

Estonian Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

ORCHIDÉ LIRIUM

La Biennale di Venezia

59. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

Kristina Norman and Bitia Razavi
Based on the life and
works of Emilie Rosalie Saal

AN APPÉTITE FOR BUNDANCE

Curator: Corina L. Apostol, Tallinn Art Hall (TAH)
Commissioner: Maria Arusoo,
Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA)

23 April–27 November 2022
Opening: 20 April 2022
Pre-opening: 20–22 April 2022

Giardini della Biennale, Rietveld Pavilion
www.orchidelirium.ee, www.cca.ee
[Instagram](#), [Facebook](#)

Kristina Norman and Bitra Razavi, in close dialogue with curator Corina L. Apostol, will present *Orchidelirium. An Appetite for Abundance*, an exhibition encompassing installation, film, photography, archive and performance—connecting the past with the present, all through the lens of colonial botany and its socio-political ramifications. The artists and curator, with the guidance of advisor Sadiyah Boonstra, and the contributions of a team of creative collaborators will create an immersive environment, featuring a film trilogy by Norman and a performative spatial intervention by Razavi.

The exhibition takes as its point of departure the overlooked story of the Estonian nineteenth-century artist and world traveler Emilie Rosalie Saal. Her work as an artist of tropical botanical flora combined with her personal history serves as a case study for entangled histories of self-determination, colonial experiences, neo-colonial structures, botany, science and art. The title of the project reflects the orchid madness that gripped Europeans in the nineteenth century, Saal included, fed by an abundance of botanical illustrations that erased contexts and promoted an extractivist vision of local landscapes and people. The obsession with collecting tropical orchids that spans histories and geographies inspired Apostol to research its symbolism as well as the abuse of power exercised by orchid adorers. What were the consequences of Saal's choices for indigenous peoples and landscapes? Norman and Razavi reflect on their own cultural heritage and lived experiences, while trying to engage critically with the colonial and neo-colonial discourses in the context of Estonia today.

Norman's films, entitled *Rip-off*, *Shelter* and *Thirst*, respectively, will explore *the manor* as an elite place of cultural transfer between upper-class Baltic German women and their servants through the knowledge of and fascination with tropical flowers; *the cage* as a liminal place of transformation, divided between a perspective from the inside and the objectifying gaze from the outside; *the orchid nursery* as a

site connecting the Estonian mires and peat excavation industries, the import of tropical orchids and the circulation of capital and natural resources.

Razavi's spatial intervention begins outside the pavilion, where the audience—initially unaware—enters into a system of categorisation. Re-enacting class divisions inscribed in architecture, she engages the viewer to reflect on the notions of hierarchy and privilege through performance. Addressing historical erasures and incomplete narratives, Razavi utilises changes of light in a site-specific installation and in display cases. A kinetic sculpture invokes a *kratt*, an enslaved magical creature from Estonian mythology, producing botanical drawings on command for those who accept its consequences.

Additionally, the viewer will discover Apostol's research behind the project, in collaboration with Boonstra and the artists, which combines material from different archives in Estonia, the Netherlands and Indonesia and highlights positions of the colonial past and present. In collaboration with Norman and Apostol, choreographer and dancer Eko Supriyanto will develop a film-intervention that also asks: to what extent has coloniality actually ended? He explores the extensions of coloniality in nature, highlighting its ongoing exploitation in Indonesia and tying in issues of gender and race.

Orchidelirium examines the historical experience of serfdom in Estonia from which the Saal emerged, her role in Dutch colonial history, and the experiences of the colonised people of Indonesia—in tandem with the alteration of their indigenous landscapes during the late colonial period and the ecological impact it continues to have to this day. Immersed in the exhibition, the viewer will access de-colonial ecological imaginaries and the socio-political ramifications of colonial ways of being, thinking, misunderstanding and doing.

Participating since 1997, this is the thirteenth time Estonia is exhibiting at the International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. The Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art is the official representative of the Estonian exposition and it is financed by Estonian Ministry of Culture.

For information about CCA and the Estonian entry for 2022, please contact: head of communication of the Estonian Pavilion, *Kaarin Kivirähk*: kaarin@cca.ee / +372 5394 7169 or international PR-advisor *Alexia Menikou*: am@alexiamenikou.com / +44 (0) 7958 454 111

About Kristina Norman

Kristina Norman (1979) is a Tallinn based artist and documentary maker, who explores the converging trajectories of national identity, politics of memory and public space.

About Bitu Razavi

Bitu Razavi (1983) is a multidisciplinary artist best known for her autofictional practice centered around observations and reflections on a variety of everyday situations.

About Corina L. Apostol

Corina L. Apostol (1984) is a curator at the Tallinn Art Hall and the co-curator and coordinator of the international collaborative, practice-based research project, "Beyond Matter—Cultural Heritage on the Verge of Virtual Reality".

About Emilie Rosalie Saal

Emilie Rosalie Saal (1871–1954) was born in Tartu, studied art in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), then joined husband Andres Saal in Java between 1899 and 1920.

Organizers and other collaborators

Graphic Designer: Laura Pappa
Architects: Aet Ader and Arvi Anderson, b210
Technical Director: Tõnu Narro with a team of Mihkel Lember, Villem Säre, Aleksander Meresaar, Erik Liiv
Head of production: Sten Ojavee, CCA
Head of Communication: Kaarin Kivirähk, CCA
International PR Advisor: Alexia Menikou

Exhibition assistant: Simona Šulnyte
Orchid typeface: Jungmyung Lee & Laura Pappa
Website programming: Eva Rank

Commissioned and produced by Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art
Co-Producers: Tallinn Art Hall (Paul Aguraiju), Rühm Pluss Null, Post Theatre Collective

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Rühm
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