

PRESS RELEASE 17.9.2018

Spike Island

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Christopher Kulendran Thomas
New Eelam: Bristol
19 January to 24 March 2019
Preview: Friday 18 January, 6–9pm



New Eelam: Bristol is Christopher Kulendran Thomas' first major solo exhibition in the UK, presenting a newly commissioned iteration of the artist's long-term artwork at Spike Island in January 2019.

New Eelam is a real estate technology company founded by Christopher Kulendran Thomas. Over the last two years, the venture has brought together an interdisciplinary team of specialists across the fields of technology, art, real estate, finance and architecture to explore how a more liquid form of citizenship could be constructed beyond national boundaries. New Eelam's strategy is based on re-engineering property relations at the very heart of the present economic system through collective access rather than individual ownership – a distributed evolution of a housing co-operative based on a flexible global subscription.

New Eelam originates from contemporary art's role in reimagining cities, from styles of living to forms of labour. Christopher Kulendran Thomas, together with curator Annika Kuhlmann, has been developing *New Eelam* as a long-term artwork in the form of a startup. The exhibition at Spike Island is part of the company's research and development into the future of housing and citizenship. New Eelam's 'concept space' is a sci-fi vision of an alternate reality, featuring technologies such as hydroponic home-farming systems, presented here as living sculptures. Within this immersive environment, visitors can view New Eelam's speculative documentary, *60 million Americans can't be wrong*, which introduces the post-capitalist housing proposal and the political and historical horizons of the venture. The exhibition also features a collection of new micro films that explore how a new economic model could be grown out of the existing economic system rather than in opposition to it. This first UK presentation of *New Eelam* provides a timely opportunity to consider new possibilities for citizenship.

New Eelam's ideas are rooted in Thomas' personal history. Thomas' family is from a place that no longer exists. For three decades during the Sri Lankan civil war, the Tamil homeland of 'Eelam' was self-governed as an autonomous state led by a neo-Marxist revolution. But this uprising was crushed in 2009 by an authoritarian Sri Lankan president, protected by the cloak of national sovereignty. The revolutionary vision of Eelam was lost forever. But what could a new 'Eelam' be if that idea – of a self-governed state – was imagined as a distributed network rather than a territorially bounded nation?



Image 1: Christopher Kulendran Thomas, *New Eelam* (2018), in collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann.

Installation view: *I Was Raised on the Internet*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago;

Images 2 and 4: Christopher Kulendran Thomas, *New Eelam* (2016), in collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann. Installation view: 9th Berlin Biennale.

Image 3: Christopher Kulendran Thomas, *New Eelam* (2017), in collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann.

Installation view: *moving is in every direction. Environments – Installations – Narrative Spaces.*, Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin.

Image 4: Christopher Kulendran Thomas, *New Eelam* (2017), in collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann.

Installation view: *New Eelam: Tensta*, Tensta konsthall, Stockholm.

– Ends –

For further information and high resolution images please contact Sam Talbot on sam@sam-talbot.com / +44 772 5184630 or Jane Faram, Communications Manager at Spike Island on jane.faram@spikeisland.org.uk / +44 (0)117 9292266.

Notes for editors:

- *New Eelam: Bristol* is supported by Arts Council England and co-commissioned with lille3000. *New Eelam: Bristol* furniture is generously loaned by HAY.
New Eelam is presented with thanks to Institute for Modern Art, Brisbane; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin; and Triple Canopy.
- Following initial presentations at the 9th Berlin Biennale and the 11th Gwangju Biennale and subsequent iterations at Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart (Berlin), Tensta konsthall (Stockholm), the Bi-City Biennale (Shenzhen) and most recently the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (in collaboration with curators such as Maria Lind, Hou Hanru, DIS and Omar Kholeif), *New Eelam's* next generation concept space at Spike Island forms the basis of Christopher Kulendran Thomas' first solo exhibition in the United Kingdom.
- 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 Pavillon, 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 Pavillon, Berlin.
- Spike Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design. It is a place where artists and the public can meet, enabling audiences to engage with artists' research and production. Within the 80,000

square foot building, Spike Island offers visitors a year-round programme of exhibitions, events and activities in the central gallery spaces, as well as providing working space for artists, designers and creative businesses.

- Spike Island is a partner of Tate as part of the Plus Tate network.
- The gallery is open Tuesday to Sunday, 12–5pm. Entrance is free.

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