

# Institute of Contemporary Arts

PRESS RELEASE

THE ICA PRESENTS 'DECRIMINALISED FUTURES', AN EXHIBITION  
INSPIRED BY THE SEX WORKER RIGHTS MOVEMENT

*The exhibition covers different feminist perspectives on sex work and the interwoven issues faced by sex workers, people of colour, trans people, migrants and disabled people.*

Open to the public: 16 February – 22 May 2022

Press view: 16 February, 10am–12pm



From *Mythical Creatures* by Liad Hussein Kantorowicz, film, 17:35 min., 2020.  
Photography by Aviv Victor.

In February 2022, the Institute of Contemporary Arts will present *Decriminalised Futures*, a group exhibition featuring thirteen international artists whose work speaks to the multiplicity of contemporary sex worker experiences.

The exhibition highlights the history of the sex worker rights movement and its inextricable links to issues of racial and social justice, migrant rights, labour rights, anti-austerity work, and queer and trans liberation.

Works comprise ten distinct projects by artists from the UK, France, Germany and the United States, and features the use of moving image, embroidery, bookmaking, gaming and sculpture.

Through an interdisciplinary approach, themes of sacred space, mental health, gender, racial justice, joy, pain, disability, tenderness and desire become tools for solidarity and elicit conversations rooted in the need for a decriminalised future.

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Queer Pakistani-Egyptian artist Aisha Mirza's installation is presented in the lower gallery, a space that fuses poetry and picture to explore notions of queerness, sickness and transformation. The work features an altar with books, plants and sex work zines.

The exhibition continues to a series of three life-size linocut self-portraits, by artist Khaleb Brooks, whose work explores Blackness, transness and collective memory. A comic book, drawn by artist Annie Mok and written by Danica Uskert, questions the divide between 'legitimate' actors and adult performers in Hollywood in relation to sex presented in film.

In the upper galleries films by Chi Chi Castillo and May May Peltier, artists focusing on narratives around sex work and queerness, explore the lives and philosophies of four sex workers of colour, while performance artist and musician Liad Hussein Kantorowicz's video *Mythical Creatures* tells the story of Argaman Alliance, the first sex worker organisation to exist in Palestine-Israel.

*Decriminalised Futures* is hosted by the ICA in partnership with Arika, a UK-based political arts organisation that supports connections between artistic production and social change. The exhibition forms part of an ongoing project of the same name, led by organisers from SWARM (Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement), a UK-based collective founded and led by sex workers.

## **Co-curators of *Decriminalised Futures*, Yves Sanglante and Elio Sea, said:**

'Full decriminalisation of sex work is the rallying cry that unites the sex worker rights movement across the world. Under this banner, sex workers and their allies have fought tirelessly for strong workers' rights, an end to exploitation, an end to criminalisation, and real measures to address poverty.

*Decriminalised Futures* is a celebration of this movement. This exhibition is a testament to what can be created when we take politicised sex worker organising as our starting point.

'It gives us great pleasure to share the stunning works of all the talented artists involved in *Decriminalised Futures*. This truly is a creatively diverse collection of works that offers nuance, sensitivity, humour and depth in exploring sex worker lives and struggles.

'As a small team who care about collaboration, we have thoroughly enjoyed working with the ICA. Their team has been supportive every step of the way, and demonstrated the ICA's ongoing commitment to exploring meaningful struggles for justice and liberation.'

## **The curatorial team at the ICA, said:**

'As a home for free and progressive thought, *Decriminalised Futures* chimes with the ICA's championing of voices that foreground contemporary art's inextricable connection to the socio-economic conditions of our time.

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‘This exhibition is a timely presentation that looks at contemporary sex workers’ everyday lives and struggles through the lens of artistic creation.’

— ENDS —

**For further information, images and to request interviews please contact:**

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Visit [ica.art/decriminalised-futures](http://ica.art/decriminalised-futures) for additional information and to book tickets.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

All artworks created for this exhibition have taken inspiration from the 2019 festival *A Decriminalised Future: Sex Workers’ Festival of Resistance* (17–19 May), hosted by SWARM for sex workers and allies. Recordings and quotes from the festival are threaded into the design of the exhibition, connecting the artists’ works to broader social, labour and movement struggles.

*Decriminalised Futures* is curated by Elio Sea and Yves Sanglante with support from the ICA’s curatorial team.

Works were selected by an independent panel of writers, artists, performers, filmmakers and sex educators including Jay Bernard, Joanna Helfer, Morgan M. Page, Imani Robinson, Hello Rooster, and Yves Sanglante.

A chapbook containing documentation of the exhibited works alongside texts and quotes from the panel discussions at SWARM’s 2019 festival will be published alongside the exhibition.

## Arika

Arika is a UK-based political arts organisation concerned with supporting connections between artistic production and social change working since 2001.

## SWARM (Sex Workers Advocacy and Resistance Movement)

SWARM is a collective founded and led by sex workers who believe in self-determination, solidarity and co-operation. They campaign for the rights and safety of everyone who sells sexual services. Together they organise skill-shares and support meetups for sex workers, as well as public events. They are UK based and part of the global sex worker-led movement advocating the full decriminalisation of sex work.

## Institute of Contemporary Arts

The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) is an independent organisation that supports the most pressing debates in contemporary culture. From its home on The Mall, the geographic heart of the UK establishment, the ICA presents a programme that speaks to the challenges of the 21st century: ground-breaking exhibitions, performances, independent film and keynote lectures by many of the world’s leading thinkers.

Founded in 1946 by a collective of artists, poets and their supporters, the ICA played a pivotal role in the development of pop art and charted the course of punk, performance art and independent cinema. It has previously staged the first institutional exhibitions by artists including Jean-Michel Basquiat, Damien Hirst, Cindy Sherman and Cosey Fanni Tutti; historic performances and legendary concerts by artists such as Laurie Anderson,

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David Bowie, Einstürzende Neubauten and Yoko Ono; and critical discussions featuring the likes of Kathy Acker, Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The ICA is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation and supported by the DCMS Culture Recovery Fund.

## Artist Biographies

### **Tobi Adebajo**

Adebajo is an Anti-disciplinary artist exploring the question: 'Who is not in this space? And why?' Their projects are curated to highlight the inaccessibility of society for and to othered bodies, encouraging freedom with/in movement whilst celebrating survival. Focusing on sound, movement, visual and written pieces; Tobi's practice draws from all the senses and relies upon meaningful collaboration to create works centralising diasporic experiences whilst simultaneously honouring the power of identity. Adebajo presents evidence of communal and spiritual language that we inherently possess but may be unable to access; framing this language as a basis for collective healing and liberation.

### **Yarli Allison**

Allison is a Canadian-born-Hong Kongese artist based in London. Her frequent relocations and mixed identities have focused her attention to the collective uprootedness and solidarity of migrant demographic groups. In her works, she fabricates imagined worlds that consist of her invented survival tactics and coping mechanisms, often in interaction with sculptural installation, drawings, performances, and moving images.

### **Khaleb Brooks**

Khaleb Brooks is an interdisciplinary artist, researcher and writer exploring blackness, transness and collective memory. Meshing the black queer figure with surreal environments in paintings, using printmaking to question the politics of desire and entering transcendental states in performance they force their audience to confront the literal and social death of black people globally. Khaleb, originally from Chicago is inspired by the perseverance of black families in overcoming poverty, addiction, abuse and gang violence as well as their own experiences of being transgender. Khaleb is currently an artist in residence at the International Slavery Museum and Metal Culture in Liverpool.

### **Chi Chi Castillo**

Castillo is an independent filmmaker and writer focused on narratives around sex work, queerness, and DIY. Chi Chi is collaborating with May May Peltier to create work especially for this exhibit. Castillo and Peltier began making films together in 2017, with their first film being *Chi Chi's House Party*, a smut film highlighting the queer underground in Oakland, California. Peltier and Castillo are now continuing their work together under the name Stone Dove. They're excited to invite you into Stone Dove's dream world.

### **Cory Cocktail**

Cory Cocktail is a power exchange architect and escort; a post disciplinary artist with an interest in the intersections of the body and technology, narrative design, contemporary dance, interactive fiction, migration, gender, and sexuality. A transsexual descendant of Oceti Sakowin and European peoples, Cocktail is attempting to bring a sex worker digital interactive fiction experience into the world for *Decriminalised Futures*. Cocktail is based in the unceded lands of the Duwamish, in what is currently known as Seattle, United States of America.

### **Hanecdote**

Hanecdote, is an artist and sex worker with chronic pain who specialises in hand embroidery which speaks from a place of emotion. They are interested in portraying everyday life, inspired by art history but making sure it is much more inclusive and beautiful. Hanecdote believes art is therapy, justice, communication, love and a human experience.

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## **Liad Hussein Kantorowicz**

Kantorowicz is a performance artist, musician, perpetual migrant, and master of the margins. Her performances de-exotify and de-mystify the positions of so-called sexual or political deviants. In them, the body is a tool of resistance, a platform to display vulnerabilities, and means of transgressing the boundaries of the public space.

## **Letizia Miro**

Miro is a Spanish queer who migrated to London several years ago. She is a sex worker and poet. Miro has been involved in sex workers' rights and political organising in Spain as well as in the UK. When she is not monetising her erotic capital, she writes poetry that digs into the meanings of sexuality and existential pain. She has performed and published her work both in English and in Spanish.

## **Aisha Mirza**

Mirza is a queer Pakistani-Egyptian writer, DJ, multi-disciplinary artist and stripper. Their work explores the relationship between queerness, transness, race, mental health, sex and art. They are also creator of Misery, a mental health collective and sober club night for queer/trans people of colour. Mirza writes a monthly advice column for gal-dem and lives on a boat.

## **Annie Mok**

Mok is a intersex trans woman writer-artist, musician (formerly in See-Through Girls, currently in the Knight Dreams), and sometime filmmaker. She drew and designed the graphic memoir *Unsustainable* based off her friend Danica Uskert's script.

## **May May Peltier**

Peltier is a model and video artist emphasising experimental paradigms to document the culture of feminine identities and how they intersect with modern systems of oppression. Peltier will be working alongside Chi Chi Castillo, a brilliant artist she is frequently in collaboration with under the production name 'Stone Dove'.

## **pxr•mxt•r**

pxr•mxt•r is an inquiry that will be using the space to study, present and be in negotiation with infrastructure and power exchange.

## **Danica Anna Uskert-Quinn**

Uskert-Quinn is a mixed-race, pansexual, polyamorous film director, producer, video and performance artist, curator, writer, and the editor-in-chief of filmandfishnet.com. As Danica Darling, she is also a cam girl, porn performer, and professional submissive. She currently resides in Hollywood, United States with her dog Elvira.

## VISITOR INFORMATION

Opening times: *Decriminalised Futures* can be visited during regular ICA opening hours Tuesday–Sunday 12–9pm.

Location: Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall, London, SW1Y 5AH

For information about tickets and membership, please contact:

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