

# Expedition Mani - Reverberations

## Sajan Mani

As part of the exhibition series *Speaking to Ancestors*,  
curated by Pauline Doutreluingne & Keumhwa Kim

**Expedition Mani - a performative procession by Sajan Mani starting at 3 PM, Feb 10, 2024**  
Meeting point: Sanchi Gate at Schlossplatz 5, Berlin - Potsdamer Platz - NOME Berlin  
(duration about 1.5 hours)

**Exhibition Opening: Feb 10, 2024, 5 PM**  
Duration: Feb 10 – 17, 2024  
**Artist Talk: Feb 13, 2024, 6:30 pm**

Venue: NOME | Potsdamer Str. 72 | 10785 Berlin  
Opening Hours: Tue – Sat, 1 - 6PM

[www.speakingtoancestors.de](http://www.speakingtoancestors.de)

As the final edition of the exhibition series *SPEAKING TO ANCESTORS*, the Dravidian artist Sajan Mani presents his exhibition *Expedition Mani – Reverberations* at NOME Berlin.

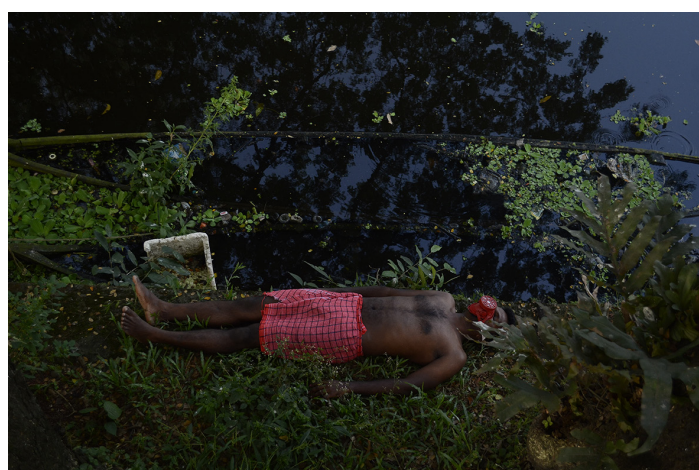
Sajan Mani (born 1981 in Kerala, South India) is an interdisciplinary artist coming from a family of rubber tappers in a remote village in the northern part of Kerala, South India. Performing with and centering around his own „Black Dalit Body,“ Mani addresses the issues faced by marginalised indigenous communities in India under the oppressive environment long upheld through Brahmanic knowledge production. Mani has spent years searching for traces of his ancestors in Western image archives, including the Ethnological Museum of Berlin. It contains a large number of photographs taken during the colonial era in the South Indian Malabar region. These photographs are evidence of anthropological expeditions such as Emil Riebeck’s in 1882 in the service of colonialism. In these early colonial photographs, indigenous communities were observed, measured, and inventoried through the European gaze.

The exhibition *Expedition Mani – Reverberations* is an interim report of Mani’s artistic research. At the centre of the exhibition is his “body” as a means of resistance – an interface between the past and present. He metaphorizes his body as a socio-political projection surface, confronting his audience with pain, shame, fear, and power.

Through installations, videos, and drawings activated by his performance, Mani engages in an imaginary dialogue with his ancestors. He allows the contradictions of our present to reverberate under the weight of the colonial past.

Mani’s performance *Expedition Mani* (2024) is inspired by the ritual Gulikan Theyyam, a popular ritual dance in the Dravidian tradition from Kerala, where he comes from. In this ritual, human bodies of a lower-caste ceremonially transform into those of deities. *Expedition Mani* represents a physical and discursive challenge to the hegemonic thinking that western archives narrate. Through ritualised chants and dances, Mani invites the visitors to become a part of a performative procession from The Gate of Sanchi at Schlossplatz, Berlin to Potsdamer Platz and finally to NOME Berlin, where the exhibition will be inaugurated by his arrival. The artist is going to embody the demi-god Gulikan, a Dravidian power worshipped as one of the snake deities whose duty is to protect the Scheduled Castes and Tribes from environmental problems. In the exhibition space, Mani installed a neon sign showing a crossed C for *Colonial Copyright* (2024) right at the entrance. Alongside colourful drawings depicting hybrid humans and more-than-human species against the backdrop of magazines from the region Malabar reflecting their peoples own history, ritual music from Kerala, and the costume and the instrument he wore during the performance, the exhibition evolves

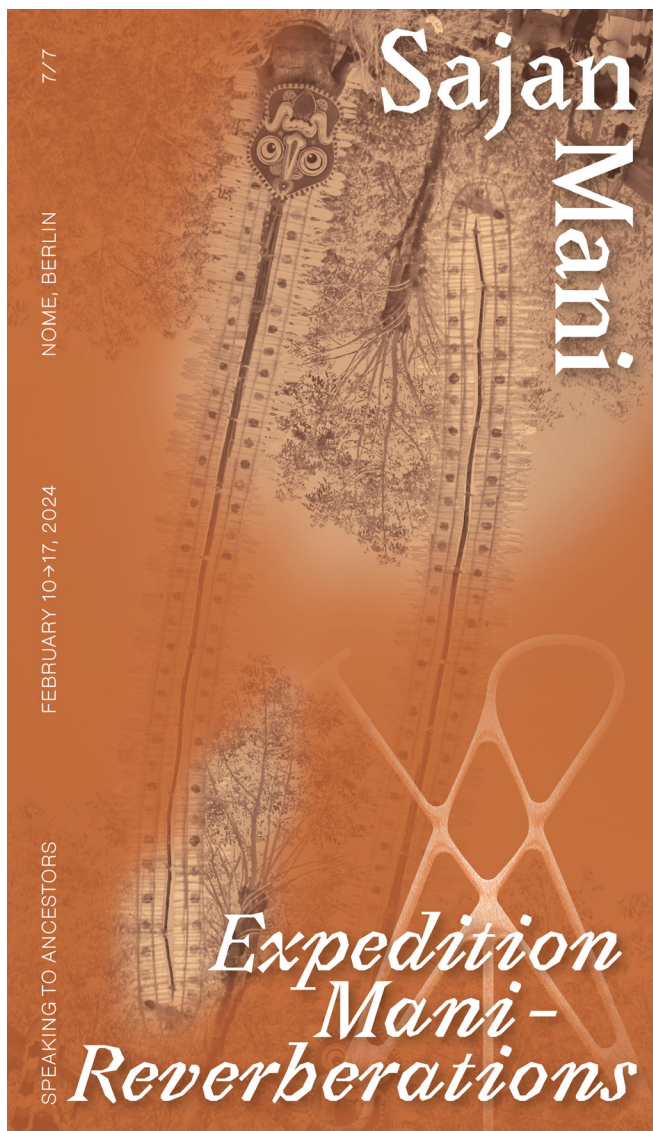
into a resonance space echoing the resurrection of his ancestors' own narratives. Mani creates a „counter-gaze“ on the European eye during the era of colonialism. His installation *Gazing back* (2024), a serigraph on natural raw rubber sheets, a medium with a deep connection with the artist's family legacy of labor, depicts a series of enlarged eyes of his portrayed ancestors, who were then captured by Europeans as „foreign“ and „different“ for their inventory purposes. The silkscreened rubber sheets have been sewn together by the artist to form a collective memory confronting visitors to the exhibition. Also, the monitor included in his video installation *Dream walks of a Haemodracon riebeckii* (2024) is rubber-wrapped, surrounded by a pile of fresh soil and a stone. It shows the artist in traditional attire visiting the grave of Emil Riebeck (1853-1885) in Halle-Saale, Germany. Time, space, and history collide in this work, raising questions about what it means to encounter beyond ideologies, what it means to be dead or alive, who ultimately measures whom, and what colonialism has ultimately left behind in the present.



SAJAN MANI was awarded the Prince Claus Mentorship Award, the Breakthrough Artist of The Year from Hello India Art Awards (2022), and Berlin Art Prize (2021). Between 2019 and 2022, he received artistic research grants from the Berlin Senate, the Fine Arts Scholarship from Braunschweig Projects, and the Akademie Schloss Solitude Fellowship, Germany.

He has participated in international biennales, festivals, exhibitions, including NPT Biennale: New Performance Turku Biennale, FIN (2023); The INHABIT, Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics, GE (2022); Galerie Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Concordia University, CA (2021-22); Lokame Tharavadu Kochi Biennale Foundation, IN (2021); Times Art Center Berlin, DE (2021); Nome Gallery, Berlin (2021); CODA Oslo International Dance Festival, No (2019); Ord & Bild, SE (2019); India Art Fair (2019); and *Specters of Communism*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2017).

1 *Stretched whispers I & II*, 2023, laser cut and acrylic on natural raw rubber sheets. Courtesy of the artist; 2 *Dream walks of a Haemodracon riebeckii*, 2024, video (still), 01:50 min. Courtesy of the artist; 3 *Caste-pital*, durational performance, 2017. Photo: Marion Vogel. Courtesy of the artist and Haus der Kunst; 4 *OK OK*, Performance as part of the ongoing series *Eco-Art Performances*, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.



Design: Studio Hold

The exhibition *Expedition Mani - Reverberations* by Sajan Mani takes place as part of the exhibition series *Speaking to Ancestors* curated by Pauline Doutreluingne and Keumhwa Kim.

The two-year exhibition series, *Speaking to Ancestors*, brings together seven artistic positions that deal with the search for genealogies, origins and ritual (image) practices. The invited artists have in common that they develop their own narration about their ancestors, starting from ceremonial, ritual traditions or based on intimate, familial stories. They create a new symbolic and social field of action situated between faded myths and handed-down imagination. They strive to heal societal wounds, resurrect forgotten histories of marginalized groups, and counter patriarchal, colonial power structures through ancestral and magical ritual powers. *Speaking to Ancestors* explores how our global society responds to ancestor worship, shamanism, animism and myth.

[www.speakingtoancestors.de](http://www.speakingtoancestors.de)

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The exhibition series *Speaking to Ancestors* is kindly supported by the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion.

Location partner : NOME Berlin  
 Media partner : Berlin Art Link