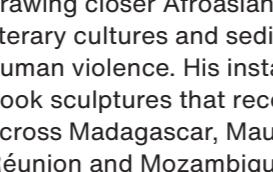


Kelani Abass  
Malala Andrialavidrazana  
Shiraz Bayjoo  
Rossella Biscotti  
M'barek Bouhchichi  
Nikhil Chopra  
Dhow Countries Music Academy  
Tishani Doshi  
Köken Ergun and Fetra Danu  
Adama Delphine Fawundu  
Haji Gora Haji  
Clara Jo  
Jasmine Nilani Joseph  
John Njenga Karugia  
Jeewi Lee  
Lavanya Mani  
Oscar Murillo  
Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor  
Dominic Sansoni  
Sim Chi Yin  
Jennifer Tee  
Jack Beng-Thi  
Abdourahman A. Waberi  
Kudzanai-Violet Hwami and  
Belinda Zhawi

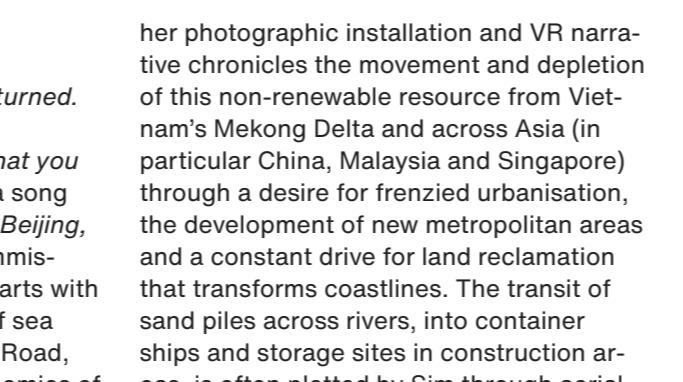


Further information

[gropiusbau.de/indigo-waves](http://gropiusbau.de/indigo-waves)

between 1980–1988) by acclaimed Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer, first expressed orally when the author was under detention in a camp on Buru island. Biscotti's installation is inspired by five of its characters, one of which is based on the life of Surati, who contracts smallpox voluntarily in her efforts to escape subjection as a concubine under Dutch colonialism. In gleaning subjectivity from fragmented records, Biscotti weaves a lineage of feminist agency, ecological entanglements and potential affiliation. The use of Batik textile patterning upon translucent natural resin acts as a bodily imprint, recalling shared memory as well as rebellious, transient and disappearing voices.

From Réunion Island, **Jack Beng-Thi** has travelled across the many islands and archipelagos of the Indian Ocean world. These creative voyages have resulted in public artworks and the dissemination of poetry, performance and experimental pedagogy. It has also been an endeavour in attesting to and carrying forward the multiple ancestries held within him, including his Indian, Chinese-Vietnamese, African and European lineage. Beng-Thi commemorates the enslaved body, narratives of displacement and coerced movement through maritime imperialism. He also celebrates water-borne kinship amidst islander communities using materials such as terracotta, plant fibre and volcanic stones to gesture to organic histories and sacred geography. Through his decades of practice, the ocean is addressed as a common ancestor that dissolves centre and periphery, instead drawing closer Afroasian and Austronesian literary cultures and sediments of human violence. His installation assembles book sculptures that recognise Africanity across Madagascar, Mauritius, Comoros, Réunion and Mozambique.



**Malala Andrialavidrazana's** series of photomontages titled *Figures* (2015–ongoing) is a deep reflection on the problematics of cartography and the violence and finiteness of maps. As Lee Maracle aptly puts it in her poem *Maps*: "Maps are pretentious arrogantly purporting to know where everything is. Pretending power where none is. Maps are finite. Maps are always old." *Figures* reads like an exhumation and recomposition of pictorial, symbolic and representational legacies. It brings together historical personalities alongside the faces of ordinary men and women whose roles, conditions and destinies have been overlooked across times and geographies. Fascinating both for their historical heft and their absurdities, they inform about political deviation, intellectual manipulation, systems of privilege and domination between genders, colours, classes or nations. It overlays the graphic reliefs of telegraphic cables, river systems and journeys of sacred philosophy with civilizational imagery of paradoxes and proximity. In Andrialavidrazana's endeavour, one finds a path toward navigating collective truth and sovereign forms of place-making, echoing Kei Miller's reflections in *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*: to anticipate the ironic question: how did we find ourselves here? My job is to untangle the tangled,

to unworry the concerned,  
to guide you out from cul-de-sacs  
into which you may have wrongly turned.

"Invest in Indonesia / make sure that you don't miss it!" goes the refrain of a song featured in **Köken Ergun's** *China, Beijing, I Love You!* (2023). The newly-commissioned film is an animation that charts with documentary rigour the network of sea routes known as the Maritime Silk Road, which services the extractive economies of rare earths between Indonesia, China and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Essential to the production of EV batteries, mobile phones and missile technology, in the film Nickel and Cobalt are metals-turned-characters who face extraction and exile through Afrasian networks of profit and consumption. While a group of suited-up men tout investment as the way forward to national prosperity, the grievances of Nickel are echoed by the political unrest of workers in processing plants, who protest for better working conditions, environmental protection and health safeguards. Along with the plea of Nickel to be returned to the ground where she belongs, ecological depletion and health hazard are reminders that different forms of planetary cohesion are needed in the Indian Ocean world.

**Sim Chi Yin** (in the adjacent room, *Surge (social cataracts)* (2019–ongoing)) invokes the aesthetics of Claude Monet's paintings of water lilies to reflect on the plethora of signifiers that bodies of water connote. No matter how gentle some waters are, their undercurrents seem to tell other stories. Murillo's social cataracts seem to unravel the stories told by the undercurrents. It is difficult to think of the bodies of water that connect the African continent to the rest of the world without bearing witness to traumas that lay underneath the swirling waves. As Amiri Baraka put it: "At the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean there's a railroad made of human bones." Murillo uses stitched-together patches of canvas, broad agitated strokes of blue, green, red, yellow paint to express the voices of the undercurrents. This suite also reminds us of the hydrological cycle and processes of weathering that

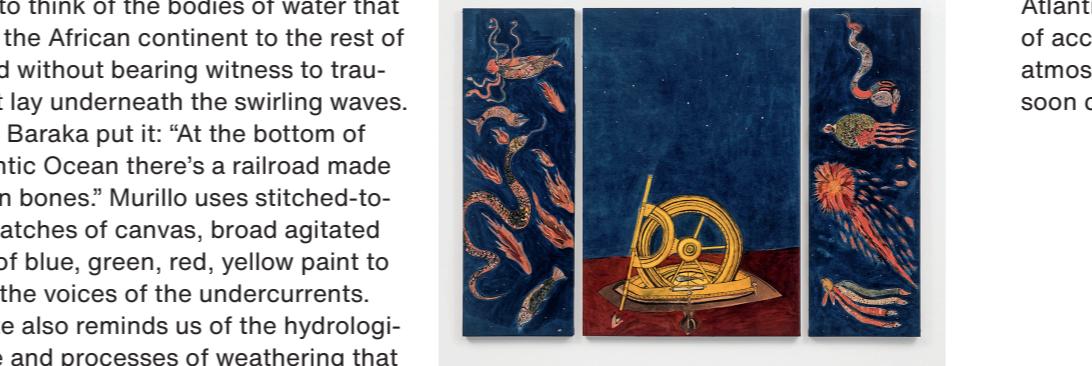
connect rain clouds with the bottom of the sea. Although Murillo takes his cue for this series from the story of Monet's suffering from cataracts when he painted the water lilies, the work itself invites us to think of the colonial enterprise as an impairment of vision that still throws a dense cloud over humanity – thus coloniality is a social cataract. With the entralling beauty of these paintings, we are reminded that despite all the odds, waters still connect, waters transcend borders, disrespect maps and are the life-bearers of the planet. As Fela Kuti put it: "water no get enemy".

*as if there is a path where beings truly meet, as if I am rounding the human corners*

— Linda Hogan, *The Turtle Watchers* (2008)

The textile paintings of **Lavanya Mani**

mediate relations with the ocean via real and chimerical creatures, manifesting their claims for a better treatment of planetary commons. Evoking characters of the deep sea and skies, *Spectral Objects* (2018–2019) dives into obscure waters to contest the idea that human mastery through scientific instruments of navigation can assume supremacy over the seas. Dispelling the construction of "darkness" as a space of regression or anti-modernity, the sea's depths echo with calls to rethink our place



**Natasha Ginwala, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung with Michelangelo Corsaro**

Curators

Shiraz Bayjoo  
Bone Yard, 2021  
Courtesy of the artist

Clara Jo

*Nests of Basalt, Nests of Wood*, 2023  
Courtesy of the artist

Kudzanai-Violet Hwami and Belinda Zhawi

Buktu, Anna, Nehanda, 2021  
© Kudzanai-Violet Hwami and Belinda Zhawi

Courtesy of the artists and Victoria Miro

Jennifer Tee

*Tampan World Mountain, Ancestral Creations*, 2019  
Courtesy of the artist

M'barek Bouhchichi

*Essential words I*, 2022  
Courtesy the artist

Adama Delphine Fawundu

*Sopdet Illuminates*, 2017  
Courtesy: the artist

Malala Andrialavidrazana

*Figures 1853, Kolonien in Afrika und in der Süd-See*, 2016  
© Malala Andrialavidrazana

Sim Chi Yin

*Shifting Sands*, 2017–ongoing  
Courtesy of the artist and Zilberman, Istanbul/Berlin

Oscar Murillo

*surge (social cataracts)*, 2021  
Photo: Tim Bowditch and Reiniis Lismarie  
Image courtesy the artist

Lavanya Mani

*Spectral Objects*, 2019  
Photo: Anil Rane  
Courtesy: the artist and Chemould Prescott

Developed in partnership with

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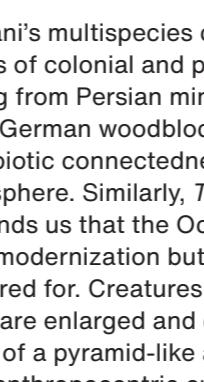
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GROPIUS BAU

# Indigo Waves and Other Stories

Re-Navigating the Afrasian Sea and Notions of Diaspora

6.4. →  
13.8.2023

The research and multi-chapter exhibition *Indigo Waves and Other Stories* sheds light on the historical, cultural and linguistic links between the African and Asian continents, as seen through the work of contemporary artists, filmmakers, musicians, writers and thinkers. The exhibition chapters at Gropius Bau and SAVVY Contemporary have been composed in resonance. While moving between these venues, visitors are invited to experience fluid associations that open up like the tug and swell of tides.

*Indigo Waves and Other Stories* responds to a need to rethink the histories and processes of dispersion, and to reconsider notions of diaspora and cultural belonging. Here, the Indian Ocean serves as a communal horizon from which to read Afrasian histories of the forced and unforced movements that occurred historically through currents of coastal societies, water-borne kinship and mercantile imperialism. The project's perspective is one of perpetual hybridity – addressing what Françoise Vergès calls “the politics of forgetfulness”, rather than recentering the colonial gaze and restoring asymmetries of power while echoing from the annals of bygone exploits.

*Ziwa Kuu, the Swahili Sea, the Afrasian Sea, the Indian Ocean, Ratnakara, Eastern Ocean, Indic Ocean or Bahari Hindi* are just a few of the plethora of names used to characterise a body of water, making up a fifth of the earth's oceans, and which has been dubbed the oldest continuum in human history. It spreads between the East African coast, bordering Asia on the north, engulfing Australia in the east and stretching south to the Southern Ocean.

In **Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's** *The Dragonfly Sea*, the novel's Pakistani and Indonesian subjects, Ari and Ayanna, give many names to this ocean. There may be much in a name, but no single name can

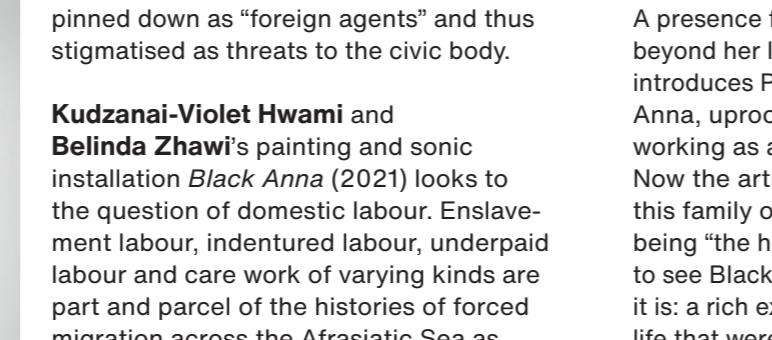
encompass, contain or express all that this body of water stands for, tells, sings and invokes. It is too complex, too deep, too vast and pregnant with a plenitude of histories to carry just one name. What is certain is that rather than divide, it connects geographies, cultures, peoples, languages, foods, sounds, winds, waters, economies, philosophies and more. The ocean is a fluid joint: a junction of and for affinities and realignments prior to nation-state allegiances.

In charting the free-flowing nature of Afrasian waters, we acknowledge how the navigation and inhabitation of the Indian Ocean has been historically premised on seasonal cycles and wind systems. In *One Water, Many Lands* (2023) **Nikhil Chopra** evokes the contours of water cycles that interlink the Indian Ocean with the lands it unfurls against. Throughout much of his work, Chopra's performative acts are strongly connected to egress and landscape. This is done as a means to channel a personal metamorphosis, but also with the aim of transforming physical and mental spaces. Here, journeying through a vast marine scenery is a way for Chopra to trade the stability of the land in exchange for a liquid horizon in perpetual states of motion – from glaciers to waterfalls, estuaries to clouds. Incarnating a humble persona dressed in mud and cotton, he dwells on a floating platform, painting waterscapes on canvas sheets with deep blue pigments and ochres obtained from mud and clay.

**Shiraz Bayjoo** creates talismans that carry the weight of mourning and survival, recollecting foremothers and their struggles in

the Indian Ocean world – particularly from the shorelines of Mauritius, Madagascar and most recently from research in South Africa. Bayjoo listens for buried archives to carry just one name. What is certain is that rather than divide, it connects geographies, cultures, peoples, languages, foods, court records and botanical gardens.

To borrow a term from poet and thinker Kamau Brathwaite, his pursuit carries on the “tidalectics” of remembrance, bearing witness to creole formations and notations of *marronage* – recalling those in the Indian Ocean's islands and the Americas who escaped slave societies and formed their own independent communities and settlements. His sculptures include photographs as well as textile flags using Shewshew batik and Kanga fabric. The images include archive portraits of Malagasy queens, coastlines of early Dutch arrival in Mauritius and Indigenous as well as transplanted fauna. Composed as wooden display systems that investigate museological approaches but also gesture toward shrines and altar pieces, Bayjoo notes, “[t]hese works draw lines of enquiry between ‘Land erasure’ and matriarchy and a way of survival within the plantation landscape.” The installation *Lamer Vide, Later Ruz* (2022) also links ancestral traumas and defiant wayfinding in dialogue with storyteller Traci Kwaii, who has been exploring her familial narratives in Kalk Bay, a historic fishing village in greater Cape Town, and charting traditions of generations of fishing communities in the Cape.



**Kudzanai-Violet Hwami** and **Belinda Zhaiwi**'s painting and sonic installation *Black Anna* (2021) looks to the question of domestic labour. Enslavement labour, indentured labour, underpaid labour and care work of varying kinds are part and parcel of the histories of forced migration across the Afrasiatic Sea as



Islands and archipelagos of this ocean have included some of the earliest architectures of quarantine and colonial hospitals that have induced traumatic suffering.

The movement of human beings has been accompanied with animals and botanicals along ancient maritime routes. The history of epidemics is often recounted through a colonial lens and thus framed problematic terms for contagion, such as “exposure” and “first contact” that continue to reside and shape societal notions of a healthy subject.

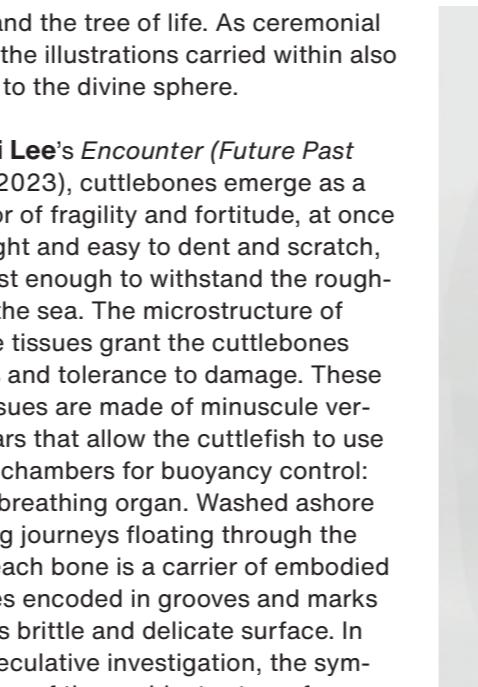
**Clara Jo** conceives a film with animation sequences that invite us to critically reassess the nautical imagination and the docking on land through processes of decay, the circulation of contagious disease, detention and regeneration. The artist reflects on historical antecedents of incarceration in Albion and Flat Island in Mauritius and presents allegorical protagonists to explore how fear is planted in our living systems: how viral loads and waterborne diseases have spread with mercantile ambition and, finally, which bodies are pinned down as “foreign agents” and thus stigmatised as threats to the civic body.

#### **Kudzanai-Violet Hwami and Belinda Zhaiwi**

*Black Anna* (2021) looks to the question of domestic labour.

Enslavement labour, indentured labour, underpaid labour and care work of varying kinds are part and parcel of the histories of forced

migration across the Afrasiatic Sea as



well as the Atlantic Ocean. In many cases women are especially susceptible to the most exploitative conditions of labour. The installation takes its cue from the story of Zwarte Anna (Black Anna), a black [enslaved] woman from Suriname who arrived in Arnhem in 1727, accompanying the family she worked for. The work imagines narratives around Black Anna beyond

the servant, departing from the private world(s) she might have created for herself, her person, but also depicting her in moments of rest, reflection and aloneness. A presence for Anna is thereby created beyond her labour. Simultaneously, Hwami introduces Paula, a present-day Black Anna, uprooted from her country of origin, working as a servant for a European family.

Now the artist wonders who Paula is to this family outside of her labour, outside of being “the help”? Hwami invites the viewer to see Black women's personhood for what it is: a rich existence beyond the scripts of life that were and still are placed upon them.

#### **Kelani Abass**

proposes an installation comprising *Casing History, The Root Across the Walking Path, 1,2,3* (2022) and *The root across the walking path* (2022).

The former is a sequel in his long-term research project of searching through

archives. Abass's mixed-media assemblages are made up of letterpress type-cases, historical photographs and handwritten notes from family archives that date back as far as the 1920s. One of his many points of departure is his family's printing press and the way this medium of capturing information, stories, knowledges and histories ties together the familial (the micro) to the societal (the macro). Abass's installation

*The root across the walking path* considers stiffness and tolerance to damage. These bone tissues grant the cuttlebones through a collaging process using pressed tulip petals, the artist pays homage to an ancestral crossroads between her father, who travelled by ship with his sister and parents to the Netherlands after the Second World War, and her grandfather, an exporter of tulip bulbs, who frequently sailed to the United States. With Tee's artistic corpus *Tampan Tulip*, which she has grown since 2010, the ship becomes a site of transfiguration that resonates as cultural leitmotif and structuring principle, reframing its role in littoral societies beyond maritime power.

It is a reflection of water as an intrinsic part of people's identities, cultural perceptions, religious beliefs and worldviews. *Unveiled Barriers* (2019) reflects on the ocean's role as a mediator of pathways within and out of Sri Lanka. Joseph charts minuscule details of shelters built by fishing communities, the Indian coast guard intercepting small boats and detention camps built by the Australian government that continue to threaten the lives of those fleeing from this coastline. In Lee's speculative investigation, the symbolic value of these objects stems from encounters taking place during research in Senegal on the beach, a porous aquatic border channelling oceanic remembrance. From there, as for the building of an archive, Lee records the imprint of the bones on *hanji* paper and seals each of them in a protective metallic glaze. Coated in copper, the collection of traces left on over five hundred cuttlebones forms an anthology of histories floating in between terrestrial and oceanic worlds.

#### **Dhow Countries Music Academy**

is invited to compose and conjure a sonic

scape of the Afrasiatic Sea. Perhaps the

most appropriate way to navigate that body of water is to use music in particular and sound in general as the compass. As a musical school in Zanzibar which preserves and promotes musical heritage of the “dhow

region” (including countries along the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Arab Gulf such as Zanzibar, Comoros, Oman, Kuwait, Iran, U.A.E and India), the members of the Dhow Countries Music Academy

have their ears not only proverbially on the ground, but also under water. As an institution, the Dhow Countries Music Academy is

Often beginning with field research around the Jaffna peninsula as well as conversations with neighbours and local groups, **Jasmine Nilani Joseph**'s series of drawings dwell on private and public memory. She focuses on security structures and the pervasive militarisation of the domestic sphere and the natural world. The artist's biography plays out in several of her works, which include accounts of fleeing violence and forced displacement during childhood through the years of civil war. In plotting architectural motifs and the built environment interweaving rural coastal zones, the artist conveys embedded complexities of exodus and resettlement, language barriers and cultural loss. *Unveiled Barriers* (2019)

reflects on the ocean's role as a mediator of pathways within and out of Sri Lanka. Joseph charts minuscule details of shelters built by fishing communities, the Indian coast guard intercepting small boats and detention camps built by the Australian government that continue to threaten the lives of those fleeing from this coastline. In Lee's speculative investigation, the symbolic value of these objects stems from encounters taking place during research in Senegal on the beach, a porous aquatic border channelling oceanic remembrance. From there, as for the building of an archive, Lee records the imprint of the bones on *hanji* paper and seals each of them in a protective metallic glaze. Coated in copper, the collection of traces left on over five hundred cuttlebones forms an anthology of histories floating in between terrestrial and oceanic worlds.

#### **M'barek Bouchichi**

's sculptural work superimposes the concepts of a braille slab and a tribulum. A tribulum is a historical sledge for threshing still used in many parts of the African continent to separate seeds from the lot of a harvest as well as chaffs.

A presence for Anna is thereby created beyond her labour. Simultaneously, Hwami introduces Paula, a present-day Black Anna, uprooted from her country of origin, working as a servant for a European family.

This broad, heavy mostly wooden board is furnished with teeth of stone or iron and visually reminiscent of writing systems on stones in varying civilisations around the world. This connection to writing inspired Bouchichi to deliberate on the many writings that connect North Africa in general

snakes and the tree of life. As ceremonial textiles, the illustrations carried within also connect to the divine sphere.

#### **Adama Delphine Fawundu**

delves into this sphere of ancestral and sacred time-keeping in her video and sculptural works, braiding the protective and fearsome qualities of multi-spirited and creolised waters. Through exploring her familial stories from her Sierra Leonean heritage, her Mende ancestors, and inspired by Senegalese Baye Fall culture in *Hymns and Parables* (2022), the artist uses indigo dyed and batik fabrics, cotton paper from India and Brazilian banana paper, frankincense and cowrie shells. Drawing from her grandmother's textiles and new patterns printed as cyanotypes and using UV-activated inks, she describes these series as “codes”. In this way, audio-visual recordings and human-scale layered pieces perform as tessellated realms of cosmological relation-making, masquerade and larger diaspora chronicles. Fawundu's practice has long recognized water's elemental role in ceremonies for cleansing and sacrifice, marking the lifecycle from birth to death.

#### **Engseng Ho**

addresses creole kinship in his writing on the Hadrami diaspora and the distribution of inheritance as non-linear. These aspects also gain visibility in the long-term research journeys of **John Njenga Karuga** that emphasise on tributaries of memory cultures, aural inheritances and material legacies of seafaring communities intercrossing between Kenya, Oman and Indonesia for centuries. His anecdotal archive of photographs and the documentary film *Afrasian Memories in East Africa* (2018) are on view, offering glimpses of what lies behind-the-scenes of scholarship, private contestations and marginalia of what academia (re-)claims or rejects as part of “Ocean Studies”.

#### **Sea deities, djinns and aquatic spirits**

such as Mami Wata are recurring vivid and powerful entities in the hydro-imaginaries of

Africa and the African atlantic.

and Morocco in particular to the Indian Ocean and the lands beyond the eastern shores of that body of water. Even if some of these writings and traces are erased from the view of some, they still exist in other forms and can be read otherwise. Bouhchichi appropriates the braille system dedicated to deceased Africans, the coral walls of Jaffna fort and a former Dutch hospital at Neduntheevu (Delft island) in the Palk Strait. Joseph's drawings reflect on the ways natural boundaries and coastal frontiers act as spaces of affiliation, while also remaining hazardous amidst the repressive clutches of ethnic divides in a bounded island geography.

#### **Rossella Biscotti**

commits to circulating biographical, botanical and literary encounters around banned and forgotten histories through her artistic work. In her “rubber works” – *Annalies, Mei, Princess of Kasiruta, Sanikem - Nyai Ontosoroh - Madame Le Boucq, Surati* (2019) she focuses on the four-volume novel *The Buru Quartet* (published gradually

