



**The Rural Assembly:  
Contemporary Art and Spaces of Connection  
Thursday 20 – Saturday 22 June 2019**

The Rural Assembly draws on a series of public programmes and research that developed throughout 2018. It looks at contemporary artists and creative practitioners who are challenging the assumptions made about rural life and culture, providing a new vision of the countryside grounded in everyday experience and a critique of the rural-urban binary. This culminating assembly considers how artists respond to the established and imposed divides between the rural and the urban. From re-imagined farming practices and food systems to architecture, community projects and transnational local networks, this three-day assembly brings together artists, curators, and academics to discuss the role of art in a rural context, inviting a critical outlook at our relationships with the rural today.

The programme has been conceived in collaboration with partners the University of Aberystwyth, Istanbul Biennial, Manchester Metropolitan University, Myvillages and Wysing Arts Centre.

**Keynote Lecture: Whitechapel Gallery, Thursday 20 June, 7pm**

19.00

**Big Ideas: Wu Mali**

A leading practitioner of socially engaged art in rural areas, the keynote lecture for the conference is delivered by Taiwanese artist and curator **Wu Mali**. For over thirty years she has developed a distinctive approach to working with communities across Taiwan, in projects that consider rural culture, land use, environmental concerns, and the shifting relationship between the rural and urban in Asia.

**Day 1: Whitechapel Gallery, Friday 21 June, 11.30am – 5.45pm**

**AUDITORIUM**

- 11.30 Welcome by **Sofia Victorino**, Director of Education and Public Programmes, Whitechapel Gallery
- 11.35 Introduction by **Jane Scarth**, Curator: Public Programmes, Whitechapel Gallery and Prof. **Michael Woods**, University of Aberystwyth
- 11.50 – 13.20 **Networked Rural: Mapping the Translocal**  
The rural is often painted as a remote space, isolated from global networks, economies and exchanges. This panel stages a conversation to consider examples of the various entanglements and assemblages that reveal the interconnectedness of rural places – outside of urban frameworks.
- **Michael Woods**, Professor of Human Geography, Aberystwyth University
  - **Pelin Tan**, Artuklu University, Mardin, Turkey
  - **Adam Sutherland**, Director, Grizedale Arts
  - **Kathrin Böhm and Wapke Feenstra (Myvillages)** Artists
- Response: **Bige Orer**, Director, Istanbul Biennial
- 13.20 **LUNCH**
- 14.30 – 16.00 **Embedded Practice: Audience, Site, Exchange**  
This panel brings together projects that have reimagined how art engages with local contexts. What does a genuine exchange look like, when working in rural areas where audiences are not traditional viewers of contemporary art?
- **Richard Saxton**, M12 Studio, Artist
  - **Fulya Erdemci**, Director Cappadox Festival
  - **Heather Peak** of **Studio Morison**, Artist
  - **Katerina Seda**, Artist
- Response: **Sofia Victorino**, Director of Education and Public Programmes, Whitechapel Gallery
- 16.00 – 16.15 **BREAK**

16.15-17.45 **Decolonising The Rural: Indigenous perspectives on art, language, land and waters**

**Katya Garcia-Anton** Director of the Office for Contemporary Art Norway and artist **Sissel M. Bergh** discuss the perspectives and transformative methodologies of Sámi artists across Sápmi (Norway/Sweden/Finland/Russia), as case-studies for cultural workers' contributions to Indigenising /decolonising rural areas today in the face of entrenched colonial frameworks.

## CREATIVE STUDIO

12.00 – 13.20 **Representing the Rural**  
**Rosemary Shirley** and **Nicola Bishop** of Manchester Metropolitan University lead this session, investigating how the rural is represented in mainstream culture. How does it feel to encounter representations of rural places? How might the intersection between contemporary art and rural places provide points of resistance or challenge to these representations? This discussion based workshop explores a number of examples of how rural places are represented in popular culture, branding and everyday life, from air fresheners to *Love in the Countryside*.

14.30 - 16.00 **Establishing Rural Networks: INLAND and Confederacy of Villages**  
Join artist **Fernando Garcia-Dory** (INLAND) and curator **Adam Sutherland** (Grizedale Arts) for a session taking the international network 'The Confederacy of Villages' as a case study in how to develop and establish long-term land based projects, operating between the global art systems and a local social ecosystems. The workshop includes a tasting of INLAND and Grizedale produce.

16.00 – 16.15 BREAK

16.15 - 17.45 **The Ark Reading Group with Grace Ndiritu**  
Artist **Grace Ndiritu** leads a reading group on the text '*Mandalas or Raised Fists? Hippie Holism, Panther Totality, and another Modernism*' by Simon Sadler, to consider how alternative movements have emerged from rural communities. The discussion will be punctuated by short silent meditation breaks led by the artist.

## GALLERY THREE

Available in breaks **Mapping Rural Networks**  
Sharing knowledge across the assembly, this immediate and temporary mapping of rural projects and spaces gathered from delegates is led by artist **Rhine Bernadino**.

**Day 2: Wysing Arts Centre, Saturday 22 June, 11.00am – 6.30pm**

*Coach Departs Kings Cross. Arrives at Wysing 10.30am*

**GALLERY**

- 11.00 Welcome and Introduction by **Donna Lynas** Director,  
Wysing Arts Centre
- 11.15 – 13.30 **Walks and Seminar (choice of three)**
- A) **Walk: Open Ramble East - Ian Giles**  
A walk led by artist Ian Giles and members of the Open Ramble East Project, considering the complex and often invisible experience of queer identities in rural places and landscapes.
- B) **Walk: Caroline Wendling**  
Together with locally based farmer William Bevan, Wendling leads a tour of his farm and other sites in Bourn, connecting to local histories, exchanges and experiences.
- C) **Seminar: Farmer to Farmer - Asunción Molinos Gordo and Simon Diss**  
Artist **Asunción Molinos Gordo** shares her project "De Campesino A Campesino " (Farmer to Farmer), in dialogue with farmer **Simon Diss**, to address questions of agroecology and peer-to-peer agricultural innovation across informal global networks. The project, commissioned by the Havana Biennial 2019, inverts the conventional top-down approach to agriculture, by creating a knowledge exchange between a group of Spanish and a group of Cuban farmers.
- 13.30 – 14.30 **Lunch**
- 14.30 – 16.00 **Artistic Utopias? Experimental practice from the Rural**  
This panel invites artists who self-organise projects from and for rural places, challenging the idea that the rural is a site for artists to 'escape' to. From an artist-run space in a remote part of Indonesia, to an experimental farm, to alternative communities around the world, how do artists experiment outside of 'cultural centres'?
- **Ismal Muntaha**, Artist, Jatiwangi Art Factory
  - **Léonore Bonaccini and Xavier Fourt (Bureau d'Etudes)**, Artists
  - **Grace Ndiritu**, Artist
- Chaired by **Lotte Juul Petersen**
- 16.00-16.15 **BREAK (15 min)**

- 16.15–17.15 **Possibilities of Rural Belongings: Embodying Liminality**  
In advance of their performances later in the day, this conversation between artists **Jade Montserrat** and **Harold Offeh**, considers critical approaches and practices from the position of being Black British artists in rural environments. Chaired by curator **Hansi Momodu Gordon**.
- 17.15–17.30 **Jane Scarth** Final Comments
- 17.30–18.00 **Performance – Jade Montserrat: *Love. Love?***  
Developed as part of Montserrat's ongoing 'Rainbow Tribe' project, '*Love. Love?*', emphasises renewal and a renewing of energy and materials against the backdrop of the rural. The work seeks to unsettle representational space, physical privilege, gendered connections of sexuality and empowerment. A somatic response to trauma and healing, the performance is a continuation of Montserrat's work to create transitional spaces and strategies of survival for the body. A second version of '*Love, Love?*' will take place in Kings Cross, London, in conjunction with Art Night.
- 18.00–18.30 **Performance – Harold Offeh: *BodyLandscapeMemory***  
The second performance focusses on the presentation of Black bodies in the landscape. Moving away from stereotypes of the labouring or victimised body, the work will explore leisure, play and connections to the physical environment. Taking source material from popular culture: fashion photography, album covers and advertising, the piece presents a series of poses and gestures. Harold Offeh will be performing with collaborators Ebun Sodipo and Samra Mayanja.
- 18.45 *Coach Departs - arrive King's Cross at 20.00–20.30*

## **New GEO GRAPHIES**

The Rural Assembly also forms part of the East Contemporary Visual Arts Network's project *New Geographies*, chaired and coordinated by Wysing Arts Centre and supported by an Ambition for Excellence grant from Arts Council England.

The programme has also been supported by the Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial Research Grant from the Art Fund, and made possible through the contributions of partners: University of Aberystwyth, Istanbul Biennial, Manchester Metropolitan University and Wysing Arts Centre.

Further support has been provided by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in London, and SAHA for Fulya Erdemci's and Pelin Tan's participation.