

THE ARKS OF GIMOKUDAN BY LEEROY NEW

PRESS RELEASE

5 – 26 April 2022



Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court

Free

This Spring, Philippine artist-designer **Leeroy New** presents his first UK large-scale installation, **The Arks of Gimokudan**, a major new commission by Somerset House to mark the occasion of **Earth Day 2022**, a worldwide event which takes place on 22 April championing transformative environmental change.

This striking outdoor installation features a fleet of three ships, constructed using reused and recycled materials and plastic waste. Docked within the centre of Somerset House's famous courtyard, the arks appear to float, elevated up to three metres from the ground, inviting visitors to imagine they are underwater themselves, looking up to these fantastical forms. *The Arks of Gimokudan* invites audiences to engage creatively with the complexities of history, culture and our collective future, in the context of global climate and ecological crisis.

Leeroy New moulds and manipulates the plastics by hand, transforming waste into something of delight and beauty, giving each form a mesmerising appearance. This sustainable and innovative practice of transforming found objects and surplus materials, which are often overlooked and discarded, into decorative pieces reflects the artist's view of typical Philippine attitudes and realities, based on a mind-set of reuse. Addressing the often-problematic life cycle of everyday objects we use, the sculptural forms confront audiences with the scale of single use plastic waste impacting the UK, and the globe. The plastics used within the installation will be collected and recycled following their time at Somerset House.

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Each of New's vessels draws upon the history, culture and mythologies of his home nation of the Philippines, the country most at risk from the climate crisis according to a report published in 2019 by the Institute for Economics and Peace. This is despite the Philippines reportedly contributing less than 0.4% to the climate crisis as a country compared to 92% for the global north¹. Being a collection of low-lying islands means it is especially vulnerable to rising sea levels and temperatures, which also result in more extreme weather patterns, causing devastation to local communities and landscapes (most recently Typhoon Odette, which caused destruction to the Visayan islands of the Philippines in December last year). Occupying a central space in London, New brings attention to the communities and countries which face irreversible damage, but are often an afterthought in today's climate change debates.

The ships take on different forms representing the Philippine's past, present and imagined future: a Spanish imperial galleon highlights the Philippines' long history of colonisation; a contemporary, military battleship, references continued territorial conflict and international tension in the region; and finally, a futuristic depiction of a spaceship, inspired by New's fascination with sci-fi and world-making, through which he imagines and creates alternative futures for himself, his peers and community.

The Arks of Gimokudan also references one of the Philippines' mythological figures – Mebuyan, the *Goddess of Gimokudan* - the Goddess of Death and Fertility. The upturned vessels summon ideas around the relationship between this life and the afterlife, a belief held strongly within pre-colonial Philippine mythology. In doing so, New seeks to reclaim and give form to the mythological beliefs held by his ancestors, as he looks towards the past to help present alternatives to Western-centric ideas of future and the uncertain times we face ahead.

Set within Somerset House's neoclassical courtyard, New's work also speaks to the maritime and colonial history of its surroundings, drawing upon Somerset House's history as the administrative home of the Royal Navy during the 18th & 19th centuries.

This April, Somerset House and The Courtauld launch a new Lates series - **Morgan Stanley Lates at Somerset House with The Courtauld** – opening the doors around Somerset House's spectacular central courtyard for three special nights per year with after-hours access and activities hosted by artists and curators, street food pop-ups and bars and sunset DJ sets. Visitors to the first Lates event of the series, which takes place on **13 April 2022**, will have the opportunity to join Leeroy New in moulding locally recycled items by hand, transforming waste into new works of art to be exhibited during the evening. New will be joined in Somerset House's courtyard by choreographer **Julia Cheng**, founder of House of Absolute, an all-female collective of multidisciplinary dancers, for an electrifying new contemporary dance piece in response to *The Arks of Gimokudan*, accompanied by a new sound commission composed by

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jan/05/philipinos-count-cost-of-climate-crisis-as-typhoons-get-ever-more-destructive>

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Nicola Chang and performed by dance artists **Rajib Manandhar** and **Faye Stoesser**. Manandhar and Stoesser will don some of New's distinctive wearables, created by the artist for this one-off live performance. A special pop-up from **Bongbong's Manila Kanteen** will be situated in the courtyard, bringing soul-warming Philippine-inspired street food to the first Lates event. The evening will celebrate the global spirit of artists and subjects on show across Somerset House in April, including **The Courtauld's** exhibition of Dutch artist Vincent Van Gogh, who was inspired to paint across Western Europe, and the **Sony World Photography Awards** exhibition, showcasing the best contemporary photography from across the world, with submissions to this year's competition being entered from 211 different countries.

Commissioned with support from Cockayne – Grants for the Arts, The London Community Foundation and the UK Government's Culture Recovery Fund

With funding from Westminster City Council and additional support from Mercedes U. Zobel and Outset Contemporary Art Fund

Westminster residents can enjoy a 10% discount in Somerset House's on-site café Eat Ten for the duration of the installation.

Sustainability at Somerset House

London's working arts centre, Somerset House is actively responding to environmental issues both through the practical management of the Grade I listed historical site and thematically as part of our year-round cultural programme. By working together with visitors and the 2500+ resident creative community, we are committed to collectively reducing our impact on the planet. Somerset House has been awarded a 4-star rating in recognition for its environmental commitment, understanding and improvement in the Julie's Bicycle Creative Green Awards. For more information, visit somersethouse.org.uk/sustainability

FOR PRESS ENQUIRIES, PLEASE CONTACT:

press@somersethouse.org.uk/0207 845 4624

Address: Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 1LA

Transport: Underground: Temple, Embankment / Rail: Charing Cross, Waterloo, Blackfriars

Website: www.somersethouse.org.uk

Somerset House Facebook:

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NOTES TO EDITORS

ABOUT WESTMINSTER COUNCIL

The installation is part of Westminster Council's Westminster Reveals campaign which first launched last year as part of its ambitions to encourage both residents and visitors to enjoy different cultural attractions and activations across Westminster. Now in its second year, Westminster Reveals will continue to take place throughout 2022, with bigger and better attractions with key cultural partners to continue to welcome people back to the city.

The installation is also in line with Westminster Council's commitment to leading the way in terms of becoming net zero by 2030, with the aim of Westminster becoming net zero by 2040.

ABOUT SOMERSET HOUSE

London's working arts centre

Somerset House is London's working arts centre and home to the UK's largest creative community. Built on historic foundations, we are situated in the very heart of the capital.

Dedicated to backing progress, championing openness, nurturing creativity and empowering ideas, our cultural programme is ambitious in scope. We insist on relevance, but aren't afraid of irreverence, and are as keen on entertainment as enrichment. We embrace the biggest issues of our times and are committed to oxygenating new work by emerging artists. Where else can you spend an hour ice-skating while listening to a specially commissioned sound piece by a cutting-edge artist?

It is this creative tension—the way we harness our heritage, put the too-often overlooked on our central stage and use our neo-classical backdrop to showcase ground-breaking contemporary culture—that inspires our programme. Old and new, history and disruption, art and entertainment, high-tech and homemade, combined with the fact that we are home to a constantly shape-shifting working creative community: this is our point of difference. It is what we are proud of. And it is what makes the experience of visiting or working in Somerset House inspiring and energizing, urgent and exciting.