

EVENTS

ARTISTS' BRUNCH:
CHRISTOPHER KULENDRAN
THOMAS AND MAI-THU PERRET
Saturday 19 January, 11am–1pm
£5/£3 concessions, booking advised
On the opening day of their
exhibitions at Spike Island, artists
Christopher Kulendran Thomas
and Mai-Thu Perret discuss the
ideas behind their work with curator
Vanessa Boni.

EXHIBITION TOUR
Saturday 9 February, 2–3pm
Free, booking essential
Lucia Fortune-Ely, geography
student at University of Bristol,
leads a tour of the exhibition and
discusses the role that contemporary
art can play in reimagining cities and
communities.

Spike Island is a registered charity
(no. 1003505). Spike Island gratefully
acknowledges support from Arts
Council England and Bristol City
Council.

New Eelam: Bristol is supported
by Arts Council England and co-
commissioned with lille3000, with
additional support from Greens
Hydroponics. Furniture is generously
loaned by HAY.

INFORMATION

Spike Island is an international centre
for the development of contemporary
art and design, located in Bristol's
harbour area. Admission to the gallery
is free.

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OPENING HOURS
Gallery: Tuesday to Sunday, 12–5pm
(during exhibitions)
Café: Monday to Friday, 8.30am–5pm
Saturday to Sunday, 10am–5pm

New Eelam is presented with thanks
to Institute for Modern Art, Brisbane;
DIS; Tensta konsthall, Stockholm;
Museum of Contemporary Art,
Chicago; Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin;
The Stolbun Collection and Triple
Canopy.

Spike Island

CHRISTOPHER KULENDRAN
THOMAS

New Eelam: Bristol

19 January – 24 March 2019

WHAT IS NEW EELAM?

New Eelam is a real estate technology company that I founded together with an interdisciplinary team of specialists in technology, real estate, finance and architecture to develop a new form of housing based on collective co-ownership rather than individually owned private property. We're building a flexible global subscription whereby profits from real estate markets can be repurposed towards reducing the cost of housing.

HOW AND WHY DID IT BEGIN?

Curator Annika Kuhlmann and I began exploring how the home is becoming a primary site of production in an increasingly post-wage economy and how technology could enable collective ownership of this. I hadn't had any ambitions of founding a technology company; but the more I thought through the problems with current housing models, the more I became convinced that this might work – or at least would be worth trying.

WHERE DOES THE NAME NEW EELAM COME FROM?

'Eelam', in Tamil, loosely translates as some version of 'home'. But it's also the name of a place that no longer exists, which is where my family is from. In Sri Lanka, the Tamil homeland of Eelam was self-governed as a de facto autonomous state for three decades during the Sri Lankan civil war but it was wiped out in 2009. The thought-experiment behind New Eelam is to ask what a self-governed state could be if it was a distributed network rather than a territorially bounded nation.

WHO IS NEW EELAM FOR? HOW ACCESSIBLE IS IT?

Initially our subscriptions will start at a level equivalent to the cost of rent. This could be reduced over time as subscribers accumulate equity in a revolving property portfolio across different cities. The reality now is that more and more people work freelance or change their job frequently. As everything else moves towards cloud-based subscription models – from streaming media to car-sharing – today's fixed housing feels increasingly restrictive for people who work in more flexible ways. Eventually we hope to reduce the cost of housing through collective co-ownership.

WHAT DOES A POST-CAPITALIST FUTURE LOOK LIKE TO YOU AND HOW DOES NEW EELAM FIT INTO THIS?

What we're doing isn't really based on a pre-determined utopian vision of the future. It's starting with the reality of how real estate markets work. It's an experiment to see if it might be possible to grow a new economic model out of the existing economic system rather than in opposition to it. Our hypothesis is that populations that are free to do what they care about, and wherever they choose to be, will ultimately build more valuable economies than populations enslaved by debt and waged labour. Our long-term ambition is to provide infrastructure upon which new forms of citizenship could be constructed, beyond borders, by requiring national jurisdictions to compete to provide citizenship on better terms for increasingly mobile populations.

NEW EELAM IS BASED ON ITS SUBSCRIBERS BEING CO-OWNERS. HOW IS IT DIFFERENT TO OTHER CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING MODELS?

Co-ops are great. You could see what we're building as a distributed and more fluid evolution of historical models of co-operative housing, with the potential to overcome the sometimes high entry costs and inflexibility. As a subscriber, you will have continual access to apartments in multiple cities for an all-inclusive flat rate fee, so that you can move freely between connected smart homes around the world.

IN 'ART AND HOUSING: THE PRIVATE CONNECTION' BY ANDREA PHILLIPS, SHE HAS TALKED ABOUT RETURNING HOUSING PROFIT TO A 'SOCIAL PROFIT'. HOW DO YOU IMAGINE ANY FUTURE PROFIT FOR NEW EELAM MIGHT BE DISTRIBUTED?

Our financial model is based on distributing profits from real estate assets to Community Wealth Funds for the benefit of each neighbourhood we'll be operating in. We want to share these profits with the local communities where real estate value is increasing fast, whilst potentially enabling a transfer of wealth away from the rental economy and towards a model of co-operative co-ownership. If we can make this work at scale, we could even democratise something that is currently reserved for the super wealthy – the ability to choose where you're legally resident.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEW EELAM THE HOUSING VENTURE AND NEW EELAM THE ARTWORK?

Art has always been good at prototyping new lifestyle formats, new ways of living. Living in former industrial buildings is an example of something that many creatives did over half a century ago but that has since become a mainstream lifestyle aspiration – 'loft living'. Now, as more and more jobs are lost to automation, the future of work could look more like what artists do.

In Sri Lanka you have an accelerated microcosm in which to see how contemporary art functions on the front line of the global processes through which cities around the world are transformed. So we started this venture by asking: what if you could take these processes of globalisation and gentrification that art is involved in – what if you took what art actually does in the world – as your starting point for doing art, or even as your artistic materials? Could then some of these processes be reconfigured? On a personal level, making this business work is my way of being an artist for this work.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE 'CONCEPT SPACE' YOU'RE PRESENTING AT SPIKE ISLAND?

Our exhibitions, developed with New Eelam's Creative Director Annika Kuhlmann, give us the opportunity to test our ideas. At Spike Island, you find a kind of modular architecture with hydroponic systems that automate the cultivation of edible plants on a domestic scale. These systems are presented as 'living sculptures'; meanwhile, we're experimenting with how these hydroponics could be implemented in New Eelam homes. Visitors can watch a series of micro videos and our speculative documentary *60 million Americans can't be wrong* which explore the political and historical horizons of New Eelam. The exhibition also features photographic works made in

collaboration with photographer Joseph Kadow from his work in various cities around the world.

WHAT DOES PRESENTING NEW EELAM IN SPACES DEDICATED TO CONTEMPORARY ART BRING TO THE PROJECT?

We've come to see our exhibitions as open, discursive research and development spaces where we can experiment with the ideas behind our venture. This has become an important part of how we're building a very different kind of organisation.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR NEW EELAM?

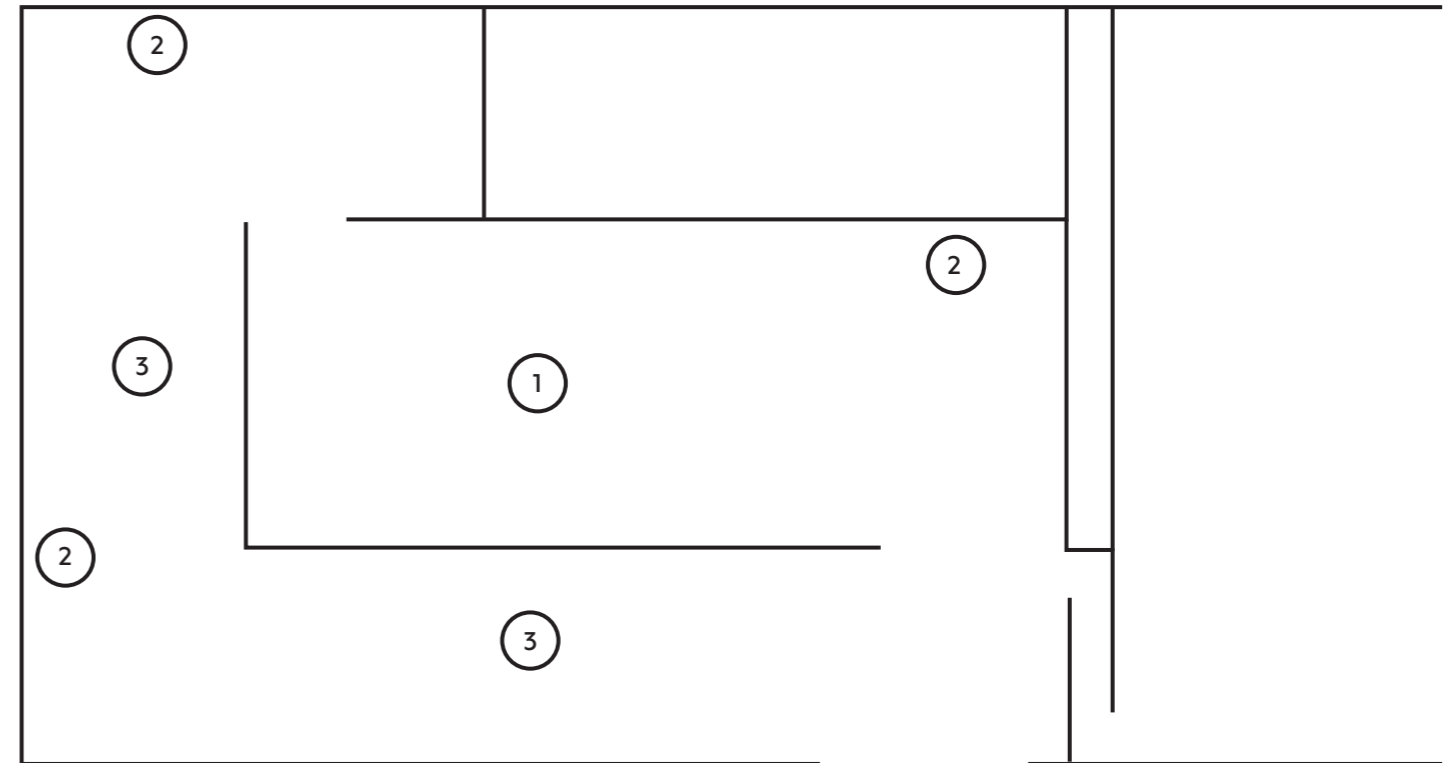
We've just successfully raised seed funding for the venture and our subscription launches in summer 2019. You can register for updates on our website: new-eelam.com

BIOGRAPHIES

Christopher Kulendran Thomas is an artist who manipulates some of the structural processes by which art produces reality. His work has been included in the 7th Bi-City Biennale, Shenzhen (2017); the 11th Gwangju Biennale; the 9th Berlin Biennale; and the 3rd Dhaka Art Summit (all 2016). Recent exhibitions include *I Was Raised on the Internet*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2018); *New Eelam: Tensta*, Tensta konsthall, Stockholm (2017); *Christopher Kulendran Thomas*, New Galerie, Paris (2017); *moving is in every direction*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2017); *Bread and Roses*, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (2016); *Co-Workers: Network As Artist*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2015) and *Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making*, Tate Liverpool (2013). Forthcoming solo exhibitions include Institute for Modern Art, Brisbane and Schinkel Pavillion, Berlin, as well as a new commission with the V-A-C Foundation for the 58th Venice Biennale. Thomas is the founder and CEO of New Eelam (new-eelam.com).

Annika Kuhlmann is a curator who works predominantly through long term collaborations. As Creative Director at New Eelam, she has developed presentations for the 9th Berlin Biennale, the 11th Gwangju Biennale, Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Tensta konsthall in Stockholm and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. She has also worked on exhibitions at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; BFI Miami, Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof, Hamburg; New Galerie, Paris; and she co-curated the exhibition *Welt ohne Außenat Gropius Bau*, Berlin together with Tino Sehgal and Thomas Oberender. Kuhlmann is associate curator at Schinkel Pavillion, Berlin.

FLOORPLAN



LIST OF WORKS

1 *New Eelam* (2019) In collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann
Hydroponic home farming systems, HD video, website and ceramics

Featuring:

Ceramics by Chris Scherer

Asela Gunasekara
Skin Deep I (2014) Ceramic
Courtesy Christopher Kulendran Thomas
(Purchased from Art Space Sri Lanka)

NE_P_01-4 (2019)
Framed Giclée print
Photography by Joseph Kadow, Creative Direction by Annika Kuhlmann

Website with VR model
Designed by Manuel Bürger
VR Architecture by DVLPR / David Tasman and Tom Hancocks, Coding by Web3000

60 million Americans can't be wrong (2018)
In collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann
HD video, 24:30 minutes
Written by Christopher Kulendran Thomas
Edited by Annika Kuhlmann with Sabrina Labis

Sound by Annika Kuhlmann and Toni Quiroga
Animations by Jan-Peter Gieseking and Manuel Bürger
Research by Pauline Doutreluigne, Leonie Alpheus and Emma Siemens

From the ongoing work *When Platitudes Become Form* (2018) Acrylic on canvas with wooden frame, netting featuring *Cocktail III* (2015) by Muvindu Binoy, (Purchased from Art Space Sri Lanka)

2 *NE_LB_11/12/14* (2019)
Backlit tension fabric, aluminium frame
Photography by Joseph Kadow, Design by Offsh0.re, Creative Direction by Annika Kuhlmann

3 *NE_MV_01-08* (2019)
In collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann
HD Videos; 01 - 08 (58, 107, 88, 69, 58, 56, 103 and 56 seconds)
Written by Christopher Kulendran Thomas
Edited by Annika Kuhlmann, Anthony Valdez and Sabrina Labis
Sound by Dan Bodan and Toni Quiroga
Research by Leonie Alpheus, Tomás Hernando Kofman and Nathan Engels