

PRESS RELEASE

Friday 9 February 2024

A giant dragon's head prow – set to be an iconic feature of the Biennale Arte 2024 – voyages from the arctic archipelago to the Venetian Lagoon to form part of the Nordic Countries Pavilion

Photo: Mattias Lindbäck/Moderna Museet



THE ALTERSEA OPERA

**The Nordic Countries Pavilion at the
60th International Art Exhibition –
La Biennale di Venezia**

20 April – 24 November 2024

Official inauguration: Thursday 18 April 2024 at 13:00

Vast ocean beneath a misty sky. A creature of both water and land is praying to the sea goddess Ma-Zhou when he accidentally summons a dragon ship which takes him on a journey beyond time and space.

For the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (20 April – 24 November 2024), the **Nordic Countries Pavilion** invites us to embark on a journey through time and space in search of safe harbour aboard a spectral dragon ship which will occupy the light and open architecture of Sverre Fehn's meditative masterpiece in the Giardini. The Pavilion will be book-ended by a huge and ornate dragon's head prow and tail, which will soon make the voyage from its mooring on the frozen waters of the Stockholm Archipelago to the Venetian Lagoon.

Conceived and conceptualised by artist **Lap-See Lam** (Sweden), *The Altersea Opera* is a poetic exploration of the existential implications of displacement and belonging which veers between the real and the imaginary to tell a story about the desire to stay and the need to move on. For the duration of the Biennale, the Nordic Pavilion transforms into a dragon ship, powered by magic sails made of stories and filled with mythological water creatures trying to find their way back to the places of their past. A richly layered audio-visual installation, *The Altersea Opera* is inspired by the spirit of the Red Boat Opera Company – the travelling opera troupe which popularised Cantonese opera in the 19th century.

Moderna Museet in Stockholm is leading the work on the 2024 edition of the Nordic Pavilion for which [Lap-See Lam](#) (Sweden) has been invited to create an ambitious multi-modal installation. In collaboration with **Asrin Haidari**, curator of Swedish and Nordic Art at the museum, Lam has extended the invitation to artist [Kholod Hawash](#) (Finland) and composer [Tze Yeung Ho](#) (Norway), and an international ensemble of collaborators ranging from singers, costume designers and filmmakers to interpreters and a certified bamboo scaffold engineer.

On crossing the threshold into the Nordic Pavilion, visitors enter into an imaginary ship inspired by *Floating Restaurant Sea Palace*, a 100-foot long, three-storey Chinese dragon ship. Built in Shanghai and decorated by master craftsmen, the lavishly appointed ship was towed to Gothenburg in 1991, where it served as a Chinese restaurant. When the business failed, it took on an afterlife as a ghost ship at the Gröna Lund theme park, where Lap-See Lam discovered it in a dilapidated state before it was towed to its present home in a remote boatyard in the Stockholm Archipelago.

Through successive works, Lap-See Lam's world-building practice has engaged with the notion of generational loss through artistic investigations into the displacement of people and objects from one context to another. *The Altersea Opera* expands Lam's universe further with this investigation into the mutability of myth and connection through multilingualism. At the centre of the Pavilion installation, and brought to life by a film shot on board the *Sea Palace*, we find the Cantonese mythological figure Lo Ting – half fish, half man – as reimagined by Lap-See Lam in a libretto that tells the tale of his longing to return to a former home, Fragrant Harbor – only to find it transformed beyond recognition.

The score composed by **Tze Yeung Ho** merges Baroque ornamentation and unexpected instruments in melancholic melodies, interspersed with lullabies and poetry that draw on the multilingual background of the artists. **Kholod Hawash's** textile works form a sculptural installation in the Pavilion. Her embroideries conjure a distinctive world of motifs, sewn stitch-by-stitch through *jodaleia* and *tatreez* (Arabic for quilting and embroidery), with elements from folktales and archaeological landscapes.

The Altersea Opera was initiated by [Moderna Museet](#) in collaboration with the [Office for Contemporary Art Norway](#) (OCA) and the [Finnish National Gallery Kiasma](#) (Museum of Contemporary Art).

Press images can be found [here](#).

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NOTES TO EDITORS



Photo: Mattias Lindbäck/Moderna Museet

Lap-See Lam

[Lap-See Lam](#) was born in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1990, where she lives and works and is represented by [Galerie Nordenhake](#). She explores questions of representation and interpretation working both with contemporary technology and traditional references and techniques. The notion of glitches informs the artist's visual language, referencing a "generation loss" both in a literal data transfer and an idiomatic inheritance of knowledge throughout family generations. At the same time formal elements from traditional forms of storytelling such as shadow play, to the décor of Western Chinese restaurants, become analogous for the experience of the Cantonese diaspora. Lap-See Lam delves into almost magical imaginations of Chinoiserie, defined by imperialist trading, while reflecting on the reality of migration and her own family history, to both claim ownership of and complicate the idea of cultural heritage – a duality that characterises the artist's mythical installations.

Recent solo exhibitions include AKG Art Museum, Buffalo NY (2023-2024); Swiss Institute, New York; Portikus, Frankfurt (both 2023); Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm (2022); Trondheim Kunstmuseum (2021); Moderna Museet Malmö (2018–2019). Lam's past group exhibitions include Ars Fennica, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki (2023-2024); KINDL-Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2022); GHOST 2565, Bangkok (2022); PinchukArtCentre, Kyiv (2021); Performa 19, New York (2019); Fondation Cartier, Paris (2019); Luleå Biennial (2018).

Lam is a recipient of the Maria Bonnier Dahlin Foundation Grant and was awarded the Dagens Nyheter Cultural Prize in 2021. Her work is included in institutional collections such as Kadist Foundation, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Moderna Museet, Malmö Konstmuseum, and Röhsska Museet.

Tze Yeung Ho

[Tze Yeung Ho](#) was born in Oslo, Norway, in 1992 and commutes between Oslo and Helsinki. He holds a doctoral degree from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and a master's degree from the Norwegian Academy of Music.

Tze Yeung Ho's compositions reflect his multilingual background and explore speech, translations of language, dramaturgy and poetry. He engages in close collaborations with writers and storytellers, as well as word-based artists. The audience often encounters the end result in the shape of musical theatre, not least chamber operas. At the same time, he produces concert series and festivals and is involved in the theory and practice of curatorship.

Tze Yeung Ho has represented Norway in the music festival Ung Nordisk Musik for several years, held a residency at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Berlin and been the recipient of numerous grants including the Norwegian government grant and the Fergesten Foundation's artist's grant. The writer, dramatist and poet Linda Gabrielsen is one of his many recurring collaborators. Their joint work "hvorfør pusen?" (why the kitty?) was awarded second prize in the Shanghai New Music Week's Chamber Opera Composition Competition in 2019.

Tze Yeung Ho is active in a number of Nordic and international contexts involving cross-disciplinary art forms, for example as a board member of Periferien, the concert series of contemporary Norwegian music and as a member of the ECCO working group within ECSA (the European Composers and Songwriters' Alliance).

Kholod Hawash

[Kholod Hawash](#) was born in Basra, Iraq, in 1977 and lives and works in Espoo, Finland. For many years she was working as an illustrator of children's books for major publishers in Iraq.

Kholod Hawash uses the textile craft technique of jodaleia, the Arabic term for quilting. Traditionally, Iraqi quilts are created from reused textiles that are sewn together by hand and used to cover and protect furniture and walls.

Kholod Hawash gets her inspiration from memories of her mother's quilting, Iraqi folklore and its myths and legends, as well as animals and nature in the rich archaeological landscape where she grew up. The motifs are dominated by strong feminist beliefs and our human longing for and right to freedom and self-determination. Her colourful visual stories emerge stitch by stitch, the present and the past converging in a magical universe.

Kholod Hawash's work has been presented in a number of solo exhibitions in Finland, Jordan and Lebanon. In Finland she has also participated in group exhibitions, such as ARS22 at the Museum for Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki, as well as the textile exhibition Pehmo (soft) at the Helsinki Art Museum in 2022.

Kholod Hawash received the William Thuring Prize in 2022, as well as professional grants from the Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taika) and the Kone Foundation. Her work is represented in the collections of Kiasma, the Helsinki Art Museum and the Espoo Museum for Modern Art, as well as private collections in Dubai, France, Iraq, Switzerland and Spain.

The Nordic Countries Pavilion

The Nordic Pavilion, by Norwegian architect Sverre Fehn, located in the Giardini della Biennale, Venice, is a space for collaboration between three Nordic countries - Norway, Finland and Sweden. Built between 1958 and 1962, the open space was designed to let light in, reminiscent of that of Nordic countries. Notably, the three plane trees inside the 446 sq metre unsupported space appear as the only vertical elements. For the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (20 April – 24 November 2024), Sweden – through Moderna Museet – is the principal commissioner and manager of the Pavilion's presentation, working in collaboration with Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art (Finland) and the Office for Contemporary Art Norway.

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