



March 21, 2018

Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy  
Director  
Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art  
Witte de Withstraat 50 -3012 BR Rotterdam

Re: 'The Ten Murders of Josephine', 2017, installation, opera and libretto, Rana Hamadeh

Dear Ms. Hernández Chong Cuy,

I am writing on behalf of the author M. NourbeSe Philip to express serious concerns about the unauthorized use of her work in the 2017 exhibit by Rana Hamadeh. Specifically, we wish to call your attention to the unauthorized use of the poetry and intellectual work from the book **Zong!** (Wesleyan University Press, 2011) by Philip in 'The Ten Murders of Josephine', 2017, installation, opera and libretto, by Rana Hamadeh.

On July 31, 2017, Hamadeh wrote an email to Philip asking Philip for permission to use **Zong!** in her installation and on September 1, 2017 Philip replied, denying permission. It appears as if Hamadeh assumed that Philip would grant permission. She asks for the author's blessings, and makes no mention of any possibility of a fee for use of the work, which is standard practice.

Yet she writes in her email to Philip: "For part of the rhythm, I am hoping that you do not mind me using **Zong!**'s typography as a logic: I am constructing part of the sound's rhythmic/ percussive structure, taking **Zong!**'s pages' layout and the way the layout builds its intensity throughout the book, as my reference." We believe that Philip's work needs to be fully credited.

While the exhibit catalog does mention Philip's name, and in another document under "phonic substance" Hamadeh references **Zong!**, we are disturbed that the very basis for her approach to the Gregson v. Gilbert case is clearly drawn from **Zong!** and much of the language she uses to describe her project is very close to what Philip has written in her book, for example the notion of the untold and the untellable and the fragmentary, which clearly come from **Zong!**. The ideas elaborated in Notanda (the author's afterword in **Zong!**) are manifest in the poetry and exist in the formal properties of the poem. Indeed, Hamadeh states in her email to Philip that Zong! became "an important theoretical and affective scaffolding within the work."

What is so upsetting about this is that Hamadeh has erased Philip's work and labor from her exhibit, as can be gleaned from her interviews about it. Indeed, she has done exactly what the court case did to the Africans who were thrown overboard — she has erased Philip, except for the reference to the "phonic substance" of **Zong!**.

We would like to know if the gallery asked to see permissions? If there were no permissions for this use, why did you go ahead? It is clear that Hamadeh knew that she needed to obtain permission, but when it wasn't granted, she went forward anyway.

Her appropriation of **Zong!** and her lack of proper acknowledgment is unprofessional, unethical and even academically dishonest. We believe this constitutes an adaptation of **Zong!**, and one made without the permission of the author.

We thereby ask that you:

Acknowledge receipt of this letter;

Tell us if pages of **Zong!** were used in this installation as is suggested by Hamadeh's request;

Provide a written apology to Philip and place this on your website and in all instances where the project appears, and include this credit line:

This work was inspired by the book **Zong!** by M.NourbeSe Philip. The book was a major influence and reference, forming an important theoretical and affective scaffolding within the work. **Zong!** by M.NourbeSe Philip as told to the author by Setaey Adamu Boateng, was published in 2011 by Wesleyan University Press, Middletown CT, US; copyright is held by M. NourbeSe Philip.

Mail copies of the project's libretto and book to us at the address on this letterhead;

We respectfully request that until all of the above actions have been taken, that you not exhibit this work again and that it be removed from the website ([http://www.wdw.nl/en/our\\_program/exhibitions/rana\\_hamadeh\\_the\\_ten\\_murders\\_of\\_josephine](http://www.wdw.nl/en/our_program/exhibitions/rana_hamadeh_the_ten_murders_of_josephine)).

Lastly, we would like to discuss with you and Hamadeh a reasonable fee for use of the material, particularly in light of her being awarded the Prix de Rome.

We thank you in advance for your thoughtful attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. J.', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Suzanna Tamminen  
Director and Editor in Chief

cc Rana Hamadeh; Prix de Rome 2017 jury