

## 'MODERN TIMES'

S I N T A T A N T R A

20 March– 17 May 2020

Kristin Hjellegjerde London, London Bridge

Private view: 19th of March, 6:30 -9pm  
2 Melior Place,  
London SE1 3SZ

*Modern Times*, an exhibition of new work by Sinta Tantra curated by Guillaume Vandame.

A boy smoking a cigarette. A man playing with forest monkeys. Men and women barefoot and partially clothed walking and freely dancing along dirt paths and through crowded markets.

These are some of the sights experienced by Charlie Chaplin and his brother Sydney upon arriving in Bali in 1932. These rare moments of natural life were documented in black-and-white film by Chaplin and recall "the golden age" in Balinese history before its Westernisation and fondly remembered by Sinta Tantra's family.

Pink vinyl on an industrial window casts a bright glow inviting the viewer towards the original film footage by Chaplin documenting his anthropological studies of pre-modern Balinese and Javanese life. In this world, Tantra presents new paintings, sound, textiles made in collaboration with local artisans, a site-specific mural on the staircase and new sculptures in the garden terrace.

A few years after his trip to Indonesia, Chaplin created his iconic film, "Modern Times" (1936), which uses the allegory of "The Tramp" as a parable on the modernisation and urbanisation of society. Set in the Great Depression, Chaplin's character begins his work at a factory and struggles to find a sense of belonging while encountering the novelty of modern living; a machine created to expedite our consumption (only to falter) and his body famously diving headfirst into its great cogs. Suffering a nervous breakdown, The Tramp goes to prison and finds a moment of solace, a sudden birdcall, his true freedom; only to be released into the modern world again.

With the support of his love, The Gamin, performed by Paulette Goddard, he finds work in a series of places: another factory, a department store, as a waiter and performer at a vaudeville. He wants to settle down, find a home, and live the 'American dream', but the constraints of modern society always work against him and these desires. As The Tramp and The Gamin walk off into the hills, on the run from the police, there is an endearing sense of hope that they could still find "paradise".

Initially, "Modern Times" provided a foundation to reflect on Tantra's work and her ongoing interests in modernity to shape a globalised identity, drawing from her roots in Bali, her early years and education in London, where she continues to live and work, and her travels from Italy to Pakistan. Throughout her journey as an artist, her style has adapted 'modernity' as a trope and allegory through her kaleidoscopic vision of colour, light, and form. Masses of monochrome colour become flattened and compressed into sheets or fields, marked by something mechanical and detached with the illusion of being machine-made. References to Art Deco, Bauhaus, Constructivism, and Minimalism create a visual language that interjects these genres with bursts of colour, tropical motifs, and unusual shapes and patterns - in a sense, claiming ownership of a Modernism which is distinctly her own and transcends geopolitical boundaries.

The joy of Tantra's work is in her deft ability to transform space through her refined and playful use of colour and dynamic abstract-geometric designs. From her earliest projects in the mid-2000s, Tantra has been interested in the role her work has in the public realm, showing her art internationally on bridges, buildings, playgrounds, and other structures which are regularly used and have a social function. These places and sites are then filtered through the prism of modernist thinkers and artists such as Buckminster Fuller, Alexander Calder and Sol LeWitt, figures linked by their shared interest in the world, connectivity, and utopian aspirations for the future. Her public art practice continuously informs new drawings, paintings, prints, and sculptures, like blueprints for a building.

Within the gallery at Kristin Hjellegjerde, Tantra has tapped into its previous histories as an industrial factory, an artist studio, a mid-century modernist home, to create a site-specific installation. The installation is paradoxically

pre-modern and postmodern, suggestive of a tropical jungle and civilisation before Westernisation and uninhabited by humanity. In her words:

*"I wanted to cut through the vast architectural volume of the space and somehow inject the spirit of escapism or stepping into another world - part nostalgic, part historical, real and imagined. "*

This is particularly brought out by the modernist staircase at the centre of the gallery, which Tantra finds reminiscent of the Penguin Pool at London Zoo, designed by Berthold Lubetkin in 1934, as well as the Isokon Flats in Hampstead, North London, designed by Wells Coates between 1929 and 1932 and opened in 1934. The Isokon Flats were inhabited and visited by world-class artists, architects, writers, and theorists including Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Laslo Moholy-Nagy, Naum Gabo, Piet Mondrian, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and Ben Nicholson. The building fell into disuse in the 1970s and 1990s until being rescued and refurbished as a gallery and flats in 2003. In this way, the staircase becomes a symbol for the hopes and dreams of modernity while pointing to its inadequacies as a realistic form of living.

We are seemingly frozen and locked in this moment of time, Sinta Tantra's vision of paradise. Occasionally, we might hear a piercing birdsong, awakening our inner selves and, perhaps, our true calling into the wild and the vast unknown.

An interview between Vandame and Tantra is featured in the exhibition, as well as a public programme of events and screenings coinciding with Charlie Chaplin's birthday on 16th April 2020.

#### **About Sinta Tantra**

A British artist of Balinese descent, Sinta Tantra was born in New York in 1979. She studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London 1999-2003 and at the Royal Academy Schools London 2004-06. In 2017 she was the first recipient of the Bridget Riley Drawing Fellowship at The British School at Rome. Tantra currently lives in between London and Bali.

Highly regarded for her site-specific murals and installations in the public realm, commissions include; Karaachi Biennale (2019); Sharjah Islamic Art Festival (2019); Honor Hills, Seoul commissioned by Hyundai (2019); Facebook London (2018); Lee Tung Avenue, Hong Kong (2018); Folkestone Triennial UK (2017); Newnham College, Cambridge University (2016); Songdo South Korea (2015); Royal British Society of Sculptors (2013); Liverpool Biennial UK (2012); Southbank Centre (2007). Tantra's most notable public work includes a 300-metre long painted bridge commissioned for the 2012 Olympics, Canary Wharf, London.

Solo shows include *Your Private Sky* (Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London 2018); *A House in Bali* (ISA Art Advisory, Jakarta 2017); *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (Pearl Lam Gallery, Hong Kong 2016) and *Fantastic Chromatic* (Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London 2015). International group shows include; *On the Nature of Botanical Gardens*, (Framer Framed, Amsterdam 2020), *Strangers in Town* (Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Berlin 2019), *Woven & Illuminated*, (Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Berlin 2019), *Voyage to Indonesia*, The World Bank, Washington (2018); *Tetap Terang / Always Bright*, ISA Jakarta 2018; *High Noon*, Accademia Belle Arti di Rome, Rome (2017), *Quotidian*, Pearl Lam Gallery, Shanghai (2017).

A recipient of many awards including the British Council's International Development Award (2014) and The Pyramid Deutsche Bank Award (2006), Tantra's work has been featured in both UK and international press including *The Guardian*, *The Evening Standard*, *Tate Shots*, *Architectural Digest*, *Wall Street International Magazine*, *The Jakarta Post*, *iD Indonesia*, etc.

#### **About Guillaume Vandame**

Guillaume Vandame is an artist and writer based in London, often collaborating with Josh Wright as the collective, Wright & Vandame. Vandame is primarily interested in pop culture and art history through a queer perspective. Growing up in New York and New Jersey, his art is influenced by the Pictures Generation and artists such as Jack Goldstein and Dara Birnbaum. Moving image and video art are a key part of his practice alongside text, digital painting, sculpture and performance, focusing on the poetry of images to express the human condition from a personal and collective visual language.

Between 2017 and 2018, Vandame took part in the LUX Critical Forum, London. In 2019, he presented his first public art work commissioned by Sculpture in the City for *Nocturnal Creatures* in partnership with the Whitechapel Gallery, London and received an a-n bursary to support research in homoeroticism, queer theory, printmaking, and scent. He recently had a solo show *Sexy Pizza Dance* at SET, London in September 2019 and he is taking part in *MK Calling* at MK Gallery, Milton Keynes.

He has written and lectured about contemporary art at St. John's College, Cambridge, University of Oslo, Daiwa-Anglo Japanese Foundation, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, and the Royal Society of Sculptors, London. With Josh Wright, he has shown at fig-2 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; Chi-Wen Gallery, Taiwan; Gazelli Art House, London; MK Gallery, Milton Keynes; Photofusion, London; and recently at the Whitechapel Gallery, London. They are currently Artists-in-Residence for Open House with Kettle's Yard, Cambridge between 2019 and 2020.

#### **About Kristin Hjellegjerde**

Established in 2012, Kristin Hjellegjerde quickly gained recognition as an international gallery dedicated to exhibiting a roster of innovative, international artists, both emerging and established, with strong theoretical and aesthetic bases.

Known for its multicultural curatorial approach, the gallery has, over the past years, fostered close and cooperative relationships with museums and curators worldwide, maintaining a deep devotion to the artists it represents.

Drawing on her own international background, Kristin Hjellegjerde seeks to discover new talents by creating a platform through which they can be exposed to local and international clients. In 2019 she curated 'Kubatana', a museum exhibition focused on African artists at Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium, Norway. Her curatorial approach is collaborative, working closely with other curators and collectors, as well as with developers and architects.

In April 2018 the gallery opened its second space in Berlin. Following this exciting advancement, a second space was opened in London at the vibrant central location of London Bridge. This space is due to expand its reach over the coming years. In June 2020, Kristin Hjellegjerde is opening an annual Summer space in the beautiful coastal town of Nevlunghavn, Norway.