

GG GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on June 23, 2022

THE OTOLITH GROUP

O HORIZON

The Otolith Group. O Horizon

- From June 23 to October 2, 2022
- Curated by Manuel Cirauqui
- Film & Video Gallery (103)

From June 23 to October 2, 2022, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is presenting *The Otolith Group: O Horizon*, the second exhibition of the year in the Film & Video Gallery, a dedicated space at the Museum where are presented key works of video art, film-based installation, and moving images understood as an artistic language.

Presented this time is an ambitious project by The Otolith Group, an artist collective founded by Anjalika Sagar (London, 1968) and Kodwo Eshun (London, 1966) and known for their influential approaches of such crucial topics as the Anthropocene, the aesthetics of Afro-futurism, and the decolonial articulation of critical theory. Producing films, texts, audio works, essays, and installations as well as curatorial projects, The Otolith Group's practice is considered an essential touchstone for contemporary art and the recent development of the film essay globally. The video installation *O Horizon* is a major work depicting the Visva Bharati school in Santiniketan (West Bengal, India), founded by the writer, educator, social reformist, and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore in 1921. The work encourages us to reflect on the interaction of nature, culture and agriculture, and the urgent need to heal our planet. Guiding India toward cultural independence and transformation, Tagore also anticipated some of the key issues in our globalized world today: the risks associated to climate change, the threat of nationalist and religious extremism and the importance of intergenerational transmission.

Situated at the center of the exhibition, *O Horizon* elides the terms of documentary at its most lyrical, discursive and operatic. The camera guides us through dances, rehearsals, and rituals; indoor and outdoor classes; microphones record the mystical songs of Kabir, epic poetry; conversations and plays; lenses capture animal gazes and vegetal depths in silence. Poetic recitation and performance alternate with observations of the flora, scholarly dialogues, and panoramic perspectives. Murals and public sculptures, emblems and allegories of Santiniketan's aesthetic modernity, are observed in detail, while digital screens and mobile phone apps reappear as props, gadgets and companions in the daily routines and stylized rituals of campus life.

Tagore's environmental vision was key to his foundation of Visva Bharati as a place of confluence for arts and crafts in connection with a pedagogy of the Earth. Culture and agriculture converge in Tagore's efforts to reinvigorate the land by bringing fertile soil from nearby areas, thereby reintroducing multiple species of plants and "terraforming" Santiniketan into the fertile terrain it became years later. A crucial stage in this transformation emerges at the uppermost layer of soil in which the decomposition and transformation of leaves, grass, fruit, and animal debris form the surface layer agronomists name the "O Horizon" from which the entire film project takes its title. The Otolith Group considers the poetic and political underpinnings of such a fragile and dynamic space as a crucial element for Tagore's ethos which continues to inform a contemporary thought that is both ecologic and cosmopolitical.

Extensions of this thinking become visible through a series of photomontages titled *Santiniketan Studies*, a selection of which is presented by the exhibition entrance. These pictures present the multiple dimensions of various enclaves in the campus in which multiple time periods coexist with the latency of historical events to evoke the emotional texture of every site. Trees are recurring motifs throughout, enduring presences at the center of an outdoor circle in the characteristic “tree schools” of Tagore’s system, as manifestations of the regenerative agronomy practiced at Santiniketan since its inception. Also exhibited in this space is a selection of works on paper by the artist Vidya Sagar (1938-2016), father of Anjalika Sagar, and collaborator in various films by The Otolith Group, to whom *O Horizon* is dedicated. Sagar’s work is exemplary of Visva Bharati’s influence on various generations of artists in modern and contemporary India. Sagar’s Tantric abstractions use sensuous outlines and delicate pastel hues to generate moments of visual musicality that reinterpret the patterns of contextual Indian iconographies resonating throughout the allusive poetics of *O Horizon*.

The Otolith Group. Biography

The Otolith Group was founded in 2002 by Anjalika Sagar (b. 1968, London) and Kodwo Eshun (b. 1966, London). Since then, Sagar and Eshun have produced research-based works spanning the moving image, audio, performance, installation, and curation. Their acclaimed practice has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions including the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond; Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge; The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester; and the Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah. Additional solo presentations include Argos Centre for Art and Media, Brussels (2007), The Showroom and Gasworks, London (2009), MACBA, Barcelona (2011), and MAXXI, Rome (2011–12), among others. The Otolith Group has also curated important projects such as *The Ghosts of Songs: A Retrospective of the Black Audio Film Collective 1982–1998*, FACT, Liverpool, and Arnolfini, Bristol (2007); and *Harun Farocki: 21 Films*, Tate Modern, London (2009).

Film & Video (room 103)

The Film & Video Gallery is a space devoted to video art, video installation and the moving image. It exhibits works from the collections of the Guggenheim Museums and from other international institutions. Since it opened in 2014, the Film & Video Gallery has shown works by a number of singular artists, including Christian Marclay, Ragnar Kjartansson, Fiona Tan, Ken Jacobs, Amie Siegel, Pierre Huyghe, Michael Snow, Javier Téllez, Diana Thater, Allora & Calzadilla, William Kentridge, Alex Reynolds, Sharon Lockhart and Monira Al Qadiri, among others.

Educational activities:

Talks with artists (June 23)

Dovetailing with the opening of the exhibition in the Museum’s Film & Video gallery, the founders of The Otolith Group, Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun, will speak with Manuel Cirauqui, curator at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. The conversation will situate the project *O Horizon* in the context of the

GGUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Otolith Group's two-decade practice. Central to this conversation will be Tagore's poetry and educational philosophy, exemplified by the Santiniketan university project that inspired the film installation *O Horizon*.

Cover image:

The Otolith Group. O Horizon

O Horizon, 2018 (film still)

90-minute film

Courtesy the artist

© The Otolith Group

For more information:

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Marketing and Communications Department

Tel: +34 944 359 008

media@guggenheim-bilbao.eus

www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus

All information about the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is available at www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus (press room).

Press Images for
The Otolith Group. O Horizon
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Online Photo Service for Press Images

At the press area (prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en) you can register and download high resolution images and videos featuring the exhibitions and the building. Sign in to get access. If you are already a user, log in here (you need your username and password).

For further information, please contact the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Press Department: tel. +34 944 359 008 and email: media@guggenheim-bilbao.eus

The Otolith Group. O Horizon

O Horizon, 2018 (film still)

90-minute film

Courtesy of the artists

© The Otolith Group



The Otolith Group. O Horizon

O Horizon, 2018 (film still)

90-minute film

Courtesy of the artists

© The Otolith Group



The Otolith Group. O Horizon

O Horizon, 2018 (film still)

90-minute film

Courtesy of the artists

© The Otolith Group



The Otolith Group. O Horizon

Santiniketan Studies (A Century Before Us II): Tapovan Study Circle, 2018

Digital collage on Somerset Museum Rag paper

Courtesy of the artists

© The Otolith Group



The Otolith Group. O Horizon

O Horizon, 2018 (film still)

90-minute film

Courtesy the artist

© The Otolith Group

