

# Institute of Contemporary Arts

The Mall  
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[www.ica.art](http://www.ica.art)

## Decriminalised Futures



**The exhibition features work by Tobi Adebajo, Yarli Allison, Khaleb Brooks, Chi Chi Castillo, Cory Cocktail, Hanecdote, Liad Hussein Kantorowicz, Letizia Miro, Aisha Mirza, Annie Mok, May May Peltier, pxx•mxt•r and Danica Uskert.**

***Decriminalised Futures* is curated by Elio Sea and Yves Sanglante in partnership with Arika and hosted by the ICA.**

*Decriminalised Futures* presents thirteen artists whose work speaks to the multiplicity of contemporary sex worker experiences. Through an interdisciplinary approach, themes of sacred space, tenderness, mental health, gender, racial justice, pain, joy, disability, and desire become tools for solidarity and elicit conversations rooted in the imaginaries of a decriminalised future.

The exhibition forms part of a broader project of the same name led by artists and members of SWARM (Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement), a UK-based collective founded and led by sex workers who believe in self-determination, solidarity and cooperation. The project aims to highlight the history of the sex workers' rights movement and its connections to broader social and labour struggles while celebrating creative expression as a tool for deeper solidarity between global social justice struggles.



*Decriminalised Futures* is a collaborative project using creative tools to explore a broad range of topics that impact the lives of sex workers. The project is focused on supporting art and education that speak to a multiplicity of sex worker experiences, intersect with sex worker rights and connect with broader social struggles.

Founded in 2001, Arika is a UK-based political arts organisation that supports connections between artistic production and social change.

SWARM (Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement) is a UK-based, sex worker-led collective that advocates for the full decriminalisation of sex work and campaigns for the rights and safety of everyone who sells sexual services. Together, they organise skill-shares and support meetups for sex workers, as well as public events.

# Artworks

## LOWER GALLERY

1. **Aisha Mirza, *the best dick i ever had was a thumb & good intentions*, 2022, plants, white-back print, vinyl, selection of personal objects, mirror, faux fur, foam**  
A reflection on sacred space and post-binary pleasure, *the best dick i ever had was a thumb & good intentions* features a selection of the artist's photography, writing and personal items set within a semi-domestic environment. The work presents a nuanced depiction of Domination – referencing its traditional material expressions (latex, paddles, whips) while also emphasising its connection to care, intimacy and freedom. Viewers are invited to spend time interacting with the installation, exploring their own sense of comfort, play and desire.
2. **Danica Uskert & Annie Mok, *Unsustainable*, 2020, 64-page graphic novel, riso print**  
Written by Danica Uskert and illustrated by Annie Mok, *Unsustainable* reflects on the stigma levelled against sex workers and the divide drawn between Hollywood's 'legitimate' actors and adult performers. The graphic novel is a kinky parable about love, perversion, the often-tainted relationship to the body and self as they relate to performance, and the healing and destructive power of role-play and BDSM relationships.  
\* Free copies of *Unsustainable* are available in the ICA bookshop.
3. ***pxr•mxt•r*, 2022, desk, chair, performance research materials**  
*pxr•mxt•r* is a research-based project and performance that uses the gallery as a studio and presentation space. Over the course of the exhibition, documents dealing with power exchanges (such as Naturalisation Forms) will support thinking around desire and autonomy.
4. **Cory Cocktail, *aičhmani*, 2020, laptop, html video game**  
Set in a dystopian future, *aičhmani* is a choose your

own adventure game that reflects on gender, selfhood and immigration. As visitors navigate the game, they encounter different scenarios allegorically referencing deportation, sex work-related struggles and migration.

5. **Khaleb Brooks, *The Session Series: What Chu Lookin at Ho? (Before the Session, After, During the Session)*, 2020, linocut prints on paper**

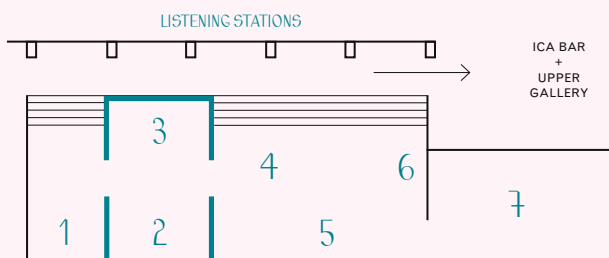
In these life-size self-portraits, the artist claims ownership over their body while exploring the ways in which their Blackness and transness are consumed. The three works speak to the importance of redefining the gaze within sex work and offer a sense of empowerment within vulnerability.

6. **Hanecdote, *Still Life for Sex-Workers*, 2020, embroidery**

This autobiographical embroidery reflects on the experiences of those who are marginalised in sex work. The work gestures towards warmth and tenderness, with each icon representing the artist's relationship to the wider socio-political struggles intrinsically connected to sex work. Among the objects depicted is a stack of books marked with 'Decriminalise', 'SWARM', 'Action', 'Community', 'Resources' and 'Safety', citing important elements of support.

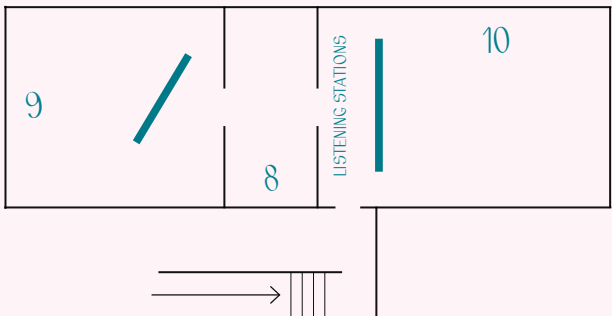
7. **Tobi Adebajo, *ẹjẹ (Blood)*, 2022, multimedia installation**

Tobi Adebajo's first installation of their 'ẹjẹ (Blood)' project is an itẹriba (homage) to sex workers that features film, a triptych collage print, sculptures and sound. They explore a variety of themes including: accountability, care, disability, desire, healing & the Yorùbá language.



## UPPER GALLERY

8. Liad Hussein Kantorowicz, *Mythical Creatures*, 2020, single-channel video, 17:34 min  
*Mythical Creatures* focuses on the story of the first sex-worker-led direct action in Palestine-Israel – conducted by members of Argaman Alliance in 2019 following the passing of the law to criminalize the purchase of sexual services. The film raises questions regarding the means by which marginalised groups can document and archive their histories as they create them.
  
9. Yarli Allison & Letizia Miro, *This is Not for Clients*, 2021, steel sculpture, sound, moving image, sound by Littio X, 11:44 min  
Complicating stereotypes by revealing the less visible material realities of sex work, *This is Not for Clients* explores labour conditions, precarity and survival. Featuring sculpture, sound and a semi-fictional documentary, this time-based installation inhabits the mind of a fictional client to unpack the image of an 'idealised' sex worker.
  
10. Chi Chi & May May, *Stone Dove*, 2021, moving image, 13:53 min  
*Stone Dove* is a series of narrative and experimental short films that reflect on ancestral and intergenerational joy/pain, magical realism, sex worker spirits and decolonisation. With music by Roland Neptune, Earthbound and Lizard Bitch.



# The global sex workers' rights movement ...

is united in the call for full decriminalisation as the best available legal model for protecting the rights of sex workers. In Britain, this struggle has a history going back to the 19th century, when feminists campaigned against police harassment of sex workers and lobbied for the repeal of laws that criminalised prostitution. Internationally, there are records from the late 1800s of sex workers across Latin America and the Caribbean collectively agitating for rights. Today's sex worker activists continue the work of challenging the repressive laws, poverty and stigma that leave sex workers vulnerable to violence.

Abolish poverty not prostitution; Sex work is work; Rights not rescue; Nothing about us without us; No bad whores, just bad laws; Decriminalisation now; Someone you love is a sex worker – these are the rallying cries of the sex workers' rights movement whenever a protest needs to be called. They speak to demands shared with other social justice movements led by marginalised people, including migrants, people of colour, precarious workers, sick and disabled people, homeless people, people who use drugs, and queer and trans people. The sex workers' rights movement overlaps and intersects with many other struggles; sex workers do not live 'single-issue lives'<sup>1</sup>. *Decriminalised Futures* explores this interconnectedness and the possibilities for collective struggle that solidarity offers.

We believe that liberation will only be won by radically changing the social and economic systems that produce our exploitation. This exhibition is an opportunity to imagine a future free of criminalisation and violence, in which sex worker voices and perspectives act as inspirations. By exploring the current landscape of sex workers' lives and perspectives and making connections with intersecting social and labour movements, we take steps towards futures in which we can all experience freedom.

– Decriminalised Futures

1. Audre Lorde, 'Learning from the 60s', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984).

# Artist Biographies

**Tobi Adebajo** is an anti-disciplinary artist exploring the question: 'Who is not in this space? And why?' Their projects are curated to highlight the inaccessibility of society, for and to othered bodies, encouraging freedom with/in movement whilst celebrating survival. Focusing on sound, movement, visual & written pieces; Tobi's practice draws from all the senses and relies upon meaningful collaboration to create works centralising diasporic experiences whilst simultaneously honouring the power of identity. Adebajo presents evidence of communal & spiritual language that we inherently possess but may be unable to access; framing this language as a basis for collective healing and liberation.

**Yarli Allison** is a Canadian-born-Hong Kongese artist based in London. Her frequent relocations and mixed identities have focused her attention to the collective uprootedness and solidarity of migrant demographic groups. In her works, she fabricates imagined worlds that consist of her invented survival tactics and coping mechanisms, often in interaction with sculptural installation, drawings, performances, and moving images.

**Khaleb Brooks** is an interdisciplinary artist, researcher and writer exploring blackness, transness and collective memory. Meshing the black queer figure with surreal environments in paintings, using printmaking to question the politics of desire and entering transcendental states in performance, they force their audience to confront the literal and social death of black people globally. Brooks, originally from Chicago is inspired by the perseverance of black families in overcoming poverty, addiction, abuse and gang violence as well as their own experiences of being transgender. Brooks is currently an artist in residence at the International Slavery Museum and Metal Culture in Liverpool.

**Chi Chi Castillo** is an independent filmmaker and writer focused on narratives around sex work, queerness, and DIY. Castillo is collaborating with May May Peltier to create work especially for this exhibit. Castillo and Peltier

began making films together in 2017, with their first film being *Chi Chi's House Party*, a smut film highlighting the queer underground in Oakland, California. Peltier and Castillo are now continuing their work together under the name *Stone Dove*. They're excited to invite you into *Stone Dove's* dream world.

**Cory Cocktail** is a power exchange architect and escort; a post disciplinary artist with an interest in the intersections of the body and technology, narrative design, contemporary dance, interactive fiction, migration, gender, and sexuality. A transsexual descendant of Oceti Sakowin and European peoples, Cocktail is attempting to bring a sex worker digital interactive fiction experience into the world for *Decriminalised Futures*. Cocktail is based in the unceded lands of the Duwamish, in what is currently known as Seattle, United States of America.

**Danica Anna Uskert-Quinn** is a mixed-race, pansexual, polyamorous film director, producer, video and performance artist, curator, writer, and the editor-in-chief of *filmandfishnet.com*. As Danica Darling, she is also a cam girl, porn performer, and professional submissive. She currently resides in Hollywood, United States with her dog Elvira.

**Hanecdote** is an artist and sex worker with chronic pain who specialises in hand embroidery which speaks from a place of emotion. They are interested in portraying everyday life, inspired by art history but making sure it is much more inclusive and beautiful. Hanecdote believes art is therapy, justice, communication, love and a human experience.

**Liad Hussein Kantorowicz** is a performance artist, musician, perpetual migrant, and master of the margins. Her performances de-exotify and de-mystify the positions of so-called sexual or political deviants. In her performances, the body is a tool of resistance, a platform to display vulnerabilities, and means of transgressing the boundaries of the public space.

**Letizia Miro** is a Spanish queer who migrated to London several years ago. She is a London-based sex worker and poet. Miro has been involved in sex workers' rights and political organising in Spain as well as in the UK. When



she is not monetising her erotic capital, she writes poetry that digs into the meanings of sexuality and existential pain. She has performed and published her work both in English and in Spanish.

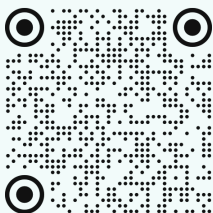
[Aisha Mirza](#) is a queer Pakistani-Egyptian writer, DJ, multi-disciplinary artist and stripper. Their work explores the relationship between queerness, transness, race, mental health, sex and art. They are also creator of Misery, a mental health collective and sober club night for queer/trans people of colour. Mirza writes a monthly advice column for gal-dem and lives on a boat.

[Annie Mok](#) is an intersex trans woman writer-artist, musician (formerly in See-Through Girls, currently in the Knight Dreams), and sometime filmmaker. She drew and designed the graphic memoir 'Unsustainable' based off her friend Danica Anna Uskert-Quinn's script.

[May May Peltier](#) is a model and video artist emphasising experimental paradigms to document the culture of feminine identities and how they intersect with modern systems of oppression. Peltier will be working alongside Chi Chi Castillo, a brilliant artist she is frequently in collaboration with under the production name 'Stone Dove'.

[pxr•mxt•r](#) is an inquiry that uses the exhibition space to study, present and explore infrastructure and power exchange.

## Audio Recordings



Access to excerpts from  
'A Decriminalised Future: Sex  
Workers' Festival of Resistance'.

# Curator Biographies

**Yves Sanglante** is interested in art as a means to inspire liberation. Through their work, they explore how untold historical moments can strengthen and inform visions of the past, present and future. In 2016, as part of a collective of sex workers, artists and anthropologists, Sanglante co-founded sex worker-led archive *Objects of Desire*. The archive's most recent exhibition took place at Schwules Museum, Berlin in 2019. The same year, Sanglante began work on *Decriminalised Futures* in collaboration with organiser Elio Sea.

**Elio Sea** is a producer, curator and community organiser. Their creative and organising work focuses on abolition and workers' movements. In 2019, they founded the *Decriminalised Futures* project, producing community based workshops and education initiatives such as *Lady of the Night School*, alongside events like *We Can Build A Different World* and the *Decriminalised Futures* exhibition. More recently they have worked with political arts organisation Arika as a Programme Producer for projects and events such as *Mutual Aid, A breath to follow* and, co-produced with Performance Space New York, *No Diving 2*.

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In memory of Georgia Lassoff, a true friend.

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For the accompanying event programme, please check [www.ica.art](http://www.ica.art) for further information.