

PRESS RELEASE

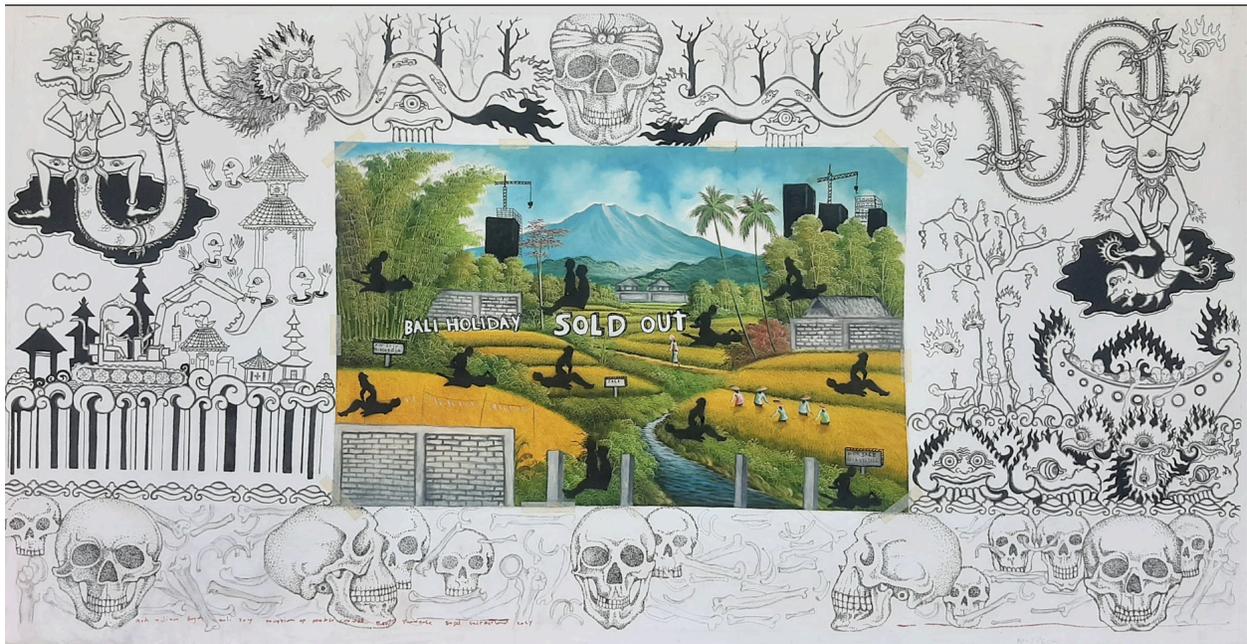
The Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G presents

Bids for Survival:

ROOTS by Michael Schindhelm

30 August - 17 November 2024

Basel, Switzerland



The Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G is delighted to announce the second site-specific immersive project in its year-long collaboration with the author, filmmaker, and curator Michael Schindhelm.

The Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger is set to unveil the groundbreaking project titled *ROOTS* from August 30 to November 17, 2024. This immersive experience promises to bring together Bali's rich history, vibrant culture, and captivating artwork within the galleries.

The exhibition revolves around the fascinating figure of Russian-born German artist **Walter Spies** (1895 – 1942), whose influence on Bali's cultural landscape reverberates today. Spies' legacy is deeply intertwined with Bali's contemporary narrative, and *ROOTS* aims to show his profound impact while exploring the island's postcolonial legacy over the last century.

At the heart of *ROOTS* lies Villa Iseh, a retreat built by Spies in 1937 in Iseh, Karangasem. Initially a sanctuary for Spies, it later became a renowned destination for the rich and famous, including David Bowie, Yoko Ono, and Mick Jagger.

Visitors will be invited to explore the maze of rooms in the villa, from the reception to bedrooms, corridors, living areas, and a pool room. The exhibition will examine the themes of mass tourism, environmental degradation, and the complex interplay of cultural identities in Bali.

Highlights include works by the painter Made Bayak and the graphic artist Gus Dark, who explore the Balinese struggle to preserve their cultural identity amidst contemporary challenges, along with a number of films and installations that will present pivotal moments in Balinese history, including the 1965 genocide.

Excerpts from Michael Schindhelm's docu-fiction film *ROOTS* will accompany the exhibition. The film resurrects Walter Spies as a spectral presence navigating Bali's modern landscape. Through encounters with Balinese artists and luminaries, the ghost of Spies grapples with his own legacy and the enduring impact of Western civilization on the island. Visitors will be invited to accompany him on his journey across today's island, 99 years after the painter's first visit.

ROOTS honours Spies' enigmatic legacy, weaving his story into Bali's contemporary narrative and exploring the complexities of cultural exchange. Through the dancer Dewa Ayu Eka Putri, the musician Putu Tangkas Adi Hiranmayena, and Balinese collaborators, including internationally renowned choreographer Wayan Dibai, gallerist Agung Rai and many others, the spirit of Spies will be awoken within this exhibition.

In 1923, Walter Spies embarked on a journey from Europe to the tropics in search of a new world and artistic inspiration. Despite his significant influence as an artist, his story has largely faded from the Western consciousness. Born in Moscow in 1895 and tragically perishing at sea off Sumatra in 1942, Spies' legacy remains enduringly influential in Bali a century after his arrival on the island.

Regarded by Balinese as a pioneer of modernism on the island, Spies underwent a profound artistic transformation under the pervasive influence of Balinese art. Despite exhibitions in Berlin and Dresden and friendships with esteemed artists from Oskar Kokoschka and Otto Dix to Friedrich Murnau, Margaret Mead and Charlie Chaplin, Spies' reputation in his homeland pales in comparison to his revered status in Bali.

Michael Schindhelm says, "*The exhibition Roots and the docufiction of the same name are to be understood as a collective memory project that deals with an important aspect of Bali's post-colonial history: the influence of Western modern culture on Balinese cultural traditions. The chequered history of Walter Spies on the island and its after-effects on the subsequent transformation of Bali into a global tourism destination are understood as a 'shared heritage'. Together with protagonists of Balinese culture*

today, *Roots* attempts to place the legacy left by Walter Spies in its historical context and at the same time to understand its significance for the development of Bali today."

Raphael Suter, Director of KBH.G, explains: "With *ROOTS* the two-part exhibition project with Michael Schindhelm continues. As with 'The End of Aging,' he has taken up a theme that is not widely recognized as connected to Basel. The Museum der Kulturen holds one of the most important collections of Balinese art. There have been festivals and events in Basel that have led to a close connection with the island's cultural creators. Michael Schindhelm picks up this thread and continues it in his own way. Once again, he does not simply focus on a place (Bali) or an artist (Walter Spies), but questions global ecological and economic developments. With the two exhibitions under the overarching theme 'Bids for Survival,' KBH.G is breaking new ground and expanding its scope once again."

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Bids for Survival – Michael Schindhelm

The End of Aging from May 3 to July 21, 2024

Roots from August 30 to November 17, 2024

Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G

Spitalstrasse 18,

4056 Basel, Switzerland

Daily (except Tuesday) from 11 am to 6 pm

Publication and admission are free

PRESS INFORMATION

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR

About the Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G

The Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger is a leading cultural foundation dedicated to fostering innovative and thought-provoking artistic experiences. With a commitment to interdisciplinary collaborations, the foundation seeks to engage audiences in meaningful conversations about contemporary issues. Founded in 2019 by philanthropist Sibylle Geiger (1930 - 2020), the foundation is named after her grandfather, Swiss pharmacist and entrepreneur Hermann Geiger (1870 - 1962). The establishment of the foundation is linked to the goal of providing the city of Basel and its residents and visitors with a novel forum for art and culture. Admission and the accompanying catalogue are free.

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About Michael Schindhelm

Michael Schindhelm is a German-born Swiss author, filmmaker, curator, and cultural consultant known for his multifaceted contributions to the arts. He served as the director and artistic director of the Theater Basel from 1996 to 2006. He was the founding director of the Dubai Culture & Arts Authority in 2008 and the general director of the Berlin Opera Foundation from 2005 to 2007. His extensive career includes accolades such as the Bavarian Theater Prize for Theater Basel in 1999 and 2001, and more recently, the Herbert Quandt Media Prize and the German Business Film Prize for his 2022 documentary 'A Vaccine at the speed of Light' (Projekt BioNTech). Beyond his professional achievements, Schindhelm has a rich academic background, having studied Quantum Chemistry in the USSR and later contributing to literature with books including "Lavapolis" and "Dubai Speed." His cinematic endeavours include documentaries such as "Song from the Steppe" in 2004, "Bird's Nest" in 2008, "The Chinese Lives of Uli Sigg" in 2016, and "In the Mood for Art" about the M+ Museum in Hong Kong in 2023, showcasing his diverse talents in the arts.

michaelschindhelm.com

About Walter Spies

Walter Spies was a German artist who spent the last years of his life in Indonesia. After he left Moscow, where he was born, he sailed to the Dutch East Indies after he had been made curious by various Dutch postcards. Firstly, Spies lived in Bandung and then moved to Yogyakarta, where he worked for the Sultan, before moving to Ubud in Bali in 1927. He recorded and collected many aspects of Balinese arts, which he then preserved in the museum he founded, the Bali Museum. In 1936, he was one of the founders of Pita Maha, an arts organisation. Together with Wayan Limbak, he developed the Sang Hyang dance and the Ramayana epic to become what we now know as the Tari Kecak (Monkey Dance). In 2018 Michael Schindelm published the first German language biography of Walter Spies.