amina Agueznay's fiber-based piece *Enfouissements (Acts of Burying)* (2024), jewelry fragments encoded with symbolic verses are woven into the fibers of a rug, itself patterned on a traditional Moroccan wedding veil with symbolic details protecting the bride. Carrying this coded language within it, the work evokes how covert resistance may counter the erasures of gender-based violence. In Serene Hui's print series *Gossip* and video *Scold* (both 2022), passages from writers Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Anne Carson are, respectively, encoded through obscuring, protective translations and used to challenge the casting of feminine voices as irrational and unpleasant. Mônica Ventura's sculptural work *O Sorriso de Acotirene (Acotirene's Smile)* (2018) revisits the story of Acotirene, a figure linked to Quilombo dos Palmares, who fought against enslavement in 17th-century Brazil. The fluid power of the forms of gourds connects symbolically to ancestral feminine creative strength while evoking the artist's effort to bring continuity to her position as an artist and a Black woman within spaces often forbidden for racialized bodies. And Seba Calfuqueo's video work *MAPU KUFÜLL (Mariscos de tierra [hongos]) (MAPU KUFÜLL (LAND SEAFOOD [mushrooms]))* (2020) reflects the Mapuche people's traditional practice of foraging mushrooms, an important food for them during Chilean military campaigns into their territories (1861–1883) and today. A grandmother's teachings guide a young Mapuche person to gather, respect, and protect the mushrooms, reflecting their role as a symbol of resistance for the Mapuche people.

*Incantations* also looks at spaces in which such alliances form, considering the material conditions that allow an environment to operate in two layers: a visible surface layer that creates

a protective covering and another beneath it for “undercover” activity. Osías Yanov’s installation *Cuarto oscuro, tetera, cuarto oscuro, mi lugar, baño, síntoma del mundo* (*Dark room, kettle, dark room, my place, bathroom, symptom of the world*) (2023) provides a view into an intimate encounter taking place in a nightclub bathroom. This moment shows how, when the right to assemble is denied, the stall affords its own assembly space, evoking the role night-life plays as a site for social activism. And siren eun young jung’s *Yeoseong Gukgeuk Project*, ongoing since 2008, focuses on the

4 jung has discussed the community’s symbolic way of referring to its theatrical form: “Yeoseong Gukgeuk means Women’s National Theater. They really wanted to create their own national art form, but it was symbolic. The government did not support them.” siren eun young jung, “The Dramatically Forgotten: Redefining traditional Korean theatre and gender politics,” interview by Renée McMillan, *Platform Magazine*, September 12, 2021. <https://www.platform-magazine.com/art/siren-eun-jung>.

history and culture of Yeoseong Gukgeuk (‘Women’s National Theater,’ a name used symbolically to indicate its significance<sup>4</sup>) in mid-20th century South Korea, where women theater-makers found refuge to create a community that both protected and enabled them to exist.

Protection takes many forms in this exhibition, but always comes enveloped in the possession of shared knowledge, whether through metaphysical practices, or the body-to-body protections of kinship. These spaces are created to hold ways of being that might seem magical or esoteric from the outside, but always have reason behind them. Logics sometimes disregarded because they form outside or in the shadows of dominating patriarchal world-views are celebrated in the exhibition for their role in protecting all life.

The sharing of information represented in these artworks—whether through a talisman, a secret encounter, or a way to perform—is in itself an act of generosity, survival, and love. In her book *All About Love: New Visions*, activist and writer bell hooks explores love from multiple perspectives, from the individual to the collective, and shows that it is in community and mutuality that we learn to love,

because “...giving brings us into communion with everyone. The mutual practice of giving and receiving is an everyday ritual when we know true love...In the midst of such love we need never fear abandonment. This is the most precious gift true love offers — the experience of knowing we always belong.”<sup>5</sup>  
*Incantations* celebrates these spaces of giving, with their flaws and limitations, from a place of love.

5 bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow Publishers, 2001), 165.

**MÔNICA VENTURA**

(Brazil, b. 1985, lives and works in São Paulo)

*O Sorriso de Acotirene*  
(*Acotirene's Smile*), 2018

Gourds, sisal, straw, steel,  
iron, various materials

8 × 6.5 × 6.5 feet





Mônica Ventura researches Afro-Amerindian, feminine philosophies and material cultures, particularly spaces created by and for Black women, and combines the results of this investigation with personal experiences to develop her artistic practice.

In the work *O Sorriso de Acotirene (Acotirene's Smile)* (2018), Ventura retells the story of Acotirene, a woman from Quilombo dos Palmares who was an influential political and community leader. Acotirene was linked to an important *mocambo*—one of several free communities established by people who had escaped enslavement in territories of colonial Brazil—located within the large association of Quilombo dos Palmares. During the 17th century, this self-governed community grew to a population of at least eleven thousand, larger than that of Rio de Janeiro, becoming the largest free Black state in the Americas.

The sculpture is composed of gourds, beads, and sisal, which carry symbolic value that is intrinsic to the themes proposed by the work. Throughout history, gourds became associated with a range of uses and symbols. They are used for nourishment, but also in rituals practiced within African-derived religions in the Americas. In those traditional ceremonial and devotional practices, the gourd is used in different ways, including as a medicine repository, a representation of the male phallus, a symbol of fertility, and more. Known as the “pot of life,” it is believed to hold the mysteries of healing, life, and death. In certain spiritual practices, each person has their own gourd, which symbolizes the unique individual, while also serving as a spiritual guide.

Ventura's great figure is a portrait of Acotirene, rising up over the viewer, guiding and providing advice and care through symbolic meanings, revindicating her legacy for future generations. The installation honoring her is alive and breathing; if it gets disposed of one day, nature will take back its materials.



## IV CHAN

(Hong Kong, b. 1978,  
lives and works in  
Hong Kong)

*Ritual rehearsal : the  
Sacred and the Profane,*  
2020–2024

Fabric, wax, gauze  
handkerchief, cotton  
stuffing, beading,  
hair, nail, thread  
Dimensions variable

In IV Chan's piece *Ritual rehearsal : the Sacred and the Profane* (2020–2024), the artist borrows the Chinese folk myth of Nezha's rebirth — Nezha is well known for his refusal to bring shame to his family and his decision to return his own flesh and bones to his parents. This act is a symbolic gesture of self-exile aimed at terminating his family ties. His reincarnated body is transfigured into the form of lotus roots, pods, and flowers — the lotus is seen as a symbol of purity. Through the years, Nezha has become a figure symbolizing filial piety in Chinese traditional religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. He is also commonly worshiped as a protection deity.

Chan sees the sacrifice of Nezha as a selfless act and a force of resistance toward the adversary. The transfiguration of the torso can be seen to represent a queer body, a powerful, gender-fluid being of consciousness and autonomous choice.

## SEBA CALFUQUEO

(Chile, b. 1991, lives and works in Santiago)

*MAPU KUFÜLL (Mariscos de tierra [hongos]) (MAPU KUFÜLL (LAND SEAFOOD [mushrooms])), 2020*

3D video animation

5:33

Director and editor:

Seba Calfuqueo

3D animation:

Valentina Riquelme

Original text and voice:

Ange Cayuman

*Trompe* (Mapuche jaw

harp): Eli Wewentxu

English translation:

Jorge Pérez Roldan

Special collaboration with

Museo del Hongo



Seba Calfuqueo's video work *MAPU KUFÜLL (Mariscos de tierra [hongos]) (MAPU KUFÜLL (LAND SEAFOOD [mushrooms]))* (2020) uses the visual language of the video game and virtual reality to take us on a journey into Mapuche cosmological perspectives. The viewer accompanies a young Mapuche person who traverses through a forest in search of sustenance, following the instructions of their grandmother. During their walk, which flows with a steady pace, a reflection interweaves themes including the importance of acts of grat-

itude, asking from and caring for our natural environment, the ancestral memory of respectful harvesting, and the richness of Mapudungun, the Mapuche language.

The Occupation of Araucanía (or “Pacification of Araucanía”) (1861–1883) was a series of military incursions by the Chilean army and settlers into Mapuche territory that led to the incorporation of Araucanía into Chilean national territory. The “Pacification of Araucanía” was the name used by the Chilean authorities for this violent war and acculturation of the territories of the Indigenous Mapuche people. During this period of war, and to this day, mushrooms have been a very important source of food for Mapuche communities. As such, grandparents teach children

techniques for collecting them correctly, without damaging the mycelium so that it can continue to fructify, without inflicting other forms of damage, and with respect for other beings. *Mapu Kufill* ('land seafood') is the Mapudungun name for mushrooms and also the name of this animated story that reflects on the Mapuche people's relationship with nature and on the mushrooms as a symbol of resistance.

Another teaching transmitted by the elders is reflected in the way the young person in the piece explicitly salutes and thanks the waters at the beginning and end of their journey. Water, or *ko* in Mapudungun, has a central place in the concept of "*Itrofill mongen*" ('all forms of life matter'). In fact, "*genule ta ko, gerkelayafuy ta mogen*" is an expression of the Mapuche people that means "life would not exist if we did not have water." This fact is of particular relevance today as countless communities on Mapuche land, and all over the world, have limited access to water because of its privatization.

## OSÍAS YANOV

(Argentina, b. 1980,  
lives and works in  
Buenos Aires)

*Cuarto oscuro, tetera,  
cuarto oscuro, mi lugar,  
baño, síntoma del mundo  
(Dark room, kettle,  
dark room, my place,  
bathroom, symptom  
of the world), 2023*

Iron, plaster, tiles, grid,  
sneakers, turmeric,  
LED tube light  
12 × 4 × 2.5 feet



Osías Yanov's installation *Cuarto oscuro, tetera, cuarto oscuro, mi lugar, baño, síntoma del mundo* (*Dark room, kettle, dark room, my place, bathroom, symptom of the world*) (2023) provides a partial glimpse into a scene of an intimate encounter taking place within a nightclub bathroom, a coming-together doubly enveloped within the protecting walls and within the sphere of nightlife. This view of a protected space suggests the other possible hidden realities that can be found or created within the visible world. With this work, Yanov continues an ongoing exploration of how elements of nightlife in Buenos Aires create sites for social activism, offering a clear nod to the present while also considering it through a historical perspective.

During the military dictatorship in Argentina that started in 1976, artistic practices had to move out of the public sphere into private spaces including party halls, living rooms, or neighborhood clubs. These spaces require encoded secrecies, layering knowledge shared only among those within them.

As a performer, sculptor, and installation artist, Yanov explores conceptual and sensory modes of resisting control over one's subjectivity. The reclaiming of subjectivity is reflected in this sculpture not only through the action required of the viewer, moving around the sculpture to look at it from below or by way of the peephole on the side, but also through its title. A literal translation of the title including the word 'kettle' may seem like an exercise in free association to the unknowing reader. However, those who are familiar with the term will know that in the slang of the Río de la Plata area a *tetera* ('kettle') is a term for a predetermined, safe place in which members of queer communities can meet for intimate encounters.



**siren eun young jung**  
(South Korea, b. 1974,  
lives and works in Seoul)  
Selections from  
*Public yet Private Archive*  
(A Part), 2015, 2024  
Digital prints  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist



**siren eun young jung**

(South Korea, b. 1974,  
lives and works in Seoul)

*Directing for Gender*,  
2010

Single-channel video  
10:15

Staging: Hye Rhee Kim  
Sounds from Yeoseong  
Gukgeuk, 1987

Directing, filming,  
and editing: siren eun  
young jung



siren eun young jung has been working on the *Yeoseong Gukgeuk Project* since 2008. *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* (‘Women’s National Theater,’ a name used symbolically by participants to reflect its significance), is a traditional form of Korean theater in which all elements, including acting, directing, and producing, are performed by women. It formed in South Korea after Korea’s emancipation from Japan and gained popularity and flourished through the 1950s and 1960s. At the end of the 1960s, the South Korean government, hastening toward its goal of becoming a modern nation-state, designated *Changgeuk* (a genre of traditional Korean opera) and *Pansori* (a form of traditional Korean musical storytelling) as cultural assets; at the same time, *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* was judged to be lacking universality because it involved all-women groups, and thus the genre didn’t receive the same designation. As a result of this exclusion, *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* was forgotten after the 1970s, leaving members of the community with a trauma they still carry with them.

Through the project, jung searches for the community’s collective memories of the golden age of *Yeoseong Gukgeuk*, striving to create a platform for these women actors in a contemporary context. The artist focuses on both the community and the status of the women’s company within the history of South Korean

modernization. Her work is also a challenge to rewrite history, advocating alternative narratives to those of the canon.

Through *Public yet Private Archive (A Part)* (2015, 2024), a selection of archival images and newspaper clippings, jung offers glimpses into the public and private lives of the performers of Yeoseong Gukgeuk. The images reveal striking scenes of interrelationships within the community and its rich traditions of costume, makeup, and performance, featuring figures such as Yim Chun Aeng, a popular performer who played male protagonists, and others including Cho Geum Aeng, Cho Young Sook, and Lee Soja.

In the video work *Directing for Gender* (2010), Hye Rhee Kim, a Yeoseong Gukgeuk actor and director, takes the stage to demonstrate through her memories how the women used their bodies when performing as male protagonists. The lost script of a theater piece titled *Muyoungtab* (1955) by Women's Korean Musical Group was rewritten by Kim from memory in 1987 and restaged to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Yim Chun Aeng. In the video work, Kim explains how the Yeoseong Gukgeuk actors channeled qualities associated with *mut* (qualities of "a sort of spiritual dandy," as the video work's script describes it) in playing male leads, such as the protagonist of *Muyoungtab*. As Kim performs examples from the actors' nuanced repertoires, she brings the spirit of Yeoseong Gukgeuk onto the stage. Through the use of gestures, voice and tone, and eye and body movements, Yeoseong Gukgeuk's performers transcended gender boundaries and acting itself.

jung's long-term research project has revealed the exploration of the performativity of gender roles at the heart of Yeoseong Gukgeuk and the sisterhood and bonds among the actors and their fans. The community embodied queerness and the fluidity of gender roles, and created a space for performance as a form of resistance.

**AMINA AGUEZNAY**

(Morocco, b. 1963,  
lives and works between  
Marrakech and  
Casablanca)

*Enfouissements (Acts  
of Burying)*, 2024

Natural undyed wool,  
cotton warp thread,  
natural henna-dyed wool  
12 × 6.5 feet



In *Enfouissements (Acts of Burying)* (2024), Amina Agueznay reinterprets the *adghar*, the traditional matrimonial veil worn by women on their wedding day in the Anti-Atlas mountain range in Morocco. The *adghar* is a white cloth ornated with embroidered symbols and henna drawings, bestowing protection and blessings on the bride. It is believed that wearing the *adghar* as an under-layer, concealed from sight, preserves its power.

Inspired by the *adghar*, Agueznay conceived *Enfouissements* as a talisman, using crocheted henna-dyed wool elements stitched to a flat-woven white rug. Henna is a dye made from the dried and powdered leaves of the henna tree. Many cultures around the world credit its esoteric qualities and health benefits. To compose *Enfouissements*, the artist paid close attention to graphic symbols used in textile and jewelry ornamentations in her milieu. Combined, those symbols usually constitute a transgenerational coded language between women and form incantations with metaphysical shielding virtues.

For this new commission, Agueznay deconstructed those coded symbolic verses into three-dimensional fragments that function as jewelry pieces. She then recomposed them in her own talismanic score. The artist inserted the components inside the white fiber by tearing its surface and stitching the pieces inside it. In doing so, the artist contemplates the inherent link between protection and violence, as the latter is a prerequisite for the former to exist. She also describes this process as ‘acts of burying’ (in French: *enfouissements*), reflecting both the invisibilizing force of gender-based violence and acts of resistance that manifest in secrecy and concealment.

## TAMAR ETTUN

(Israel, b. 1982, lives and works in Brooklyn)

*Purple Placenta*, 2024

Hand dyed sail fabric, turmeric-dyed infant blankets, linen fabric, thread, repurposed ropes, blankets, and diapers, inflator, aluminum cast, flashlight, LED lights, lavender

Height variable, 11 feet diameter

Lighting design:

Xiaotian Zhang

Production team:

Jingyi Ling, Mancu Zhu,

Gigi Giovanelli

Consultation and

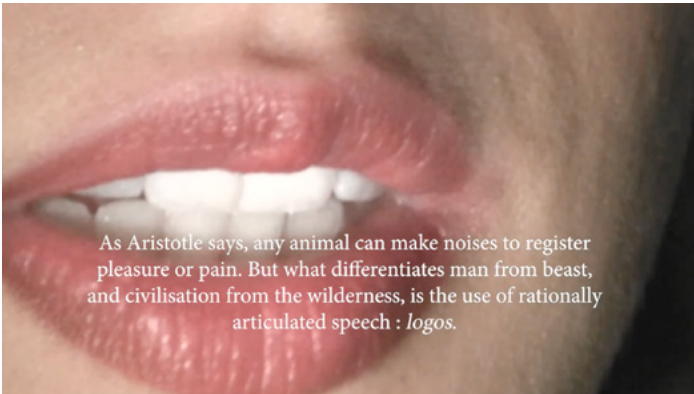
friendship: Aimée Burg



Tamar Ettun has been collaborating with the figure of Lilit for the last four years. Lilit's origins are in ancient Mesopotamia with appearances in Judaic mythology. Her extracanonical story within the Abrahamic religions describes Lilit as Adam's first female counterpart, but upon refusing to be subservient to him (or to anyone) she is cast out and villainized. However, this feminine spirit demon's image was still used in protective rites.

During the period from the second to the seventh centuries CE, artist-healers created spells, drawings, and talismanic objects to trap demons like Lilit, who was characterized as a dangerously sexual female entity, and whose image continued to appear frequently on incantation bowls used in protective rituals. The rituals were often performed by women concerned with medical issues like pregnancy and birth. Ettun is reviving these practices through a feminist lens by subverting Lilit's framing, challenging her construction as a misogynistic archetype, and reinterpreting her as an empathic demon.

*Purple Placenta* (2024) continues the ongoing transformation of Lilit by the artist and reconnects her through a fundamental aspect of Ettun's practice, the creation of inflatable contemplative spaces. Based on the practices of the ancient artist-healers, whose therapeutic conversations with afflicted women helped to trap their demons and guide them through difficult situations, Ettun invites the audience to enter the protected space of the placenta. There, they are welcomed to take time to communicate with Lilit, answer her questions, think of their birth, abortion, fertility and loss stories, and elaborate on their struggles. The practice of conversation and its benefits, as a way of letting go of what weighs on us, especially within feminine circles, has historically been deemed 'gossip,' as unconfirmed knowledge. However, with the passage of time and the adoption of regulated conversation as a tool by the medical industry, the importance and strength of these spaces, of being heard, have become clear.



As Aristotle says, any animal can make noises to register pleasure or pain. But what differentiates man from beast, and civilisation from the wilderness, is the use of rationally articulated speech : *logos*.



## SERENE HUI

(Hong Kong, b. 1992,  
lives and works  
in the Netherlands and  
Hong Kong)  
*Scold*, 2022

Two-channel video in  
color, with audio, on loop  
11:44 and 13:32

Text excerpts: Anne

Carson, “The Gender  
of Sound” from *Glass,  
Irony and God*, 1995.

Performers: Jean-René  
Toussaint, Serene Hui

Cinematographer:

Hugo Leos

Director: Serene Hui

Voice-work from

Jean-René Toussaint  
(Primitive Voice  
[Stemwerk], the  
Netherlands)

## SERENE HUI

(Hong Kong, b. 1992,  
lives and works  
in the Netherlands and  
Hong Kong)

*Gossip*, 2022

Letterpress and  
polymer photogravure  
printing on paper

A set of 7

Edition of 5 + 2

printer's proofs, signed,  
numbered, and stamped

Paper size: 27.5 × 18.95  
inches each

Display size (folded):  
23.6 × 18.9 inches each

Technical consultant and  
printing support:

Thomas Ankum and

Poedijo Widodo

(the Netherlands)



Serene Hui's artworks *Gossip* and *Scold* (both 2022) consider the politics of women's voice and language. In *Gossip*, ten passages written by the Korean American artist, filmmaker, and writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982) in her most renowned work *Dictée*, which inquires into issues of language, war, suffering, dislocation of identity, and the fragmentation of memory, are translated into Chinese, then into Nüshu ('women's writing'), the world's only gender-specific language, then printed in a manner evoking a secret inkless scroll.

The work is an homage to the oeuvre of Cha and, in parallel, to the history of Nüshu, in praise of the strength of unacknowledged forms of language — such as magical spells — that cannot be tracked, and therefore cannot be controlled, extracted, or commodified. This printmaking work proposes that the power of magical languages be seen as providing a kind of refuge, in the cases of both Cha and the Chinese women living centuries ago within an agrarian economy who developed Nüshu: for both, these forms of language do not *say* something directly but *are* something. While they resist clarity and transparency, they open up a space of empathy and empowerment to communities of women.



*Scold* refers to Anne Carson's notable essay "The Gender of Sound" (1995) on how irrational and unintelligible the sound of women is thought to be. Since ancient times, sound uttered from a woman's body, bubbling up through a woman's throat, was considered irritating, undesirable, unspeakable, and abject. 'Feminine sound,' for Aristotle, Hippocrates, and others, was too far from language, and too alien from rational discussion, for it to be appropriately contained and translated. Feminine sound, in the classical tradition — and, alarmingly, still — needs to be silenced, channeled, or sexualized in order to be neutralized.

The video work probes the trope that associates feminine expressions with the irrational and unpleasant, almost animalistic, outflow of sounds—the contrary of self-controlled, moderate men in civilized society. Furthermore, it questions the political and historical implications of voice training, especially in the context of feminine sound. From the custom of voice modulation often deployed by politicians (one prominent example being Margaret Thatcher) to a first-hand experience of attending a voice-work session with Primitive Voice (Stemwerk), the short videos explore the uncanny dialectics of how the socio-political and the personal shape and stage the voice through the body as an instrument.

## ABOUT THE CURATORS

**ROXANA FABIUS** is a Uruguayan curator and art administrator based in New York City. Between 2016 and 2022 she was Executive Director at A.I.R. Gallery, the first artist-run feminist cooperative space in the U.S. During her tenure at A.I.R. she organized programs and exhibitions with artists and thinkers such as Gordon Hall, Elizabeth Povinelli, Jack Halberstam, Che Gosset, Regina José Galindo, Lex Brown, Kazuko, Zarina, Mindy Seu, Naama Tzabar, and Howardena Pindell among many others. These exhibitions, programs and special commissions were made in collaboration with international institutions such as the Whitney Museum, Google Arts and Culture, The Feminist Institute, and Frieze Art Fair in New York and London. Fabius has served as an adjunct professor for the Curatorial Practices seminar at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, and Tel Aviv University. She has also taught at Parsons at The New School, City University of New York, Syracuse University, and Rutgers University. She is currently curating the 2024 exhibition series *Cantando Bajito* at the Ford Foundation Gallery.

**KOBE KO** is an independent curator and artist, and formerly worked as Assistant Curator at Para Site, Hong Kong (2021–2023) and Art Education and Gallery Coordinator at Tai Kwun

Contemporary, Hong Kong (2019–2021). She has curated *Everyday Life in Hong Kong and Fukuoka: The Study of Contemporary Arts and Kougengaku* (art space tetra, Fukuoka, 2023), *Post-Human Narratives* series (Cattle Depot Artist Village and Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences, Hong Kong, 2020–2022), Kong Chun Hei's solo exhibition *PS* (Para Site, Hong Kong, 2023), Florence Yuk-ki Lee's solo exhibition *Broken heart pieces disco ball* (MOU PROJECTS, Hong Kong, 2023), and *CHOW KAI CHIN* Community Art Experimental Project (Kowloon City, Hong Kong, 2013 & 2014), among others.

Ko's artworks depart from her intimate relationships and personal sensation and mainly focus on the re-imagination of distance and boundaries. She has participated in joint exhibition *The Tailed Scar* (Tiger A(r)m Strong Biennale, Hong Kong, 2023), duo exhibition *Over the ocean, over the sea* (Current Plans, Hong Kong, 2022) and more. She graduated from the Department of Creative Arts and Culture of the Hong Kong University of Education, and received an MA in Gender Studies from Shih Hsin University in Taiwan. She lives and works in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

**BEYA OTHMANI** is an art curator and researcher from Algeria and Tunisia, dividing her time between Tunis and New York. Currently, she is the C-MAP Africa Fellow at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. Her recent curatorial projects include the Ljubljana 35th Graphic Arts Biennial and Publishing Practices #2 at Archive Berlin. Previously, she took part in the curatorial teams of various projects with sonsbeek20→24 (2020), the Forum Expanded of the Berlinale (2019), and the Dak'Art 13 Biennial (2018), among others, and was a curatorial assistant at the Berlin-based art space, SAVVY Contemporary. Some of her latest curatorial projects explored radical feminist publishing practices, post-colonial histories of print-making, and the construction of racial identities in art in colonial and post-colonial Africa.

## **ABOUT THE FORD FOUNDATION GALLERY**

Opened in March 2019 at the Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice in New York City, the Ford Foundation Gallery spotlights artwork that wrestles with difficult questions, calls out injustice, and points the way toward a fair and just future. The gallery functions as a responsive and adaptive space and one that serves the public in its openness to experimentation, contemplation, and conversation. Located near the United Nations, it draws visitors from around the world, addresses questions that cross borders, and speaks to the universal struggle for human dignity.

The gallery is free and open to the public Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m. It is accessible to the public through the Ford Foundation building entrance on 43rd Street, east of Second Avenue.

### **FORD FOUNDATION GALLERY**

320 East 43rd Street

New York, NY 10017

[www.fordfoundation.org/gallery](http://www.fordfoundation.org/gallery)

## ABOUT THE FORD FOUNDATION

The Ford Foundation is an independent organization working to address inequality and build a future grounded in justice. For more than 85 years, it has supported visionaries on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. Today, with an endowment of \$16 billion, the foundation has headquarters in New York and 10 regional offices across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Learn more at [www.fordfoundation.org](http://www.fordfoundation.org).

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