

SFMOMA Announces *SOFT POWER* — International Contemporary Exhibition

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Tanya Lukin Linklater, *The Treaty is in the Body*, 2017 (video still); courtesy the artist and Winnipeg Art Gallery; © Tanya Lukin Linklater; photo: Liz Lott, courtesy the artist

Timely and provocative, *SOFT POWER* is an exhibition about the ways in which artists deploy art to explore their roles as citizens and social actors. Appropriated from the Reagan-era term used to describe how a country’s “soft” assets such as culture, political values and foreign policies can be more influential than violence or coercion, the title *SOFT POWER* suggests a contemplation on the potential of art and offers a provocation to the public to exert their own influence on the world. The exhibition opens at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) on October 26, 2019 and remains on view through February 17, 2020.

Organized by Eungie Joo, curator of contemporary art, and presented exclusively at SFMOMA on two floors of the museum, the exhibition features new and recent work by

20 international artists working in 12 countries. More than three quarters of the works in *SOFT POWER* are commissions and new works never before presented in the United States. Taken together, the works demonstrate what cultural theorist, filmmaker and catalogue contributor Manthia Diawara has called *a solidarity between intuitions* — a concept that acknowledges the complexity, darkness and opacity from which our reality emerges — the poetry and imagination of our differences. According to Joo, “Professor Diawara’s *solidarity between intuitions* expresses how specific works can enhance our understanding of others by association and relation, while maintaining their distinct contexts and content. I trust the public can relate to many of the concerns of the artists in *SOFT POWER*, and hope that this exhibition will unleash an untapped energy among us.”

“*SOFT POWER* reflects SFMOMA’s commitment to living artists and the world we share, as outlined in our new Strategic Plan,” said Neal Benezra, Helen and Charles Schwab Director of SFMOMA. “The diverse practices and perspectives represented in this exhibition embody the goals of this museum: to embrace new ideas, push boundaries and share new ways of looking at our world through the lens of contemporary art.”



Nairy Baghramian, *Retainer*, 2012 (installation view, Punto de la Dogana, Venice, 2015); cast aluminum, silicon, poly carbonate, chromed metal, print, painted metal, rubber

About the Exhibition

The majority of works in *SOFT POWER* have never been presented in the U.S., including the four-channel video installation *The Specter of Ancestors Becoming* (2019) by **Tuan Nguyen**, co-founder of The Propeller Group. Co-produced by SFMOMA and commissioned by the Sharjah Art Foundation, the work explores the creation of memory and the agency that affords. Nguyen's remarkable collaboration with descendants of French colonial soldiers once stationed in Vietnam — *tirailleurs Sénégalais* — features stories written by three members of the Vietnamese community in Senegal. Enacting fictionalized vignettes that reveal their own imaginings and experiences, his collaborators call forward the unresolved ghosts of history, receiving them with compassion and grace.

The 15 artists' commissions for *SOFT POWER* also include five new sculptures by **Haig Aivazian** that explore the relationship between mythology and nation-building; the installation *Who's Afraid of Ideology, Part 2* by **Marwa Arsanios**; a site-responsive installation by **Dineo Seshee Bopape**; a new mural by **Minerva Cuevas** inspired by the history of Smokey the Bear and the environmental impact of fire; a sound sculpture enveloping the fourth floor by **Cevdet Ereğ**; a series of sculpture by **Hassan Khan** that echoes his concurrent solo exhibition at the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid; a performance and video by **Tanya Lukin Linklater** on encounter as a form of repatriation in collaboration with the Hearst Museum of Anthropology in Berkeley; an installation and photographic diptych by **Cinthia Marcelle** based on the traces of economic instability; a performance by **Jason Moran** in early 2020, along with a published conversation between Moran, IONE and Jessie Baird about the revolutionary power of the dream state; the first chapter of **Carlos Motta's** new project on LGBTQI Dreamers; four large-scale abstract paintings by San Francisco Art Institute alumnus **Eamon Ore-Giron**; ongoing research into the market potential of gas hydrate by **Pratchaya Phinthong**; **Xaviera Simmons'** enormous painting installation inspired by and responding to Jacob *Lawrence's* *The Migration Series* (1940–41); and a series of "flat" sculptures based on teepee covers by **Duane Linklater**. Highlighting the technology of mobile architecture, Linklater's new canvases patch together distant elements that comprise indigenous reality. Incorporating the ancient geometric patterns of the Omaskêko Cree, a large format inkjet printer and natural pigments that he harvests locally, Linklater produces objects masking their own purpose through their form: nonfunctioning teepee covers, now devoid of architectural purpose, but imbued with new cultural purpose.

SOFT POWER is also enlivened by several existing works, including a changing installation of five massive landscape drawings and tent from the durational performance *Drawing a Line through Landscape* by **Nikhil Chopra** at *documenta 14*; the premier of **LaToya Ruby Frazier's**, *Flint is Family, Part 2*, in which Shea Cobb and her daughter Zion escape the ongoing Flint water crisis and "return" to their inheritance in Mississippi; **Hassan Khan's** remarkable video installation *Jewel* (2010); a series of 15 banners and small abstract sculptures by **Dave McKenzie**; **Pratchaya**

Phinthong's "documentation" of migrant bilberry pickers in Finnish Lapland, *Give More Than You Take* (2010); and a wall installation and sculptures by **Tavares Strachan** from his *Invisibles* series. The exhibition features two works by **Nairy Baghramian**, including *Retainer* (2013), produced for her first major exhibition in the U.S. and extending her examination of systems of power, context, architecture and the materiality of sculpture. In this work, chromed steel supports large translucent slabs of cast resin and silicon reminiscent of a dental or gynecological intervention in process, but at a scale that confronts the full body. Within the context of the exhibition, Baghramian's work suggests the temporal precision of physical states of matter, conjuring vast possibilities of adaptation, suffering and survival.

Full List of Artists Included in *SOFT POWER*:

Haig Aivazian (b. 1980, Beirut, Lebanon; lives and works in Beirut)
Marwa Arsanios (b. 1978, Washington, D.C.; lives and works in Beirut)
Nairy Baghramian (b. 1971, Isfahan, Iran; lives and works in Berlin)
Dineo Seshee Bopape (b. 1981, Polokwane, South Africa; lives and works in Johannesburg)
Nikhil Chopra (b. 1974, Kolkata, India; lives and works in Goa)
Minerva Cuevas (b. 1975, Mexico City, Mexico; lives and works in Mexico City)
Cevdet Erek (b. 1974, Istanbul, Turkey; lives and works in Istanbul)
LaToya Ruby Frazier (b. 1982, Braddock, Pennsylvania; lives and works in Chicago)
Hassan Khan (b. 1975, London, U.K.; lives and works in Cairo)
Duane Linklater (b. 1976, Ontario, Canada; lives and works in North Bay, Ontario)
Tanya Lukin Linklater (b. 1976, Kodiak, Alaska; lives and works in North Bay, Ontario)
Cinthia Marcelle (b. 1974, Belo Horizonte, Brazil; lives and works in São Paulo)
Dave McKenzie (b. 1977, Kingston, Jamaica; lives and works in Brooklyn)
Jason Moran (b. 1975, Houston, Texas; lives and works in New York)
Carlos Motta (b. 1978, Bogotá, Colombia; lives and works in New York)
Tuan Andrew Nguyen (b. 1976, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City)
Eamon Ore-Giron (b. 1973, Tucson, Arizona; lives and works in Los Angeles)
Pratchaya Phinthong (b. 1974, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand; lives and works in Bangkok)
Xaviera Simmons (b. 1974, New York, New York; lives and works in New York)
Tavares Strachan (b. 1979, Nassau, Bahamas; lives and works in New York)



Nikhil Chopra,
Drawing a
Line through
the
Landscape,
2017
(production
view,
Bratislava);
courtesy the
artist,
Chatterjee &
Lal and
Galleria
Continua;
photo:
Madhavi Gore

Programming

October 24 – Artists' talk with exhibition curator Eungie Joo

October–February

- Open rehearsals by Tanya Lukin Linklater in the galleries
- Performance by Jason Moran
- LaToya Ruby Frazier and The Sister Tour
- Conference on sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity and race at the border conceived by Carlos Motta in conjunction with the University of California, Santa Cruz

Organization + Support

Lead support for *SOFT POWER* is provided by The Fund for Contemporary Art. Generous support is provided by Diana Nelson and John Atwater.

About Eungie Joo, Curator of Contemporary Art

Eungie Joo joined the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) in 2017 as curator of contemporary art, a newly established role that supports the museum's mission to engage with the art and artists of our time. Previously Joo was curator of Sharjah Biennial 12: *The past, the present, the possible* (2015) in the United Arab Emirates. The exhibition included the work of over 50 artists and cultural practitioners from 25 countries and featured new works, performances and site-specific commissions by 36 of those artists, including *SOFT POWER* participating artists Nikhil Chopra, Hassan Khan and Cinthia Marcelle; as well as Julie Mehretu, Damián Ortega, Taro Shinoda, Adrián Villar Rojas, Haegue Yang and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.

Joo was Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Programs at the New Museum in New York from 2007–12, where she spearheaded the *Museum as Hub* initiative and curated the 2012 New Museum Generational Triennial, *The Ungovernables*. She was artistic director of the 5th Anyang Public Art Project/APAP 5 (2016); director of art and cultural programs at Instituto Inhotim in Brazil (2012–14); commissioner for the Korean Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009); and founding director and curator of the Gallery at REDCAT in Los Angeles (2003–7). In addition to many other distinctions, Joo received the Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Achievement in 2006. A frequent contributor to exhibition catalogues and magazines, she is editor of *Rethinking Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education* (Routledge, 2011) and co-editor of *Art Spaces Directory* (ArtAsiaPacific and New Museum, 2012). She received her doctorate in Ethnic Studies from the University of California at Berkeley.

Publication: *Soft Power: A Conversation for the Future*

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, *Soft Power: A Conversation for the Future*, with essays by artist **Marwa Arsanios** on Ecofeminism; filmmaker and cultural theorist **Manthia Diawara** on the poetic concepts of Edouard Glissant; Whitney Museum of American Art curator **Adrienne Edwards** on the state of time-based art; writer **Yasmine El-Rashidi** on the colonization of narrative; *SOFT POWER* curator **Eungie Joo** on the exhibition; and composer **Jason Moran** in conversation with playwright and poet IONE and linguist Jessie “Little Doe” Baird on dreams and their manifestations. In addition, each participating artist is profiled in a 6-8 page section featuring installation images of the exhibition and commissioned contributions by a striking lineup of curators, thinkers and writers including: **Haytham el-Wardany** on Haig Aivazian; **Athena Athanasiou** on Marwa Arsanios; **Eungie Joo** on Nairy Baghramian and Cinthia Marcelle; **Portia Mahlodi “Uhuru” Phalafala** in conversation with Dineo Seshee Bopape; **Naeem Mohaiemen** in conversation with Nikhil Chopra; **Max Haiven** on Minerva Cuevas; **Cevdet Ereğ** on his practice; **LaToya Ruby Frazier** on her project *Flint as Family*; **Hassan Khan** on the concepts at play in his work; a photo essay by **Duane Linklater**; **Magdalyn Asimakis** on Tanya Lukin-Linklater; **Meg Onli** in conversation with Dave McKenzie; **Karma Chávez** on Carlos Motta; **Jovanna Venegas** on Jason Moran; **Koyo Kouoh** in conversation with Tuan Andrew Nguyen; **Marcela Guerrero** on Eamon Ore-Giron; **Thanavi Chotpradit** on Pratchaya Phinthong; **Brian Keith Jackson** on Xaviera Simmons; and **Stamatina Gregory** on Tavares Strachan. The publication *Soft Power: A Conversation for the Future* is distributed by Rizzoli and will be available in January 2020.