



Press Announcement: 30.05.2025

# Encounters with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Lecture: 25.06.2025, 19:00 hrs.

Location: West Den Haag in the former American embassy, Lange Voorhout 102, The Hague

**This year, the Holberg Prize has been awarded to the Indian scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak for her groundbreaking work in literary theory and philosophy. With a monetary award of 6 million Norwegian kroner (approximately €660,000), the Holberg Prize ranks among the most prestigious international research prizes in these fields. It is often regarded as the equivalent of the Nobel Prize for the humanities and social sciences.**

On Wednesday, 25 June, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak will be a guest at West Den Haag within West's new programme 'Worlding Art', in which her thinking plays a key role. This programme departs from the idea that art can be reimagined and mobilized as a space for shared engagement with, and care for, the world.

She has done groundbreaking work at the intersection of political philosophy, feminist theory, pedagogy, translation, and comparative literature. She advocates for an interdisciplinary approach to structures of power and knowledge in a world marked by inequality. In this context, Spivak fights against illiteracy in disadvantaged rural communities in various countries, where she has set up, funded, and personally teaches in educational projects.

Spivak is known for the difficulty of her academic texts, which stand in sharp contrast to her accessibility as a public speaker. She is also praised for the way she translates her process-oriented thinking into practical lessons for primary education. As a theorist and critic, Gayatri C. Spivak highlights the impact of colonization in a globalized world. Her 1988 essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in which she raises questions about representation and self-determination, remains a key text in many fields. Her influence now extends well beyond academia, reaching into the arts sector, where institutions and practices are seeking to grapple meaningfully with colonial legacies. In this capacity, she has been a sought-after speaker at leading museums and art institutions over the past decades.

West underscores Spivak's significance to the cultural field by using her thinking as a foundation for its curatorial vision and long-term programming. With 'Worlding Art', we aim to offer building blocks for a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse society. Through a transdisciplinary programme where literature, philosophy, science, and visual art converge, participants are invited to move beyond the limiting lens of 'the' art world and to approach art from a renewed perspective—one rooted in their own insights and experiences.

This process, inspired by Spivak's questions about giving voice to the subaltern — those who are structurally excluded from speaking within dominant (Western, colonial) discourses — emphasizes the importance of active participation. At its core are those who often fall outside traditional art discourses. The audience is no longer merely a passive observer, but an active and essential participant who contributes to the artistic process—and thus to the redefinition of art within a broader social and political context.

**Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak** (1942) is an influential Indian thinker in the fields of comparative literature, feminism, and coloniality. She is University Professor at Columbia University and co-founder of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society. With her translation of Derrida's 'Of Grammatology' and her book 'A Critique of Postcolonial Reason', she established herself as one of the most profound thinkers of our time. Spivak has taught around the world, received numerous honors, and was awarded, among others, the Kyoto Prize (2012) and the Holberg Prize (2025).

For more information, please contact us: [info@westdenhaag.nl](mailto:info@westdenhaag.nl) or +31(0)70.3925359

The program of West is made possible by the Municipality of The Hague and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

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