

POLITICS OF THE GAZE

Gayle Chong Kwan (UK, 1973)

5 April 2025

17 May 2025



Dates & Opening hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 11am - 7pm

Opening: Saturday, 5 April, from 5pm to 8pm

Alberta Pane Gallery is pleased to presents *Politics of the Gaze*, an exhibition by British artist Gayle Chong Kwan, proposed in both spaces of the gallery in Paris. This exhibition is the first showing in Paris of two recent works: *A Pocket Full of Sand* (2024) and *Cyclops* (2024).

A Pocket Full of Sand is a project that explores colonial narratives through the prism of geology. It highlights the historical and contemporary connections between the Isle of Mauritius, where the artist's father was born, and the Isle of Wight, in England. *A Pocket Full of Sand* includes photographs, sculptures, and a moving image work. The pieces depict sand-sculpted buildings that mimic Mauritius's colonial architecture, such as Aapravasi Ghat*, Adelaide Fort, a military structure, and Vagrant Depot, a prison for homeless workers. Presented in the shape of grains of sand, archival footages from the 1940s and 50s offer the perspectives of two young boys with contrasting experiences: one appears in a film promoting tourism on the Isle of Wight, while the other other cuts sugar cane in Mauritius during British colonial rule, revealing the profound contradictions of history. Layers of time and geological strata are revealed through references to the coloured earth and sand in Mauritius and Alum Bay on the Isle of Wight.

Cyclops was commissioned by the Fondation Valmont in Venice. It invites us to reflect on visuality, ways of seeing historically, socially, and

culturally constructed. It consists of a large photographic triptych that refers to Ulysses' encounter with Polyphemus, the giant, man-eating Cyclops, a metaphor for a limited vision and mind. It includes references to Greek mythology, cut-out historical images, as well as images created using artificial intelligence and virtual reality. The series also features several sculptures. The most important takes the form of a large-scale wooden mobile made up of painted and printed collages of the eyes of female artists from different periods of art history, many of whom are little-known or unknown, by choice not to 'see' them. The other sculptures in printed fabric raise the question of non-human visuality. They are inspired by the legend of the *Blemnyae* or 'headless men', imaginary figures whose faces were in the centre of their torsos and whose Latin name means 'looking from the middle'.

Although this two corpus of work come from very different contexts and fields of research, they share a common perspective on the political, environmental, and social consequences of how we 'view' the world.

* This 1,640 m2 site in the Port Louis district is where the modern diaspora of indentured labourers began. In 1834, the British government chose Mauritius as the first site for its 'great experiment' of using free labour instead of slaves. Between 1834 and 1920, almost half a million indentured labourers from India arrived at the Aapravasi Ghat to work on the sugar plantations of Mauritius or to be transferred from there to Reunion Island, Australia, southern and eastern Africa and the Caribbean.

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GAYLE CHONG KWAN

Born in 1973 in Edinburg, Scotland.
Lives and works in London, United Kingdom.

Gayle Chong Kwan is an award winning multidisciplinary artist and academic whose work is exhibited internationally in galleries and the public realm.

Her large-scale photographic works, immersive installations, moving image work, participatory projects, and sensory ritual events position the viewer as one element in a cosmology of the political, social and ecological. She works at the intersection of historical, material, and archival research and fine art practice to explore the contested nature of museum collections, colonialism, and ecological degradation. Her PhD is on 'Imaginal Travel: political and ecological positioning as fine art practice' of thinking, making, and doing in the world as ritual and immanent acts in collaboration and in contemplation of inner life.

She has exhibited her work internationally in various museums, including: John Hansard Gallery (Southampton, UK), Science Gallery London (UK), La Biennale di Venezia (Venice, Italy); Fondation Valmont (Venice, Italy); Victoria & Albert Museum (London, UK); William Morris Gallery (London, UK); Barbican Centre (London, UK); Bloomberg Space (London, UK); Compton Verney (Warwickshire, UK); John Hansard Gallery (Southampton, UK); Salisbury International Arts Festival (Salisbury, UK); Havana Biennial (Havana, Cuba); Xiangning Art Museum (Shenzhen, China); St. Walburga Church Museum (Arnhem, Netherlands); Auckland Arts Festival (Auckland, New Zealand); Tai Kwun (Hong Kong); The Edge at Bath University (Bath, UK); Asia-Pacific Biennial (Berlin, Germany).





Gayle Chong Kwan, *Cyclops*, 2024, framed photographic print (triptych),
117 x 83 cm (sides), 117 x 117 cm (central part).

Gayle Chong Kwan's *Cyclops* series was produced as part of the group show *ULYSSES. We are all Heroes*, presented at the Valmont Foundation, Venice, Italy, from 20 April 2024 to 23 February 2025.



Exhibition view *Ulysses. We are all Heroes*, 2024, Valmont Foundation, Venice, Italy.
Cyclops installation, 2024, wooden tripod, metal and photographs, 230 x 75 cm (wood).

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Gayle Chong Kwan, *Fort Adelaide*, 'A Pocket Full of Sand' series, 2024.

A Pocket Full of Sand by Gayle Chong Kwan is commissioned and supported by John Hansard Gallery and Film and Video Umbrella.
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Gayle Chong Kwan, *Aaprvashi Ghat Ruin*, 'A Pocket Full of Sand' series, 2024.

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