

Sondra Perry
Typhoon coming on

6 March – 20 May 2018
Exhibition Guide

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Sondra Perry (b.1986, Perth Amboy, New Jersey) constructs multifaceted narratives that explore the imagining, or imaging, of blackness throughout history. Often taking her own life as a point of departure, she makes works that revolve specifically around black American experiences and the ways in which technology and identities are entangled. Her use of digital tools and platforms, such as Chroma key blue screens, 3D avatars, open source software, and footage found online, reflects critically on representation itself. Perry's investigations demonstrate that digital technology functions as an attribute of power, and another tool that reimagines the possibilities of networked collectivity. As the artist says: 'I'm interested in thinking about how blackness shifts, morphs and embodies technology to combat oppression and surveillance throughout the diaspora. Blackness is agile'.

This exhibition is the first solo presentation of Perry's work in Europe. She has created an immersive environment with a newly-conceived soundscape to accompany her animation *Typhoon coming on* (2018). Featuring a digitally manipulated image of J.M.W. Turner's 1840 painting *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*, the original work depicts the drowning of 133 slaves by the captain of the British slave ship, Zong, to claim compensation for these 'goods' under the salvage clause of the ship's insurance policy.

Graft and Ash for a Three-Monitor Workstation (2016) and *Wet and Wavy – Typhoon coming on for a Three-Monitor Workstation* (2016) are modelled on a bicycle and rowing machine workstations that the visitor can actively engage with and use. Positioned above the handlebars are three monitors that present a bald avatar, which delivers a monologue on the contradictory definitions of success offered by contemporary capitalism. *TK (Suspicious Glorious Absence)* (2018), an audio-visual collage of found and shot footage of body cams, protests and the artist's family that foregrounds the artist's interest in the dissemination of images. The work is cut through by the sound of American singer Eartha Kitt singing 'I Want to Be Evil', a reference to racial prejudice that she subverts by refusing to be a docile subject.

The idea of abstraction, effacing or being a stand-in is expressed through Perry's signature use of Chroma key blue walls. This visual effect and post-production technique allows the compositing of images or videos together. When Perry uses this technique, she suggests that the visitor is a participant in the work against a backdrop that has yet to be defined and within a context that is yet to be developed through post-production technologies. Perry's blue becomes a digital space for representing absence.



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1_Typhoon coming on, 2018

This immersive environment, conceived specifically for the Serpentine Sackler Gallery, is an adapted version of the videos presented on monitors in Sondra Perry's *Wet and Wavy- Typhoon coming on for a Three-Monitor Workstation* (2016) also included in the exhibition. The series of seamless projections coursing through the gallery space is accompanied by a new ambient soundscape. The projected videos begin with an animation of an ocean that the artist created using the tool Ocean Modifier available in the open source software Blender that allows users to simulate, generate and deform ocean surface. In her video, the ocean is purple as is the colour warning that appears on the software when there is an error with the simulation. The animation then blends into a digitally manipulated image of J.M.W. Turner's 1840 painting *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*. The original work depicts the drowning of 133 slaves by the captain of the British slave ship, Zong, to claim compensation for these 'goods' under the salvage clause of the ship's insurance policy.

2_Graft and Ash for a Three-Monitor Workstation, 2016

Modelled after a bicycle workstation, *Graft and Ash for a Three-Monitor Workstation* (2016) confronts the viewer with Sondra Perry's own avatar. Three video screens positioned above the handlebars with a bald avatar that delivers a monologue on the contradictory definitions of success offered by contemporary capitalism. Visitors are encouraged to actively use the workstation as they watch the film. The workstations have been manipulated to make the activity more challenging and in doing so addressing matters and productivity.

3_Wet and Wavy- Typhoon coming on for a Three-Monitor Workstation, 2016

Wet and Wavy- Typhoon coming on for a Three-Monitor Workstation (2016) is a water-resistance rowing machine - its chamber filled with hair gel - revealing images across the attached screens of purple computer-generated images of waves and extreme close-ups of the sea in J.M.W. Turner's 1840 painting *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*. Sounds of chimes and loud distorted voices of Missy Elliot's song 'supa dupa fly' accompany this piece, creating a dizzying effect. Similarly to *Graft and Ash for a Three-Monitor Workstation*, visitors are encouraged to actively engage with and use the modified rowing machine.

4_TK (Suspicious Glorious Absence), 2018

This installation features Perry's use of Chroma key blue walls in her exhibitions across another projected animation of an extreme close-up and modified image of the artist's skin. The monitor positioned against the backdrop of her 'Skin Wall' shows *TK (Suspicious Glorious Absence)*, an audio-visual collage of found and shot footage of body cams, protests and the artist's family that foregrounds the artist's interest in the dissemination of images. The work is cut through by the sound of American singer Eartha Kitt singing 'I Want to Be Evil', a reference to a racial prejudice that she subverts by refusing to be a docile subject.

All works courtesy the artist

Programmes and events

SATURDAY TALKS: SONDRA PERRY

Free talks take place at 3pm on selected Saturdays to explore the works on show in greater depth.

24 March, 3pm: Amira Gad, Curator

21 April, 3pm: Claude Adjil, Curator

PROGRAMMES: SONDRA PERRY

Throughout the run of her exhibition, Sondra Perry invites artists, activists and theorists to participate in a series of public discussions and screenings. Please visit serpentinegalleries.org or ask at the reception desk for further details.

SERPENTINE CINEMA: SONDRA PERRY AND CAULEEN SMITH

Friday 11 May, 6.30pm

Peckhamplex Cinema

95a Rye Lane, SE15 4ST

Tickets £5 via peckhamplex.london

Sondra Perry hosts an evening of screenings and conversations with interdisciplinary filmmaker Cauleen Smith.

FAMILY WEEKEND

April, Free, Drop-in, Serpentine Gallery

Please ask at the reception desk for full details

Families work with artists to construct a temporary studio that will change and grow over the weekend. The event is free, drop-in and suitable for families with children of all ages.

RIGHTS TO THE CITY?

Saturday 12 May

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, WC1R 4RL

Booking essential via ticketweb.co.uk

The Serpentine presents an international forum that brings together artists, writers, educators and activists to discuss what it means to arrive, work, study, grow up and grow old in the city. Featuring projects and research developed through the Serpentine's Education and Projects programme over the last four years, the symposium will also host arts organisations and neighbourhood projects from around the world.

MOBILE TOURS

Free public wifi: Serpentine Public sgtours.org


Discover mobile tours of the Serpentine's internationally acclaimed programmes by connecting to our free wifi on your smartphone. Serpentine Mobile Tours offer visitors an interactive gallery experience by providing access to additional content, artist interviews, audio guides and curator tours. Supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

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Serpentine Gallery

Kensington Gardens, London W2 3XA

With Koenig Books

Serpentine Sackler Gallery

West Carriage Drive

Kensington Gardens, London W2 2AR

With The Magazine Restaurant
and Serpentine Shop

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