

# VISITOR REPORT

by Sso-Rha Kang

on *Tidal Gatherings: Leakage – Passage – Spillage*

with Adjoa Armah, Chandra Frank, Sara Giannini, Fazal Rivzi, Mikki Stelder, and Arnisa Zeqo.

Performance Programme

Saturday 21 June 2025, 11-19hr

Kunsthuis SYB

Hoofdstraat 70,

Beetsterzwaag

\*Note: The two-day symposium is recounted in a non-linear format, the second day of collective mud walking is indicated by italics.

*Tidal Gatherings: Leakage – Passage – Spillage*, kicked-off at Kunsthuis SYB in Beetsterzwaag. An introduction by Chandra Frank and Sara Giannini contextualised the second iteration of the project in Friesland (a region that was once partially water) exploring water's many forms within the Dutch landscape and presiding infrastructures that further explore conversations around race, ecology, temporality and ritual. From the placid landscape of Beetsterzwaag to the striking low tide of Paesens-Moddergat, the symposium offered a series of lecture performances and participatory experiences that respond to Kunsthuis SYB's institutional programme 'Unpacking the House'. Arnisa Zeqo further grounded the symposium within SYB's programme and highlighted the exhibition on view, *600 Years of Migrant Mothers* by Selman Selma that examined family lineage, feminist strategies and reconstructed futures.

*Mud – its texture palpable with each varying step as we venture further into the sea. Our cohort of symposium artists, organisers and attendees visually united through seemingly*

*out-of-place Converse sneakers which were given to us in lieu of boots to better navigate the muddy terrain. They are porous, giving way to the sensation of water rushing into your shoes as your feet sink at varying levels of depth, density and consistency. We initially walk carefully to find our footing, but caution and discomfort quickly lend way to acclimation as our pace becomes more decisive. Despite our best efforts, we are often humbled by sudden changes in water levels and mud quality that would make us suddenly sink. The struggle to get unstuck adds to the lightness in atmosphere, as curiosity, humour and playfulness accompany more scholarly components of the symposium from the day before. Once adjusted to the unsteady environmental conditions, we are able to see, observe and take in the precarity of quite literally being in the sea.*

The bus drive to the gallery feels nostalgic – the landscape banal yet romantic in its flatness, plainness and rhythm that fondly reminded me of the Midwest (US) countryside. I am told the gallery resides on a historically bourgeois street, which is in contrast to the invitational, intimate and modest ambiance of the space. A convivial gathering, we sit in a circular formation that immediately created closeness through proximity and a spatial openness that prompted casual introductions and conversations.

Mikki Stelder sits on the floor and asks me how it looks/ feels, ultimately deciding to begin the lecture performance from that position. This simple interaction set the tone for the next two days, as more contemplative moments of thought are accompanied by humour, lightness and play. A lecture on beavers and barricades – an animal that contradictorily builds and destroys infrastructure, creating profound environmental interventions. Beaver information in contrast with images of student barricades made during a pro-Palestinian protest in Amsterdam. Visitors move mid-lecture to rearrange and rebuild a Jenga-like structure on the floor at the centre of the circle to our own collective imagining. Lastly, we are asked to recompose texts regarding the return of beavers to the Netherlands. We study the words as we select, rearrange and recite what resonates with us.

*Below the shallow tide, are hundreds of small mounds composed of compact worms. I attempt to step around them, but*

*they are unavoidable. Lugworms live in lower intertidal zones, they feed on sand, taking in the nutrients, and expelling aerated sand through their skin. I am told that the mounds are not worms but sandy casts of their ghostly remnants. I was totally fixated on these mounds, the ghostly remains both induced feelings of abjection and curiosity, I walked looking down.*

We are seated on the grass outside the gallery admiring a pile of sand carefully poured in an oval formation. Adjoa Armah meticulously walks atop in a rehearsed cyclical motion, each step unveiling gradations of red sand that slowly reveal themselves as the performance carries on. Spoken text and movement, a ritualistic tempo that has our full attention. I cannot help but think about how hot the sand must be under her feet. Grief, cultural memory, resilience, ritual offerings – each spoken word and gesture are embodied and felt. The trees begin to sway from a sudden gust of wind which gives a magical surge to the performance, both palpable and spooky.

*To paraphrase a sentiment from Armah's performance, 'we focus on counting grains of sand that we forget to look at the whole'. I eventually become desensitised to the presence of worms and unknowingly start to walk through mounds that moments before I was so careful to avoid. I walk looking up and notice that everyone's hair is standing straight up. Silence and eventual commotion, amusement turned to unease as we realised lighting was about to strike but where?*

We are led to a wooded area near the gallery. A guided walk by Sara and Chandra, they alternate reciting passages from texts at given points on our leisurely stroll. We are asked to feel the earth. The once chatty atmosphere becomes quiet as we disperse into our own worlds from a simple direction that requires us to slow down and see through our hands. In contrast to this more contemplative action, we are later asked to gather in small groups and create shapes through bodily formations. Our group settles on creating a spiral – moving, spinning and laughing. We continue walking and scavenge for things that capture our attention with the intention of creating cyanotypes back at the gallery. I settle for a single pinecone because I feel guilty taking too much for the sake of creating something compositionally beautiful.

*The guide takes us to a grassy patch concluding the end of our mud walk. He points to a plant that holds a strong structural form that reminds me of coral. A vibrant green, it stands out from the surrounding muddy tones. He takes a piece and encourages us to try it. Salty and tender, it has a pleasant texture. Zeekraal (also known as glassworts but I prefer its Dutch counterpart) is a type of succulent that grows in saline environments. They are growing in abundance along the seashore, the finger-like structures reaching upwards.*

We sit around a fire burning secrets written on paper. A napkin of text is carefully put into the fire by Arnisa. It quickly rises in the wind creating commotion as the napkin goes up ablaze. We laugh and bolt out of the way as fire floats across the sky going higher and higher, out of reach, and out of view. American pop songs from the 90s play in the background (I wonder if the neighbours can hear?). The campfire begins to die down – with so much joy comes a tinge of melancholy as the night comes to an end. Fazal Rizvi had given a lecture performance earlier in the day, thinking through various notions and contexts of tears. Shia rituals of mourning and remembering, the complexities of tears as a bodily response becomes imbued with social and cultural nuances. He sat huddled in the corner of the room, a small gesture that holds your gaze. A collision of metaphoric tears and oceans through words and song. A breakup recounted, longing for home, and the haunting sound of Shia grief chants from Pakistan. As Rizvi sang, I saw tears in the gallery – tears as catharsis, fighting tears, holding tears, crocodile tears, tears of joy, tears of sadness, tears of anger, endless tears.

## ABOUT THE EVENT

*Tidal Gatherings: Leakage – Passage – Spillage* was a summer solstice programme of walks, talks and rituals with Adjoa Armah, Chandra Frank, Sara Giannini, Fazal Rivzi, Mikki Stelder, and Arnisa Zeqo. Hosted by Kunsthuis SYB, in the rural region of Friesland, the event was the second iteration of *Tidal Gatherings*, an ongoing experimental project on the intersections of water, ecology, and Dutch colonialism, curated and initiated by Chandra Frank. Responding to Kunsthuis SYB's current trajectory, "Unpacking the House," *Leakage – Passage – Spillage* considered how thinking with water can reshape our sense of space, time, and relation—dissolving dualities between inner and outer worlds. How do colonial ideas of water management relate to bodily tides, emotional floodings, and leakages? How does water inhabit our bodies, and how do we inhabit water? Where does water gather us? How do tides orient us?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sso-Rha Kang is a curator based in Cincinnati, OH. She is currently the Curator of The Carnegie (Covington, KY). From 2021-2023 she served as the Director of Galleries and Outreach at Northern Kentucky University where she curated exhibitions, performances, and organized events with an emphasis on cross disciplinary collaboration. Her research interests delve into areas of institutional critique, blankness, and aesthetic experience. She has taught from 2017-2023 at institutions such as, The University of Cincinnati, The Art Academy of Cincinnati, and Northern Kentucky University. Additionally, she has curated exhibitions for The Weston (Cincinnati, OH), and The Contemporary Arts Center (Cincinnati, OH), with an upcoming exhibition at The Blaffer (Houston, TX). She was one of two Consulting Curators for the state of Ohio in the exhibition *New Worlds: Women to Watch* (2024) for the National Museum for Women in the Arts (Washington, DC). She was the recent curator in residence of KADIST's (San Francisco) Double Take program working on the traveling exhibition *Portals, Pathways, and Space Between Us* (2025).

## ABOUT THE VISITOR REPORT

At If I Can't Dance we see the visitor report as a method of documentation. The affectual, relational and embodied nature of performance work is not always easily captured in audio-visual formats. To supplement such formats, If I Can't Dance commissions written visitor reports, which are meant to bring into the archive subjective responses to a lived experience of a work and its context. The visitor report is, therefore, not to be confused with a critical review. It is first and foremost a form of witnessing. The people commissioned to write the report span a range of positions and practices within and outside the field of art.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Tidal Gatherings* is an ongoing curatorial project by Chandra Frank in affiliation with If I Can't Dance.

Fostering interregional collaboration, *Leakage – Passage – Spillage* was convened by Can't Dance and Kunsthuis SYB. The programme was curated by Chandra Frank in close dialogue with Arnisa Zeqo (Kunsthuis SYB) and Sara Giannini (If I Can't Dance).

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WG-Plein 881  
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