

# ASSEMBLING ART ARCHIVES: WORKSHOP FOR SOUTH ASIA

AUGUST 2025 - MAY 2026

## MENTORS



**Ala Younis** is an artist engaged in curatorial, film, and publishing projects. Younis's projects look into how the archive plays on predilections and how its mishaps manipulate the imagination. She has presented her work in solo exhibitions across Amman, Dubai, Sharjah, New York, London, Seville, and Prague. Additionally, she has participated in group exhibitions such as the biennials of Venice, Istanbul, Gwangju, Ljubljana, Kaunas, Ural, Orléans, Sharjah, and Jeddah's *Islamic Arts*. In 2012, Younis co-founded Kayfa ta, an independent publishing initiative that published over twelve titles, and organized several group shows including *How to reappear: Through the quivering leaves of independent publishing* at Beirut Art Center (2019), MMAG Foundation in Amman (2020), and the Kochi-Muziris Biennale invitation program (2022). She also co-curated *How to find meaning in dead time* at SAVVY CONTEMPORARY (2021) and *How to know what's really happening* at Betonhalle Silent Green (2023) as part of the Archival Assembly festival in Berlin. Younis was co-section head of Berlinale Forum Expanded program (2021-24), Artistic Director of Cologne's Academy of the Arts of the World (2023-25) and Research Scholar at the Al Mawrid Arab Center for the Study of Art at NYU Abu Dhabi (2022-25).

### **Artist to Archivist: Repositioning Practice through Artists' Papers**

Ala Younis reflects on the evolving nature of her artistic practice as it increasingly engages with archives. Initially, she approached archives as a methodological tool within her own art projects, but this focus took a structural turn after she joined the al Mawrid Arab Center

for the Study of Art at NYU Abu Dhabi in 2022. Younis examines how her interactions with the personal papers of artists—particularly those of Rafa Nasiri and Ahmad Nawash—have broadened her understanding of their artistic practice as much as archival work, not merely as a means of historical recovery but as a generative space for research and pedagogy. Through two case studies, Younis delves into the rich insights that arise when reading artist archives across various media, including letters, diaries, exhibition materials, and photographs. These sources transform as per how they are structured, activated, and studied. In a time marked by urgent archival responsibility—due to the loss of key figures from the modern Arab period caused by conflict, displacement, and mortality—the preservation of artists' papers and the cultivation of collaborative, living encounters within archives have become essential, and can inspire pedagogical approaches.



**Benjamin Cook** is the founder Director of LUX and LUX Scotland, the UK agencies for the support and promotion of artists working with the moving image and has worked in the visual arts and independent film for the past 25 years as a curator, producer, writer and teacher after originally training and working as a film archivist. He now works as an independent art and film producer and a practicing gestalt and nature-allied psychotherapist.

### **Navigating Ethics, Knowledge, and Classification in the Marginal Moving Image Archive**

Drawing on his experience as a film archivist and the founder of the UK's only significant archive of artists' moving image work, Benjamin Cook examines the unique challenges archivists face when working with moving image collections—how the specific ontologies of moving image disrupts traditional taxonomic systems and hierarchies of knowledge; how working with the unique, the non-standard and anti-institutional raises ethical implications around preservation and digitization decisions, the politics of metadata creation; and how institutional power structures shape what gets preserved, catalogued, and made accessible. The presentation addresses practical concerns around version control, format migration, and user access while questioning whose voices are centered in archival description and how archives can either reproduce or challenge existing knowledge hierarchies.



**Sezin Romi** is the Senior Librarian and Archivist at Salt (Istanbul, Türkiye). Romi explores how archival and librarianship approaches intersect with knowledge production and historiography, while engaging with diverse research methodologies. Her research area spans the development of book collections, research, and archive projects on the history of art in Türkiye after the 1950s. She has contributed to the research and visualization of several projects at Salt including *It was a time of conversation* (2012-13), *From England with Love, İsmail Saray* (2014-15), *Idealist School, Productive Studio* (2018), and *History of the Painting and Sculpture Museums Association* (2022). Romi has contributed to various Salt's publications as editor and co-editor, and is the co-editor of *Stories and Threads: Perspectives on Art Archives* (L'Internationale, 2022). Her academic articles, "Time of Transformation: Research, Resources, and Access at Salt" (2022) and "Archiving as Knowledge Production: Research Practices at Salt" (2024-25), were published in *Art Libraries Journal*. Her most recent essay, "The Masterpiece is the Archive," was published by *LIKE A FEVER* in 2025.

### **Weaving Stories and Threads**

In this presentation, Sezin Romi will introduce Salt's research-driven mission and explore transversal practices within and between archival collections at Salt Research. Romi will focus on cataloguing archives and explore mapping as an alternative research method. While discussing the details of cataloguing through specific examples, such as artist and exhibition archives at Salt Research, she will examine its relationship with research methodologies. She will also consider how mapping can be an alternative way to retrieve knowledge when the

archives are not compiled or accessible, referencing Salt's projects Turkey's Participation in International Biennials and International Exhibitions on Turkey.

Romi will further explain how archival collections at Salt Research develop and mutually relate to each other, and their role in historicization and knowledge production. Focusing on Salt's long-term research projects on the art history of Turkey after the 1950s, Romi will discuss various approaches to the interpretation, presentation, and accessibility of archives. She will explore how archival sources are formed and shaped by the circumstances of their production and transformed by the contexts of their engagement and narration.



**Pankhuri Upadhyay** is a media, entertainment and arts lawyer. She has over a decade's experience in corporate law, having worked at leading law firms in India. In 2019, she founded Maker's Legal, a full-service law firm with a strong focus on media, entertainment and art laws, representing a diverse roster of creative professionals across the arts. One of the primary objectives of the firm, since its inception, has been quantitative research, active discourse and proactive engagement with different stakeholders in the creative industries to help better the legal infrastructure that supports them. The firm strives to work at the intersection of law, research, education, multimedia, and technology, to address the rapidly evolving landscape of creative systems globally and resulting legal challenges, so as to foster problem-solving with equally innovative strategies and facilitation of intermediary processes in the arts.

Recent engagements by Upadhyay include panel discussions and workshops on art law for various art and cultural institutions across India, including Space Studio Baroda, Hampi Art Labs, Gujral Foundation, New Delhi, Museum of Art & Photography, Bangalore, IF: BE, Mumbai, NGMA Mumbai, Avid Learning, Mumbai and Tarq Gallery, Mumbai, amongst others.

**Session Info TBC**



**Tarlan Rafiee** is an Iranian curator, archivist, art collector, and visual artist whose work focuses on reconstructing fragments of her country's fractured history, with a particular emphasis on the role of women in shaping society. She believes that over the past century—and especially in the last fifty years—repeated cycles of erasure and rewriting have obscured Iran's history. Through archival materials and what remains, she seeks to build a more truthful account, highlighting women as central figures of resistance against fanaticism and reactionary forces.

Since beginning her curatorial career in 2013 with the Calling Project, she has organised exhibitions such as Good Morning... Good Night (Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, 2018), Iran Print - 01 (Meem Gallery, Dubai, 2019), and Solace of Lovers: Trost der Liebenden (Tyrolean State Museum, Innsbruck, 2020-21). Other projects include Tehran Calling, RTL:LTR, Parviz Tanavoli's Exercise Writing, and Plants by Parvaneh Etemadi. She co-founded Bread & Salt Projects in 2008, an archive and curatorial platform for Iranian modern and contemporary art, and directs KA:V Editions, a publisher of limited editions in collaboration with Iranian modern masters. Her curatorial projects combine research-based interpretation with visual engagement, presenting Iranian art in its broader cultural and historical context while resisting the confines of official narratives.

**Yashar Samimi Mofakham** is an Iranian curator, visual artist, author, archivist, and art collector whose work explores cultural and political histories through visual media. He is the co-founder of Bread & Salt Projects, a curatorial platform and archive dedicated to documenting modern and contemporary Iranian art, and KA:V Editions, a publisher of limited editions created in collaboration with Iranian modern masters.

Since beginning his curatorial career with *Selfdom: A Personal Project* (2010), he has organised exhibitions including *The Calling Project* (2013), *Karnameh: Visual Culture of Iranian Children*

(Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art), and *Solace of Lovers: Trost der Liebenden* (Tyrolean State Museum, Innsbruck, 2020-21). He has authored several catalogues, such as Parviz Tanavoli's *Universal Icons: 50 Years of Iranian Pop Art* and *Good Morning... Good Night*, and has lectured at institutions including the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Through his exhibitions, publications, and public programmes, Samimi Mofakham positions Iranian art within broader historical and cultural narratives, fostering dialogue between local traditions and global contexts.

**Session Info TBC**

## GUEST SPEAKERS



**Ahmad Makia** is a geographer, author, and bookmaker whose work spans spatial studies, human geography, gender identities, Arab and Islamic history, and material philosophy. He is the founder and creative director of Ahmad Makia Hyperhouse, Head of Publications at Sharjah Art Foundation, and Contributing Editor at Kaph Books. His writing has appeared in academic journals, magazines, artist books, exhibition catalogues and zines. He was also founding editor of THE STATE, ZIGG, and Dubailand.



With more than ten years' experience in film programming and research, **Aki Kung** focuses on archives management, along with audio-visual archiving, preservation, and restoration in recent years. Currently, she works at Asia Art Archive as Project Archivist and is pursuing her master's degree in Archives and Records Management with a scholarship from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. Previously, she co-founded Reel to Reel Institute, a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting film preservation in Hong Kong, where she took on managerial and curatorial roles. She also worked at the Hong Kong Film Archive and participated in training courses organised by the International Federation of Film Archives. Her project, 'Study on Preservation and Exhibition of Audio-visual Heritage,' was selected for the 'Overseas Training for Arts Administrators' programme by the HKADC, which included field trips to film archives, restoration laboratories, and related organisations across Asia.



**Paco Ma** is Head of IT and Digital, Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong. Paco graduated in Internet and Multimedia Technologies with further study in project management and has been working at Asia Art Archive for 15 years.



**Sindhu N.** currently works as an Archival Conservator at Archives at NCBS, Bengaluru. Her primary work involves setting up a lab and a protocol for conservation. She is also a conservation consultant to the Archive of IIT Madras. Sindhu completed her Bachelors in Painting and Masters in Art History before joining INTACH, Bengaluru, and training in conservation. She then worked with INTACH-Bengaluru for more than 6 years. Major projects that she has been part of are documentation on wall paintings and rock art sites in Karnataka, conservation and documentation of polychrome wooden sculptures at Kalari Kovilakam in Kerala. She has also worked with the Karnataka State Museum Collections, Venkatappa Art Gallery Collections, Oil painting collections from Vidhana Soudha-Bengaluru, Private Pichwai painting, Roerich painting collections and other private collections received at INTACH-Bengaluru. She specializes in the conservation of South-Indian traditional paintings and paper objects and has obtained training in Multispectral imaging. In 2022, Sindhu worked as a course anchor for a paper conservation training program initiated by Tata Trusts, held at MAP Bengaluru.

### **Session: The Digital and the Physical as Material, Media, and Infrastructure of the Archive**

Aki Kung, Paco Ma, and Sindhu N. reflect on the handling, storage, and care of digital and physical objects respectively, in an archive. The digital and physical intersect with archives as material, as media, and as infrastructure. Addressing workshop participants who work in a wide range of contexts, from one-person initiatives to larger organisations and institutions, the speakers draw on their experiences of working within digital and physical archives to share methods and practices across the spectrum—from best practices to what we may call (following Benjamin Cook), ‘the good enough’.



**Andy Koh** is Manager at the National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive, where he is part of a team dedicated to the digitisation, cataloguing, and provision of access to archival resources related to modern and contemporary art from Southeast Asia. Since joining the Gallery in 2020, he has worked on several archival projects, including those of contemporary artist Tang Da Wu and Singapore's first independent art space, The Substation, amongst others. Prior to this, he served as an archival research assistant at the Singapore Art Museum, where he supported projects involving the archives of the artist-run initiative 5th Passage. His research interests include the interrogation of archival silences and the critical examination of the limitations of textual records.

### **Session: Art Spaces and their Archives**

By adopting concepts of archival silences and symbolic annihilation as theoretical departure points, this sharing examines archival practices and considers how they may negotiate with, and resist silences and absences within art historical narratives. The sharing will also interrogate contemporary archiving systems and their limitations in reflecting the social relations embedded within artists' collectives and independent art spaces. In doing so, the sharing will attempt to surface the tensions between archival imperatives and the ethical rights of the subjects represented in the archives.



**Anthony Yung** is Head of Research and Archives at Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong. With twenty years of experience, he specialises in researching and archiving the diverse art histories of Asia. Yung leads research projects at AAA, including "Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980-1990", which has become a key resource for scholars and artists worldwide. Yung is dedicated to advocating innovative approaches to interpreting and activating archives, bridging scholarly, curatorial, and artistic research.



**Bhooma Padmanabhan** is an independent curator, researcher and an arts administrator. She currently heads the Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation, an arts non-profit that cares for the legacy of the Mukherjee family - Benode Behari Mukherjee, Leela Mukherjee and Mrinalini Mukherjee. In her role as the Manager of Projects and Grants at the Foundation, she has been instrumental in shaping the foundation's work in the space of archiving and digitisation, publication, grant-making and developing strategic partnerships with other key cultural institutions.

Bhooma has two decades of experience in the field of visual arts in India. She previously worked at the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art (FICA) leading its programming from 2007-2017, while also curating exhibitions for FICA and Vadehra Art Gallery. As a researcher she worked on the 2018 Students' Biennale, Kochi Muziris Biennale's "Expanded Education Program". She co-curated significant shows such as the 3rd Chennai Photo Biennale "Maps of Disquiet" (2019-2021), and "A Million Mutinies Later: India at 70", an exhibition of Indian photography, in collaboration with Nazar Foundation, New Delhi, and Ffotogallery, Cardiff, Wales (2017). She is currently working on a curatorial project emerging from the archives of the renowned Bharatanatyam dancer Chitra Visweswaran, in Chennai (upcoming). Bhooma has a background in Fine Arts and Art History, and works between Chennai and New Delhi.



**Ibrahim Mohamed Ali** leads the archival processing, cataloging, and accessibility of the Arab Art Archive collections at al Mawrid, NYU Abu Dhabi. His current research focuses on developing specialized cataloging frameworks for Arabic-language archival collections to enhance their accessibility and discoverability. Before joining al Mawrid, he worked as a documentation and preservation specialist on significant projects, including the Ministry of Antiquities' glass negative archives and the Attaya Gaddis studio archive. Mohamed Ali completed internships in photograph preservation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the Smithsonian National Museum of American History (NMAH), and attended the MEPPi workshops between 2011- 2017. Mohamed Ali taught courses and lectured on the processing and preservation of archival collections in Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Japan. He presented his research on archival collections at various conferences, including the ICA Congress 2023 and the Digital Archiving in the Arab World 2024. Mohamed Ali holds an MA in Museum Studies from George Washington University and a BA in Conservation from Cairo University.



**Matthew Harle** is a writer and curator from London. He has written and edited books on writers and artists, mythic television plays, miners' strikes, lost address books and football. He also makes exhibitions, film programmes and artist's books that draw upon documents of everyday life, cities, archive collections, cultural heritage, and the history of ideas.

In 2024, Matthew was appointed the first Curator of Artistic Programmes at the Warburg Institute, working across their new gallery, auditorium, publishing, and artist residencies. Prior to the Warburg, Matthew was Curator of Public Programmes at the Barbican, where he helped found the Barbican Archive. He began his career at the British Film Institute, working in their archive programming team.

Matthew has taught English Literature and Cultural History at Birkbeck and Yale. He is a trustee of the Rita Keegan Archive & Studio, originally part of the team that assembled and curated Keegan's artworks and archive.



**Nicole Wang** is a researcher and curator whose work explores the intersections of art, archives, and collective memory in contemporary Taiwan. She holds a PhD in Anthropology from Durham University and an MA in Cultural Studies from Goldsmiths, University of London, with a particular interest in cultural dynamics and narrative formation. From 2022 to 2025, she led the research and implementation of Independent Art Spaces of Taiwan at Asia Art Archive—a multi-year archival project tracing the histories, practices, and shifting ecologies of self-organised art spaces since the late 1980s. Prior to that, she conducted research at Taiwan Contemporary Culture Lab (C-LAB), where she documented the site’s layered institutional history—from its origins as an industrial research centre to its decades as a military base and eventual transformation into a cultural campus—and collaborated with artists and curators on archival and research-driven projects. Nicole’s practice engages deeply with the politics of documentation, archival ethics, and the reactivation of overlooked or fragmented narratives within cultural history.

### **Session: Art Spaces and their Archives**

This session reflects on how archival materials from artist-run and independent spaces can be understood as a kind of infrastructure—less a standardized system than a set of conditions that shape what survives, what is visible, and how practices are remembered. Different spaces generate distinct kinds of archival traces, each marked by its own rhythms, omissions, and priorities. Drawing on my recent research project on independent art spaces in Taiwan, the session considers how these varied materials—sometimes modest or unexpected—invite us to rethink what is worth keeping and how we might begin archiving from where we are. Rather than offering tidy solutions, the session asks what it means to treat archives as infrastructures in the making: uneven, situated, and open to reconfiguration.



**Saira Ansari** is an independent writer and editor who uses creative nonfiction and publishing to explore art practice, alternative histories, grief, gardens, and the real and imagined peripheries of South Asia. For two decades, Ansari has collaborated with cultural institutions, artists, and writers in the Middle East, Iran, South Asia, and Brazil. She continues to consult on publishing projects for artist-led initiatives.

Ansari has contributed to numerous journals, exhibition catalogues, and artist monographs, and her editorial projects include monographs on Bani Abidi (Hatje Cantz, 2022), Zubeida Agha (Fondation Giacometti, 2024), Prince Faisal Bin Fahd Arts Hall (Assouline, 2024), and Sahand Hesamiyan (Black Dog Press, 2025).

Previously, Ansari worked in Publications at Sharjah Art Foundation and most recently served as Director of Research and Publications at Misk Art Institute in Riyadh. In both roles, she led the development of formative regional art book fairs focused on independent publishing.



**Wing Chan** is an editor at Afterall Research Centre. She also moonlights as a translator. Her publications include *How to Pin Down Smoke: ruangrupa since 2000* (co-edited with Arianna Mercado and David Morris; Afterall, 2025) and *Precarious Solidarities: Artists for Democracy 1974-77* (co-edited with David Morris; Afterall, 2023).

**David Morris** is a research fellow and editor at Afterall Research Centre. His work explores different approaches to artistic research, education and exhibition, with a focus on experimental and collective practice. His publications include *Schizo-Culture* (co-edited with Sylvère Lotringer; Semiotext(e)/MIT, 2013), *Artist-to-Artist: Independent Art Festivals in Chiang Mai 1992-98* (co-edited with David Teh, Afterall, 2017), *Precarious Solidarities: Artists for Democracy 1974-77* (co-edited with Wing Chan; Afterall, 2023) and *How to Pin Down Smoke: ruangrupa since 2000* (co-edited with Wing Chan and Arianna Mercado; Afterall, 2025). With Helena Vilalta he leads a research masters programme in Exhibition Studies at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, where he is also a trade union organiser.

*Mentor and guest speaker bios and session information will be updated periodically.*