

# *The Orange River*

## CURATORIAL STATEMENT

In Africa, when an old man dies, a library burns  
to the ground.

*Amadou Hampâte Bâ*

*The Orange River* presents a critical dialogue among international artists on physical, mental and linguistic cartography that goes far beyond geopolitical context, as spatial mapping, though documenting our environment, leaves out crucial aspects of culture and mentality, social and spiritual habits, a lieu de mémoire and the presence of the past.

The exhibition aims to challenge our understanding of the world's far-off borders and geographical coordinates that have been entrenched in colonialism. Its title is inspired by the longest river in Southern Africa, which starts in the Kingdom of Lesotho and borders Namibia. In the current context, the river serves as an encompassing and mystical symbol, raising questions of terrain, separation and freedom.

Through the work of international contemporary artists presenting their versions of metaphysical maps, *The Orange River* highlights the migration of peoples past and present and the socio-cultural traffic between several civilisations.

The exhibition will take place in Pimlico, at the grand Victorian London Townhouse neighbouring the Tate Britain Gallery, on the two principal floors of 66 St. George's Square; "Pimlico" being the name given to this area built at Britain's colonial peak. These restored spaces offering a unique historical context for the exhibition.

The Ground floor is dedicated to the exploration of physical landscapes and their segregating borders, using topography as a metaphor. As part of Sixty Six's core mission to support under-represented artists, *The Orange River* presents talents from diverse cultural background including artists from South Africa, Iran and Britain. Work by renowned artists

whose practices speak to socio-environmental sustainability, referencing elements of nature to challenge anthropocentrism is also part of the conversation.

The First floor focuses on mental and linguistic mapping and the transcendent themes of collective memory, space and meditative practices. This borderless space is inspired by Jorge Luis Borges's (1899-1986) short story *The Library of Babel* (1941), where the Argentine author conceives a 'universe' in the form of an infinite library filled with books written in cryptic languages that the narrator attempts to decode. Presenting a metaphor for the immense wealth of knowledge sentient life has yet to discover, Borges suggests the universe holds transcendental meaning, expanding inwards instead of outwards.

The inhabitants of this library are in a constant search for meaning contained in the never-ending information around them, which resonates with today's information overload. Here, viewers are encouraged to turn their gaze inwards, detaching from outside noise while meditating upon the genetic information they carry.

Farah Piriye, Curator