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Contemporary Artists Alice Irwin and Sinta Tantra Reveal Vibrant New work at Pitzhanger Manor and Gallery

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Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery in West London are unveiling two new exhibitions that will run in tandem with each other: Alice Irwin 'Chinwag' in the gallery space, and Sinta Tantra 'The Lightclub of Batavia' in the Grade-I listed Manor house, which was originally the country residence of acclaimed Neo-classical architect Sir John Soane.

Curator Svetlana Panova's dual exhibition follows in the footsteps of a presentation of Idris Khan and Annie Morris at Pitzhanger Manor, and there is an artistic lineage that can be traced from Alice Irwin's colourful sculptures via Annie Morris's totemic paint pigment sculpture, all the way back to the uplifting palette and playful shapes of Matisse's cut-out collages of the 1950s.



Alice Irwin. Photo by Aston Law. © Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery.

On a grey and rainy January day, Irwin's vibrant sculptures offer a welcome escape, while Sina Tantra's solo presentation 'The Lightclub of Batavia' is displayed in various rooms of the Manor House, her preferred palette of gold and navy blue blending subtly with the classical interiors. Several of Tantra's artworks arrived at Pitzhanger Manor from the sunnier climate of Bali, infusing the light-filled rooms with a slice of Balinese moonlight.

The exhibition programme at Pitzhanger Manor is carefully considered to complement the classical interiors. Seemingly unlikely juxtapositions of contemporary art with the elegant furnishings of the 19th Century house are achieved through subtle and considered curation, which creates a dialogue between past and present.

'Chinwag' is Alice Irwin's first major exhibition in a public London gallery and forms part of Pitzhanger's ongoing programme focused on introducing emerging artists to audiences in West London and beyond. 'Chinwag' features sculpture, prints and drawings celebrating playfulness and experimentation. Highlights are Irwin's 'Peeps', a series of human-like 3D figures which demonstrate the evolution of her sculptural experimentation. The exhibition comes after 3 years spent layering vibrant colours and animated forms, and reflects Irwin's interest in themes of social interaction and the human experience. Irwin was also inspired by the history of Pitzhanger Manor, where Sir John Soane entertained guests, and she often questions the social norms of the era by presenting her artwork as a cast of characters embodying diverse shapes, sizes, and colours, as a metaphor for the range of personalities in social gatherings and the evolution of social structures and hierarchies.



Alice Irwin. Photo by Mia Buerk. © Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery.

Alice Irwin comments: *"I am excited to kick off the year 2024 by showing new and unseen works in my Chinwag exhibition at Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery. The title was inspired by Sir John Soane's passion for entertaining, and it feels very special to have my first London exhibition in such a beautiful and historic setting."*

In the historic Manor House, artist Sinta Tantra presents 'The Lightclub of Batavia', which takes visitors on a visual journey populated by geometric paintings and sculptures that she has described as 'painting on a architectural scale', which resonate with the Neo-Classical architecture. Standout pieces include a series of captivating gold and Prussian blue paintings displayed on the Manor's walls and platforms, juxtaposed with delicate geometrical brass sculptures. On a fine day when the sunlight filters through the stained glass windows of the Manor House, Tantra's sculptures and paintings reflect the light bouncing through the rooms to create a calming sensory experience. The exhibition title is taken from German Novelist Paul Scheerbart's 'The Light Club of Batavia' (1912), a *Novelle* about the formation of a club dedicated to building a spa at the bottom of an abandoned mineshaft for the purpose of bathing in light.



Sinta Tantra. Photo by Mia Buerk. © Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery.

Tantra's compositions explore themes of light, wealth, and the duality of beauty and colonialism. Gold, central to her exhibition, symbolises energy, vanity, and extraction, highlighting Tantra's fascination with its historical and cultural significance. Additionally, personal touches are woven into her work; silhouettes within her pieces are traced from sketches made in the tropical valley near her family's home in Ubud, Bali, adding a layer of personal narrative to the exhibition. Tantra's exhibition at Pitzhanger Manor not only complements the historical context of Pitzhanger but also injects a contemporary vibrancy, redefining the viewer's perception of space and history.

Sinta Tantra explains: *“Stepping into the world of Soane is like stepping into theatre, an immersive environment where arched pools of natural light bathe us, warming our spirits, even on the most wintery British days. The gold leaf glows beautifully in the natural light, ironically encouraging us to reflect more on what is happening outside rather than inside — its sheer materiality, colours, and textures transforming slowly in front of our eyes. Hung inside the rooms of Pitzhanger Manor, the paintings in this context encourage me to think about Soane’s desire to design homes not only to be lived in but, more significantly, homes that are themselves ‘living’ and constantly evolving.”*



Sinta Tantra. Photo by Mia Buerk. © Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery.

Both exhibitions are open to the public as part of the general admission, and provide an opportunity to immerse in a blend of contemporary art and historical elegance. These showcases not only promise a rich sensory experience but also reaffirm Pitzhanger’s dedication to artistic exploration and community involvement.

Clare Gough, Director of Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery comments:

“Hosting Alice Irwin and Sinta Tantra simultaneously at Pitzhanger is an exciting venture. Continuing the tradition of giving a platform for contemporary artists across Pitzhanger — just as Sir John Soane did, set up a fascinating dialogue between new and old and makes us look at the classical architecture in a new way. Together, these exhibitions enrich each other, offering more than their individual parts and inviting visitors into a world where art and history intersect.”



Sinta Tantra. Photo by Mia Buerk. © Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery.

Alice Irwin 'Chinwag' and Sinta Tantra 'The Lightclub of Batavia' open to the public on 24th January 2024 at Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery: <https://www.pitzhanger.org.uk>