

SHANJA MODTUN

12 SEPTEMBER –
15 DECEMBER 2019

INTRODUCTION

*I am filled with questions.
Sometimes my questions are answered.
In my heart I know the answer is correct.*

Cynthia in *Personal Steam Interface* (2019), channelling the Log Lady from David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*.

Using video, sculptural installation, costume and performance, Shana Moulton (b. 1976, Oakhurst, California, USA) has developed a distinctive psychic and aesthetic realm anchored around her alter ego, Cynthia. Collectively titled *Whispering Pines* – a name taken from the mobile-home park for senior citizens near Yosemite that her parents ran – these episodic videos, begun in 2002, chart Cynthia's personal trials and tribulations and reflect on the relationship between consumerism and a search for meaning.

Cynthia is beset by hypochondria, agoraphobia and general helplessness in the face of everyday life. We join her on flights of imagination as she seeks to escape the mundane. Blossoming into sometimes joyful, sometimes troubling, psychedelic escapades, these hand-made experimental works flatten binaries of cultural taste and confuse chronological time, resulting in a new space with its own internal logic of colour, texture and sound.

In Moulton's first institutional solo show in the UK, new videos and sculptural installations commissioned by Zabudowicz Collection are presented alongside key recent projects. They are linked by an exploration of feminist spirituality, specifically the motif of the trapped or imprisoned woman. Ideas central to today's cultural debate, such as ecological fragility, the personal wellness industry and alternative models of living, are addressed with off-kilter humour and a strange sincerity.

The exhibition concludes with the installation *Whispering Pines ∞* (2018) in which Moulton, in collaboration with musician Nick Hallett, has extended Cynthia's adventures into something operatic in scope. A lush and magical song cycle transports viewers upwards with Cynthia, offering a glimpse of new horizons beyond her domestic confines.



Whispering Pines 6, 2006. Video still. Courtesy the artist, Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zurich and Galerie Crèvecoeur, Paris and Marseille

MAIN HALL

A towering pink structure based on children's stacking blocks of the kind used at Montessori schools occupies the centre of the Main Hall. At its foot is a new single-channel video which explores the motif of a woman trapped in a tower. A key reference is the legend of St Barbara, a virgin martyr of the early church who was imprisoned and, finally, beheaded by her wealthy pagan father for converting to Christianity and refusing an arranged marriage. Moulton is currently a resident of Santa Barbara, California, and teaches at its university; a tall tower on campus features as a location in the piece.

Moulton's references to a woman in a tower or a 'damsel in distress' suggest notions of visible, yet isolated, entrapment. She offers a metaphor for how contemporary patriarchal capitalism, via the structures of the internet, channels aspirations of freedom back into a feedback loop of anxiety-inducing ideals, goals and failures. This metaphor is also reminiscent of the 'madwoman in the attic' trope of Victorian gothic literature, in particular Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Moulton reclaims ownership over these stereotypes, transforming constraints into modes of resistance: what appears to be imprisonment or agoraphobia might actually be a choice to explore one's inner life. Seven other channels of video on monitors of decreasing size spiral upwards round the face of the tower. This cascade of images and sound outlines steps to self-actualisation and self-healing.

Facing this, on the gallery's altar, is a site-specific waterfall and pool installation. A large projected cascade is framed by two surrealist 'eye-clocks'. Visitors are encouraged to dip their toes into the video and let their shadows become part of the piece. This installation will also be the stage for a new performance by Moulton and Nick Hallett taking place on 14 December 2019.

An earlier short video, *Whispering Pines 6* (2006), is installed in our alcove space. Here waterfalls also play a leading role, indicating how recurring forms and scenarios run through Moulton's work across a number of years. In this vignette Cynthia becomes frustrated when a jigsaw piece goes missing, and ventures out to browse and buy illuminated decorations. Returning home, she has an urge to dismantle a glowing picture frame on her wall, and finds the missing puzzle piece lodged inside. Her relief is short-lived, however, as upon completing the jigsaw Cynthia is confronted by her own face, frozen in a plaintive expression, trapped within the waterfall.

MIDDLE GALLERY

In the Middle Gallery Cynthia's thwarted efforts to reach out to the world at large continue in the video installation *Personal Steam Interface* (2019). From inside a sauna tent she types gnomish phrases on a keyboard, some of which channel the deep spiritual wisdom of the Log Lady from *Twin Peaks*. Cynthia then opens the oracle of our mass consciousness, the Google search bar. Before she can enter her own enquiries the algorithm throws up a list of possible questions, including 'who do I look like?', 'what is the weather?', 'how old is Jennifer Lopez?', 'when is Black Friday?' and 'where is the love?'. It seems unlikely that Cynthia's inner quandaries have been accurately diagnosed, given the dramatically distorted expressions that appear on her face.

The final kaleidoscopic section of the video sees Cynthia, surrounded by glowing lamps, vases, figurines and a giant Slinky, burst free of her confines and dance in an animalistic frenzy to the point of exhaustion, in an attempt at cyberspace connection.

Personal Steam Interface, 2019.
Installation view 'Producing Futures – An Exhibition on Post-Cyber-Feminisms', Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich.
Courtesy the artist & Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zurich.
Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich



Shana Moulton (with Nick Hallett), Act one from *Whispering Pines 10*, 2016. Video Still. Courtesy the artist, Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zurich and Galerie Crèvecoeur, Paris and Marseille

BACK GALLERY

The relationship between feminist spirituality and ecological protest comes to the fore in the Back Gallery, which houses the multi-channel video operetta *Whispering Pines ∞* (2018), made in collaboration with musician Nick Hallett.

In this piece Cynthia acts out her desire to become an environmental activist, despite her ambivalence about leaving the house. Julia 'Butterfly' Hill is her main guide on this voyage, a character based on the real woman who, from 1997–1999, spent 738 consecutive days inside a giant redwood tree named Luna, successfully blocking its felling by a logging company. Julia asks Cynthia 'what is your tree?', meaning what will prompt her to challenge herself and achieve her potential.

Ascending through a chimney into a canopy of sequoia and a cosmic sky, meeting singing spirit guides along the way, Cynthia discovers how to stage a sacrifice to the Earth in a ritual that connects political action to performance art. Ultimately, however, her quest for enlightenment leads only to her becoming overwhelmed and frustrated, by both technology and nature. By the end of the video, confusion and kitsch have descended once again, re-enclosing Cynthia in her patterns of worry and routine.

Whispering Pines ∞ was first realised at Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zurich in 2018. It is the latest iteration of the opera project *Whispering Pines 10*. Initiated in 2010 at The Kitchen, New York, and further developed at the New Museum, New York in 2011, the piece also now exists as an online 'internet soap opera' exhibition, a Creative Capital Project commissioned by the New Museum for its First Look series.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Shana Moulton (b. 1976, Oakhurst, CA. Lives and works in Santa Barbara CA, USA) studied at De Ateliers, Amsterdam; Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine, USA; Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the University of California, Berkeley.

Solo exhibitions have been held at Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Kunsthau Glarus, Switzerland, and MOCA Cleveland (all 2016); Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (2015) and 1646, The Hague, the Netherlands (2014).

Recent group exhibitions include *Producing Futures – An Exhibition on Post-Cyber-Feminisms*, Migros Museum, Zurich (2019); *ANTI*, 6th Athens Biennale, Athens (2018); *Dreamers Awake*, White Cube, London (2017); *Health as Metaphor*, Museo de Arte de Zapopan, Zapopan, Mexico (2017) and *The People's Cinema*, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria (2016).

Performances include those at Kunsthalle Münster, Germany (2018); Parours Night, Art Basel, Switzerland (2017); La Casa Encendida, Madrid, Spain (2016); Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Primary, Nottingham, UK (both 2016); the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Getty, Los Angeles, and South London Gallery, London (all 2014).

Moulton will present newly commissioned work in the 15th Biennale de Lyon, France (18 Sept 2019–5 Jan 2020) and the *Nuit Blanche* festival, Paris, France (5 Oct 2019).

LIST OF WORKS

Main Hall

The Pink Tower, 2019
Timber structure, flat screen TVs, eight single-channel videos, sound

Commissioned by
Zabludowicz Collection

Videos in tower, all 2019:

Trapped-in Tower Syndrome, 7 mins.

Energy Visualization, 2:41 mins.

Philosopher's Hand, 2:38 mins.

The Divided Self, 8 mins.

Pink Tower Lesson, 1:45 mins.

Toxoplasma gondii, 4:12 mins.

Magic Globe Relaxation, 2:50 mins.

Dark Star, 1:43 mins.

Sculpture in tower:

Ladies' Inner Outhouse, 2018
Dress, hemorrhoid cushion, Kindle Fire tablet, single-channel digital video, silent, 2:51 mins.

The Waterfall of Grief, 2019
'eye-clocks', pool-effect flooring, Hebe goddess statue, ferns, single-channel digital video projection, sound, 3:00 mins.

Commissioned by
Zabludowicz Collection

Alcove

Whispering Pines 6, 2006
Single-channel digital video (standard definition), sound, 5:45 mins.

Middle Gallery

Personal Steam Interface, 2019

Single-channel digital video, sound, 4:44 mins., stepped structure, ten 3D illusion lamps, one globe light, one giant Slinky, one mirrored vase, three abstract glass sculptures, one camping projection light, one exercise disc, one obelisk salt lamp

Inversion Therapy, 2019

Single-channel digital video, sound, 3:17 mins., Multi-function Lighted Circle Arch

Commissioned by
Zabludowicz Collection

Back Gallery

Shana Moulton (with Nick Hallett)
Whispering Pines ∞, 2018
Six-channel video installation; includes *Whispering Pines 10*, single-channel digital video, sound, 35 mins., plus five looped non-narrative projections

PUBLIC PROGRAMME

Sunday 6 October, 2pm

Artist Tour: Lucy Stein

The artist and her daughter lead a baby (and adult) friendly tour of Shana Moulton's show, exploring their favourite works.

Saturday 26 October, 4pm

Curator Tour: Paul Luckraft

Join the exhibition's curator for an introduction to the existing works and the new commissions, giving an insight into Shana Moulton's ideas and working process.

Thursday 7 November, 7pm

Workshop: Sound Healing

This special evening with Florentina Lam-Clark reveals the calming and healing possibilities of sound. The workshop will start with a short introduction and guided meditation before crystal singing bowls' resonance provides a sonic immersion.

Saturday 9 November, 4pm

Curator Tour: Susanna Greeves

Director, Museum Liaison of White Cube offers her take on Shana Moulton's show, exploring her interpretation and connection to the work.

Sunday 24 November, 4.30pm

Screening: Ringing Psychic Cherries

See a selection of Shana Moulton's earlier videos alongside the work of some of the more surreal and strange filmmakers who have influenced her.

Please note this event takes place offsite at the Phoenix Cinema, N2 9PJ.

Thursday 28 November, 7pm

Performance: Lester Horton Technique

Observe a live dance class in the gallery space, led by dancer and choreographer Heather Star Benson, showcasing the technique that's become the enduring legacy of this pioneer of modern dance, as referenced in Shana Moulton's work.

Saturday 30 November, 4pm

Artist Tour: Candice Jacobs

The artist leads a tour of the exhibition, exploring her interest in Shana Moulton and the overlaps in their practices.

Saturday 14 December, 3pm

Performance & Talk: Shana Moulton & Nick Hallett

As a closing to her current exhibition, the artist presents a new performance, developed with her long-term collaborator, composer Hallett. This will be followed by an in conversation between Moulton and curator Paul Luckraft.

EXHIBITION CREDITS

Shana Moulton

12 Sept–15 Dec 2019

Curated by Paul Luckraft

Exhibition design and installation: Chris Spear

Exhibition installation team: Catherine Findley,

Giuseppe Lana, Anna Marsh, Antony Parkes,

Patrick Readings, Charlie Reynolds and Richard Waterton

AV technician: Kenji Takahashi

Graphic design: Burgess & Beech

Proof reading: Jane Hammett

Curator: Performance & Engagement: Antonia Blocker

Curatorial assistant: Elvira Garcia

With thanks to: Henry Eigenheer; Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zurich; Galerie Crèvecoeur, Paris and Marseille

