

ICA London Exhibition Announcement

Elisa Giardina Papa: She Flickered In and Out of History

17 July – 6 September 2026

Institute of Contemporary Arts, London



Elisa Giardina Papa, *She Flickered In and Out of History*, 2026. Video installation, 18 minutes, variable dimensions. Still from the video. Courtesy of the artist.

In Summer 2026, the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) presents a new video and mixed-media installation by interdisciplinary artist Elisa Giardina Papa (b. Italy; lives and works in New York, U.S., and Sant’Ignazio, Sicily).

In 1831, an underwater volcanic eruption gave rise to a new landform between Tunisia and Sicily, sparking a violent sovereignty dispute among European powers. Five months later, the island vanished beneath the surface. *She Flickered In and Out of History* explores the geological, mythological and political temporalities of the Mediterranean through the historical and speculative story of this island that refused to be annexed.

Following *U Scantu: A Disorderly Tale* (2022), which premiered at the 59th Venice Biennale, *The Milk of Dreams*, *She Flickered In and Out of History* forms part of a trilogy of video installations exploring forgotten Mediterranean histories. It is Giardina Papa’s newest body of work in her ongoing investigation into forms of knowledge and desire that have been lost or neglected. At a time when logics of territorial conquest and control are resurging, *She Flickered In and Out of History*

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invites reflection on the authority of those claims, the conditions under which they are constructed, and presents an analogy for unbounded refusal.

Giardina Papa filmed the work on Mount Etna, Stromboli, and along the submerged slopes of Mediterranean volcanic islands. In the video, the visual environment is elemental: an ecosystem of unstable, submerged, and resurfaced matter that flickers between abstraction and legibility. In her retelling, the island of the historical narrative – something singular to be taken and owned – is rendered elusive, visually and sonically depicted as evolving, unbounded formations of seawater ripples, pyroclastic material, volcanic ash, and floating pumice rafts. The unruly agency of the natural landscape is the protagonist in the story; the historical actors and accounts are left outside the frame.

The video is presented on a large, free-standing LED screen, alongside a series of glass sculptures. A poem spoken in Sicilian and set to an original score by New York-based composer duendita threads through the visual narrative, weaving together historical records with reflections on decolonial and queer temporalities. The poem, composed by Megan Fernandes from Giardina Papa's film script and archival research, lyrically meditates on the island's eruptive emergence and subsequent refusal.

Sculptures made from hand-shaped glass and *cotisso*, a raw, unstable glass traditionally destined for remelting in Murano furnaces, materialise another strand of the island's story. In deep, saturated hues, they embody the last stanza of the poem, which draws on historical observations of the altered colour of the sun following the 1831 underwater eruption. Caused by the release of volcanic particles and sulphur aerosols into the atmosphere, observers from the Mediterranean to the Middle East and the Caribbean reported seeing blue, green, and purple suns.

The exhibition at ICA is generously supported by the Christian Levett Collection and Musée FAMM Mougins.

The project is supported by the Italian Council programme (2024), promoted by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Culture; Bogotá Museum of Modern Art (MAMBO); MACTE, Museo di Arte Contemporanea di Termoli; the Malcom S. Forbes Centre for Culture & Media Studies, Department of Modern Culture and Media, Brown University; the Humanities Research Fund, Brown University; and Michelle Cristella.

Exhibition design by 2050+ (Sara Barbini, Francesca Lantieri, Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli).

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Elisa Giardina Papa says:

‘The island is a shapeshifter: materially ungovernable, staging a tension between emergence, accumulation, erosion, and dispersion – always already new, always already gone. Incomputable and resistant to capture and measurement, it unsettles the imperial, ordering gaze, rendering projects of conquest – past and present – absurd. For all of us involved in the project, it offered a framework to rethink sovereignty, borders, and belonging’.

Andrea Nitsche-Krupp, Exhibitions Curator, says:

‘It has been rewarding to witness the development of Elisa’s new body of work, which is not only aesthetically and conceptually precise, but offers a moving new proposition for political agency. This is, of course, regrettably timely. I admire her approach to work deeply collaboratively with composers, poets, local communities in Sicily, and the land itself, which resonates across this beautiful installation. I am thrilled to be able to offer *She Flickered In and Out of History* to the ICA’s publics’.

Bengi Ünsal, Director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts says:

‘We are delighted to dedicate a solo exhibition to this important artist after having shown the first part of Elisa Giardina Papa’s trilogy, *U Scantu: A Disorderly Tale* as part of our Frieze x ICA Artists’ Film Programme 2024. Elisa is the kind of experimental, critically engaged and cross-disciplinary artist whose work has immediate bearing on the contemporary condition we are honoured to champion at the ICA’.

ICA Exhibition support from



The project is supported by



Direzione Generale
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Visitor Information

Tickets: from £6.00

Pay What You Can (Tue to Sun, 12–1pm): £3.00

Members go free

Exhibition opening hours:

Monday: Closed

Tuesday to Sunday: 12–8pm

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

Access

If you have an access requirement that we can assist you with, please contact us in advance of your visit for more information at access@ica.art and we will make our best endeavours to help you. Full venue accessibility information can be found here, and you can download an accessibility map of the venue at www.ica.art/media/01795.pdf

For information about tickets and membership, please visit ica.art or contact: sales@ica.art / +44 (0)20 7930 3647

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About the artist

Elisa Giardina Papa's research-based art practice seeks forms of knowledge and desire that have been disqualified and rendered nonsensical by hegemonic demands for order and legibility. Through a critical yet poetic approach, she works across large-scale video installation, experimental film, and ceramic and glass sculptures, to draw attention to those aspects of our lives which remain radically unruly, untranslatable, and incomputable.

Her work has been exhibited and screened at the 59th Biennale di Venezia, MoMA, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Gropius Bau, ICA London, Vienna Secession, HKW Berlin, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Seoul Mediacity Biennale, the 6th Buenos Aires Bienal de la Imagen en Movimiento, M+ Hong Kong, among others.

Giardina Papa is also a founding member of the artist collective Radha May. Together with Indian artist Nupur Mathur and Ugandan artist Bathsheba Okwenje, they develop performances and art installations that reveal hidden histories and peripheral sites, exploring their relation to gender, sexuality, and the legacies of colonialism.

Giardina Papa received an MFA from RISD, a PhD in Film, Media, and Gender Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. She lives and works in New York and Sant'Ignazio, Sicily.

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About the Institute of Contemporary Arts

The **Institute of Contemporary Arts** (ICA) is London's leading space for contemporary culture. We commission, produce and present new work in film, music, performance and the visual arts by today's most progressive artists. In our landmark home on The Mall in central London, we invite artists and audiences to interrogate what it means to live in our world today, with a genre-fluid programme that challenges the past, questions the present and confronts the future.

The ICA platforms the daring and the curious, supporting artists and ideas that challenge perceptions, inspire social change, and connect with diverse audiences locally and globally. As a space for bold, boundary-pushing creativity, we cultivate connections across disciplines, communities, and cultures. Our cross-disciplinary programming invites audiences to explore beyond the boundaries of individual art forms, fostering experimentation and the discovery of new perspectives. Open to all voices and ideas, we embrace interplay and interaction across club nights, film festivals, gigs, exhibitions, talks, and digital art. With inclusivity and collaboration at the heart of our work, we remain fearless in shaping contemporary creativity, connecting diverse voices, and making unexpected connections that define the future of arts and culture.

Our history of presenting and promoting visionary new art is unrivalled in London: from Kenneth Anger to Kathy Acker, Kano to Klein, Jackson Pollock to Jean-Michel Basquiat, Gay Sweatshop to Forensic Architecture, David Bowie to Stormzy, Pop Art to queer techno. Today, as ever, our inclusive programme reflects and represents who we are as a disparate and diverse collection of cultures and identities.

Exactly 78 years after a group of artists and poets founded the ICA as an alternative to the mainstream, we are committed more than ever to pave the way for the next generation and to platform creative voices. The ICA continues to celebrate risk and champion innovation, and experimentation across the arts – a playground and a home for today's most vital artists. Central to the ICA's vision and mission is a commitment to diversity, equality, and inclusion at all levels of the organisation. We want to create and maintain an ICA that is a positive environment where similarities and differences of people are valued – a space where everyone belongs and feels welcome. We hold ourselves accountable through our regularly reviewed Anti-Racism Strategic Plan; Equality and Diversity Policy and Action Plan; and Safety Policy.

Since its inception, the ICA has been the home of future-thinking ideas and urgent cultural discourse. We are committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment that encourages dialogue and debate, recognising that differing viewpoints are essential to the advancement of contemporary arts and culture.

The ICA is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.