



Whitechapel  
Gallery

**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. 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.

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 – 6pm

## AUDITORIUM

- 11.30 Welcome by **Iwona Blazwick**, Director, Whitechapel Gallery
- 11.35 Introduction by **Jane Scarth**, Curator Public Programmes, Whitechapel Gallery and Prof. **Michael Woods**, University of Aberystwyth
- 11.50 **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
  - **Adam Sutherland**, Director, Grizedale Arts
- Response: **Bige Orer**, Director, Istanbul Biennial
- 13.20 **LUNCH**
- 14.30 **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? Each of our speakers has re-written the ‘rule book’ with sensitive, inquisitive approaches to local cultures.
- **Richard Saxton**, M12 Studio, Colorado
  - **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 **Decolonising The Rural: Indigenous representation and contemporary art**  
**Katya Garcia-Anton**, Director of the Office for Contemporary Art Norway leads this session dedicated to a conversation about the experience of rurally-based indigenous artists in Norway, as a case-study into how artists and curators can begin to untangle the idea of decolonising the rural, and art and cultures role within this challenging context.

## CREATIVE STUDIO

12.00 **Representing the Rural**  
**Rosemary Shirley** and **Nicola Bishop** of Manchester School of Art lead this session, investigating how the rural represented in mainstream culture. How does it feel to encounter these 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 **Making things happen: Self-organised Rural practice**  
This peer-to-peer session for artists is led by **Kathrin Böhm** and **Wapke Feenstra (Myvillages)** and offers an opportunity to ask the challenging questions directly. When the rural feels to present so many challenges, how do you begin to consider it as a space to live and work? What methods are possible to start projects in places where audiences relationship to art is so different from in the city?

16.00 **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.

## 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 – 7.00pm

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

## **GALLERY**

11.00 Welcome and Introduction by **Lotte Juul Petersen**, Wysing Arts Centre

11.15 **Walks (choice of two)**

**A) 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) 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) On site session TBC**

13.30 **Lunch**

15.00 **Panels / Seminars (choice of two)**

**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

- 15.00 **Possibilities of Rural Belongings: Embodying Liminality**  
In advance of their performances later in the day, this conversation between artists **Jade Monserrat** 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**.
- 16.30 **Break** (20 mins)
- 16.50 **Performance – Jade Monserrat: *Contagion***  
The first of two performances exploring the question of ‘rural belongings’, *Contagion* refuses containment or control in a performance that considers landscape, specifically marsh, swamp, peat bogs; mycology; care; and places where boundaries between the earth and heavens become more porous. *Contagion* emphasis renewal and renewing, spreading earthy mycological spores with complete disregard for segregated lands, concepts of terrain or ownership, or erasures of history and memory.
- 17.35 **Screening Programme**
- 18.15 **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 Eburn Sodipo and Samra Mayanja.
- 19.00 *Coach Departs - arrive King's Cross at 20.00-20.30*

The programme is supported by:

**New** **GEO**  
**GRAPHIES**

And the Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial Research Grant from the Art Fund.