

ISLANDS OF CHANGE

Exhibiting Artists:

Adama Delphine Fawundu, AM Kanngieser, Joseph Kamaru (KMRU), Laisiasa Dave Lavaki, Sophia Mitiku, Mere Nailatikau, Mudassir Sheikh, Tumeli Tuqota

Curated by: Julian Rieken

Curatorial Partners: Lidy Ettema, Matthijs Mantel

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We live in a time when waters rise and fall, threatening to drown us or leave us in thirst. Oceans, rivers, and waterways swell and fade under extractive violence, yet they also carry currents of kinship and renewal across borders, bodies, and histories. As ecocide and genocide are waged from Oceania to Palestine, we are called to attend to the urgencies of the present while imagining and enacting worlds otherwise.

Islands of Change approaches water as a companion in crisis, asking how we might cultivate new forms of relationality and responsibility – our ethical capacity to act – without reproducing extractive hierarchies. Guided by Édouard Glissant's poetics of relation and archipelagic thinking, the long-term artistic research project imagines islands not as isolated refuges but as nodes in a living and entangled constellation: distinct, yet connected through flows of sound, memory, and struggle. It asks: how can local contexts act as microcosms of systemic possibility, and how can we cultivate currents of solidarity across distances?

The project's first tide unfolds as a sonic archipelago across Gaudeamus Festival 2025, bringing together four installations, performances, and a space for collective attunement and shared inquiry in the form of a Silent Keynote. From the mangroves of Kiribati to the banks of the Blue Nile, and from trance traditions in Karachi to diasporic rituals, the invited artistic positions resonate across geographies. Two artists, selected through an open call, used their residencies in Utrecht to

draw on sounds of the city, clay from canal beds, and fragments from local voices and archives.

Each work is a vessel of testimony and memory, flowing into a resonant current that challenges us to move beyond spectatorship toward collective response. The works gathered here trace connections between ancestral knowledge and environmental fragility, contested infrastructures and silenced voices, as well as healing practices and counter-archives that flow across generations. They evoke rising seas where reefs and shorelines become teachers and kin; contested rivers where sovereignty and survival ripple through ecological and political entanglements; and diasporic waters that pulse with ancestral memory and resilience.

Islands of Change marks the start of a long-term collaboration between Gaudeamus Festival, Residencies in Utrecht and future collaborators to move from siloed action to shared rhythms. By amplifying local agency as a fractal of systemic change, it hopes to tune insular communities into resonant networks of polyphonic possibilities. At this first confluence of water and sound, we are invited to listen across geographies and generations, and to ask: how can we move beyond retreating from crisis, weaving our local contexts into outward ripples of systemic transformation powerful enough to shift the tides?

– Julian Rieken, curator.

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Sophia Mitiku

In the desert, we argue over rivers we cannot see

2025, sound, water, clay installation, performance, text

Sophia Mitiku's practice moves between music, ancestry, and landscape, weaving sound through themes of migration, memory, ritual, and repair. For her residency, she presents *In the desert, we argue over rivers we cannot see*, an installative performance stage premiered at Gaudeamus Festival.

The work emerges from the political and social implications of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) where the Blue Nile is a contested resource throughout the regions bound through the Nile's flow, yet divided over its control.

Through layered sound, field recording, and voice, Mitiku composes an auditory journey into the Nile as a sentient body: one that carries history, sustains life, and that has outlasted empires. The piece maps the spiritual, ecological, and cultural dimensions of the Blue Nile, while also imagining the river's sovereignty within ongoing debates surrounding Africa's largest hydroelectric project. She uses sound objects made during her residency, from clay and natural material foraged around the Vecht in Utrecht, as a sonic mediator between sibling water bodies.

Mudassir Sheikh

Victoria Regia.: Karachi — The Water Never Disappeared

2025, stereo sound, printed chiffon fabric, text

An installation of translucent textile prints, immersive sound, scent, and text, staged in a colonial greenhouse above Victoria amazonica, the so-called Victoria water lilies named after Queen Victoria. Images from Karachi, including flooded terrains, shrines, and urban fragments, hover like spectral membranes above the pond.

A circular soundscape enfolds the space, merging manipulated recordings from Karachi and Utrecht: urban noise, azaan, and synthesis interwoven with echoes of sonic traditions linked to ocean and migration, such as Gwati (a Balochi healing ritual) and Lewa (a rhythm practiced in African diasporic communities around the Arabian Sea). This creates a charged polarity between flooded submergence and engineered quiet, reanimating the colonial space of the greenhouse and its botanical specimens.

Through fabric, sound, scent, and text, the work summons submerged histories and spectral presences, revealing water as both threshold and trace, holding rupture and repair in fragile balance.

Adama Delphine Fawundu

A Meditation for the Dispersed

2023, sound & video, printed fabrics

This poetic video work explores the spiritual and historical currents of the African diaspora through water as both symbol and medium. Drawing on her Sierra Leonean and Equatorial Guinean heritage, Fawundu merges archival imagery, ritual, and ancestral memory to evoke the resilience and interconnectedness of dispersed communities. The film's flowing visual language – rooted in movement, stillness, and elemental forces – invites viewers into a contemplative space where diaspora is not defined by separation, but by shared histories, rhythms, and possibilities for collective healing.

Referencing global movements that led to the displacement of people and indigenous ideologies because of colonialism, enslavement and the violence of patriarchy, this work creates a space to imagine new ideas in a safe, just and environmentally friendly world. Weaving together waters and lands spirited with indigenous energies, a mediation for the dispersed is an offering, a song, a vision for a sustainable and just futures.

When the Spirits Dance: an ode to the Africans that built this place

2023-24, Kpoto Patchwok: scanned textiles, photographs, digital collage, archival pigment printed on textile, raffia (Sierra Leone), shells (Cuba, South Carolina, Maine), hair, copper, herbs (Mali), leaves, twigs, branch (Gov. Island), whispers from the Mende, Fang, Lenape, Duala, Kongo and Quilombo energies.

When we gather, let it be in a space of shared sentiments for peace, harmony, freedom and justice. To gather many ideologies for a better tomorrow, may we create a radical new, just and sustainable space together as one and many.

Referencing global movements that led to the displacement of people and indigenous ideologies because of colonialism, enslavement and the violence of patriarchy, this work creates a space to imagine new ideas in a safe, just and environmentally friendly world. She, we, I meditates, at the ocean fronts of islands: where the Mediterranean flows through Gozo and Valletta, the Atlantic meets Cuba, the U.S. Sea Islands St. Helena and James, the Casco Bay ripples along the shores of Malaga Island and the Mano River flows into the Atlantic Ocean surrounding Mano and Talia, the islands of my foremothers in Sierra Leone. Weaving together waters and lands spirited with indigenous energies, a mediation for the dispersed is an offering, a song, a vision for a sustainable and just future.

I am thinking of my personal ancestry as it connects to the history of Malta and the African Diaspora. The home of my ancestors, Mendeland or Sierra Leone, once a British colony, 1808-1961 overlaps with Malta's years of occupation, 1814-1964. Ironically both places experienced the leadership of Sir Maurice Henry Dorman as they approached independence. We honor the ancestral resistance against fascism in Malta, Ethiopia and by many African people who were resisting colonial control. We meditate with the movement of water – for birth, sustenance, resistance, healing, liberation.

AM Kanngieser Mere Nailatikau Joseph Kamaru (KMRU) Laisiasa Dave Lavaki Tumeli Tuqota

Oceanic Refractions

2025. Video, surround sound, text

"We had seen this happening. The birds have been flying off. We're just not listening to what the birds say."
– Prof Unaisi Nabobo-Baba

Oceanic Refractions is an immersive installation featuring testimonies of Fijian, i-Kiribati and Papua New Guinean elders on kinship, self-determination and care in the face of global ecocide. Along with reflections from these teachers, artists, fisherpeople, grandparents and chiefs, we hear field recordings of the reefs of Fiji, the oceans and mangroves of Kiribati, and the shorelines of Papua New Guinea's Duke of York Islands. Moved by listening and silence, the work offers audiences rare insights into the environmental relations sustaining Oceania's many worlds.

The climate crisis, an expression of colonial-capitalist violence, is intensifying rapidly. Oceanic frontline communities have long been navigating changing ecosystems. It is through cultures of reciprocity between people, lands and waters, that these changes are being experienced. By listening to environments we recognise our interdependence with the earth; we need one another to survive. Across Oceania, interdependence enables self-determination, collaboration and care in the face of incommensurable loss and grief.