

Press Release

TURNER PRIZE WINNER TAI SHANI PRESENTS WORLD PREMIERE OF MAJOR COMMISSION FOR THE VIRTUAL FACTORY

Turner Prize-winning artist Tai Shani, who is celebrated for crafting complex fantastical worlds that draw on forgotten histories, will present the world premiere of *The Neon Hieroglyph* a major new commission for Manchester International Festival's Virtual Factory series on Wed 31 March.

The Factory in Manchester, designed by Ellen van Loon from Rem Koolhaas's OMA, is one of the most exciting new cultural spaces being developed in Europe and will be the year-round home of Manchester International Festival (MIF). For *Virtual Factory*, MIF has invited some of the world's most exciting artists from the worlds of gaming, film and visual art to reclaim the virtual environment as a space for infinite possibility and imagine new worlds in response to the architecture and artistic ambition of The Factory.

For the second project in the series, the Turner prize-winning artist **Tai Shani** presents her first online artwork *The Neon Hieroglyph*. Nine hypnotic stories expand her ongoing creation of a feminist mythology of psychedelics and bring together hallucinatory CGI with video and a haunting soundtrack by the Manchester-born composer **Maxwell Stirling**.

Shani creates worlds that are at once dark yet luminous, both feminist and fantastical. *The Neon Hieroglyph* is inspired by her research into ergot as a psychedelic catalyst, a fungus that grows on rye and other common grains from which the hallucinogenic drug LSD is derived. There were many ergot poisoning outbreaks linked to the local crops and rye bread which caused mass hallucinations, with the last reported UK incident during the late 1920s in Manchester.

For Shani the psychedelic is a space that can drive new visions of society, an imaginative space where new futures can emerge. *The Neon Hieroglyph* uses these experiences to spark new visions and alternative realities: a dreamlike CGI journey that takes us on an epic journey across time and space - from the cellular to the galactic; from Palaeolithic cave markings to the optic markings left by drone photography as well as dancing plagues, communist psychedelic witches and hyper-sexual fungi.

Tai Shani says: *“I was interested in Ergot as a vector for this project, tracing a feminised history through folklore, myth, and historical events surrounding outbreaks or controlled ergot consumption. This project is also autobiographical in the sense that I was brought up around LSD evangelism and esoteric and occult practices and forms of knowledge, so it is also trying to make sense of that and see some of it through the lens of my politics.”*

MIF began developing Virtual Factory in 2019, as part of its pre-Factory programme on the journey towards The Factory, where artists are encouraged to create radical and interdisciplinary work that maximises the boundless potential of the highly flexible spaces within the building and the expanding digital spaces beyond its physical structure. The first Virtual Factory project, *Your Progress Will Be Saved*, created by avatar artist LaTurbo Avedon in the Gaming platform Fortnite, has already been visited by more than 1.5 million people.

Gabrielle Jenks, Digital Director for MIF & The Factory says: *“Even before its built, The Factory is an invitation to artists to imagine the impossible. While the previous project by LaTurbo Avedon was inspired by the architecture of The Factory, The Neon Hieroglyph is about expanding the consciousness and exploring the architecture of the mind, drawing on the fantastical and psychedelic.”*

Mark Ball, Creative Director for MIF and The Factory, adds: *“Virtual Factory underlines the digital ambition that is a cornerstone of the real-world Factory. Through augmented and virtual reality, interactive and mobile gaming, film and social media, Virtual Factory aims to imagine and create work that harnesses these new creative landscapes as spaces of infinite possibility.”*

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Notes to editors:

Tai Shani

Tai Shani creates large-scale immersive installations, combining experimental texts, performance, film, photography and sculpture. She takes inspiration from disparate histories mined from forgotten sources and transforms them into rich and complex monologues that explore feminine subjectivity.

She lives and works in London. She has exhibited widely in the UK and internationally including Tate Britain; Turner Contemporary, Margate; Hayward Gallery, London; Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham; Glasgow International, Glasgow; De La Warr Pavilion, UK; Arnolfini, Bristol; Fondazione



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Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; The Tetley, Leeds. She was a joint winner of the Turner Prize 2019 and she was shortlisted for the 8th edition of the Max Mara Art Prize for Woman. She is the co-founder and co-curator of artist-led digital film channel Transmissions.

The Neon Hieroglyph will be an ongoing body of work unfolding throughout 2021. Upcoming projects include collaborations with the Serpentine and a major installation at the British Art Show.

Credits

The Neon Hieroglyph films are commissioned and produced by Manchester International Festival with in-kind support from the Centre for Creative and Immersive XR at the University of Portsmouth. The research and ongoing project is also supported by The British Art Show and Serpentine's Back to Earth project.

The Factory

The Factory is a new world-class cultural space currently being built in the heart of Manchester, UK. Inspired by the city's unmatched history of innovation, it will be the year-round home of Manchester International Festival – a space for the world's greatest artists and thinkers to make, explore and experiment, and for communities and individuals from Manchester and beyond to meet, exchange ideas and learn new skills.

The Factory is designed by Rem Koolhaas's OMA, with Ellen van Loon as Lead Architect, and backed by Manchester City Council, HM Government and Arts Council England.

Digital at the Factory

The Virtual Factory commissions look forward to the Factory as the pioneering new home of digital culture in the North West and build on MIF's record for commissioning innovative digital work, including Björk's Biophilia app (MIF11), Ed Atkins' Performance Capture (MIF15) and Laurie Anderson and Hsin-Chien Huang's To the Moon (MIF19). MIF has also commissioned two games, which are available for free: Songs of the Lost by Paloma Dawkins featuring music by Jlin (MIF19), and Nina Freeman's Lost Memories Dot Net (MIF17).

FOR MORE INFORMATION, IMAGES, AND INTERVIEW REQUESTS PLEASE CONTACT:

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