

26 APRIL 2024

## **Ford Foundation Gallery announces opening of *Cantando Bajito: Incantations***



siren eun young jung, *Public yet Private Archive (A Part)*, (2015, 2024). Courtesy of the Artist.

**Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice | 320 E 43rd Street, New York**

On View June 5 - August 10, 2024

Opening Event June 5, 2024 | 5-7pm

Gallery Hours: Monday - Saturday | 11am-6pm

New York, NY – The [Ford Foundation Gallery](https://fordfoundation.org/gallery) is pleased to present *Cantando Bajito: Incantations*, the second movement of a year-long exhibition series that celebrates strategies for resistance in the wake of rising violence and incursions against bodily autonomy toward feminized bodies. Building on *Testimonies*, the first exhibition in this three-part arc—which centered forms of testimony used to resist violence faced by feminized bodies—the second chapter, *Incantations*, brings together artists who

consider ancestral, contemporary, and future-facing networks of support and care that safeguard feminized bodies through forms of knowledge transmission.

Such networks—symbolic systems, subversive spaces, or covert forms of language—are as varied as the communities that develop them. They include Nüshu, a form of script passed from mother to daughter in China; the use of henna as an agent of protection; and forms of therapeutic communication that have been deemed “gossip.” All have long existed, whether in the shadows or in plain sight. Preserved not in written history but in the body, these channels prepare feminized bodies for potential violence while giving them tools to resist it. This exhibition, curated by Roxana Fabius, Kobe Ko, and Beya Othmani, celebrates these protective channels through artworks by **Amina Agueznay**, **Seba Calfuqueo**, **IV Chan**, **Tamar Ettun**, **Serene Hui**, **siren eun young jung**, **Mônica Ventura**, and **Osías Yanov**, which engage with or conjure such feminized spaces for transmitting support.

*Incantations* is a tribute to the practice of re-existence, a concept coined by feminist activists of the Global South who resist profound acts of violence in their everyday lives. As shown powerfully by the activist contributors to the book *Femicide and Global Accumulation*, which explores frontline struggles against patriarchal and capitalist violences in the Global South, re-existence turns spaces of violence into places for building new solidarities, moving beyond resistance to imagine other possible ways of existing.

Considering the forms such transformative possibilities may take, the “incantations” of the title reflect the subversive potential of the occult in fostering re-existence. Defined as the casting of spells through magical words, incantations have been associated with figures whose transgressive social positioning and non-conformity to gender roles have led them to be viewed as menacing. This exhibition considers how such figures and their voices, channeling protective meaning, can embody a practice of generative resistance across generations, brought forth powerfully among these artists’ works.

The artists featured in *Incantations* address the many strategies used by feminized bodies to conceal and encode knowledge of resistance and survival. For example, in **Amina Agueznay**’s fiber-based piece *Enfouissements (Acts of Burying)* (2024), fragments of jewelry encoded with symbolic verses are buried within the fibers of a woven rug, itself a reinterpretation of a traditional Moroccan wedding veil with symbolic details that afford the bride protection. Carrying this coded language forward within it, the work evokes both the erasures of gender-based violence as well as forms of covert

resistance. Similarly, in **Serene Hui**'s printmaking work *Gossip* and the video *Scold* (both 2022), passages from writers Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Anne Carson are, respectively, encoded through a series of obscuring, protective translations into a secret scroll and used to challenge how feminine voices have been figured as irrational and unpleasant. Both work to reclaim narrative and linguistic control from patriarchal power. Relatedly, **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 Brazil in the 17th century. The repeating but varied forms of gourds carry the power of fluid movement, connecting 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 to 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. Through a child using their grandmother's teachings to gather, respect, and protect the mushrooms, the video reflects the role of mushrooms as a symbol of resistance for the Mapuche people and their relationship with nature.

Myth and folk traditions are revisited within these artworks, to subvert their patriarchal origins into transgressive patterns through which feminized bodies can find tools for resistance and strength. In **Tamar Ettun**'s sculptural work, *Purple Placenta* (2024), the artist revisits and subverts the figure of Lilit, a feminine spirit demon with origins in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Judaic mythology whose image was used in protective rites. Building on the longstanding role the figure has played in the artist's life, Ettun conjures Lilit out from long-standing misogynistic associations with danger into a fluid, multiform being symbolizing the strength found in complexity, empathy, and vulnerability. And **IV Chan**'s installation *Ritual rehearsal : the Sacred and the Profane* (2020) 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 own flesh and bones to his parents sees his body transfigured into lotus roots, pods, and flowers, a form of resistance and refusal releasing the body from family ties into a powerful, gender-fluid being.

*Incantations* also looks at forms of collective protection through kinship, chosen ties, and other feminized communities, through the different spaces and forms in which these connections develop. For example, **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 becomes its own form of assembly space, drawing the viewer into this arena of concealed intimacy as witness, evoking the role nightlife plays as a site for social activism. **siren eun young jung**'s video *Directing for Gender* (2010) is a powerful example of the artist's ongoing work on Yeoseong Gukgeuk (National Women's Theater), active in mid-20th century South Korea, where theatrical creation, direction, performance, and production were entirely in the hands of women. This video, a restaging of a lost script with involvement of living Yeoseong Gukgeuk participants, reveals the enduring, subversive potential of collective creation outside of and against patriarchal patterns. And her artwork of digital prints *Public yet Private Archive (A Part)* (2015, 2024) assembles, with moving intimacy and immediacy, moments from the public and private lives and relationships of the performers. The selection of archival images and newspaper clippings unfolds insights from the artist's research since 2008 and the space this community created for performance as a form of resistance.

## About the Curators

### Roxana Fabius

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

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

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 *Cantando Bajito*'s Series-Wide Curatorial Group

The three-part exhibition series *Cantando Bajito* is developed by curators Isis Awad, Roxana Fabius, Kobe Ko, Beya Othmani, Mindy Seu, and Susana Vargas Cervantes, with the advice of a larger curatorial group including María Carri, Maria Catarina Duncan, Zasha Colah, and Marie Hélène Pereira.

## 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 accessible to the public through the Ford Foundation building entrance on 43rd Street, east of Second Avenue.

## 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).

**For press inquiries, please contact Hannah Gottlieb-Graham ([hannah@almacommunications.co](mailto:hannah@almacommunications.co)) at ALMA Communications.**