

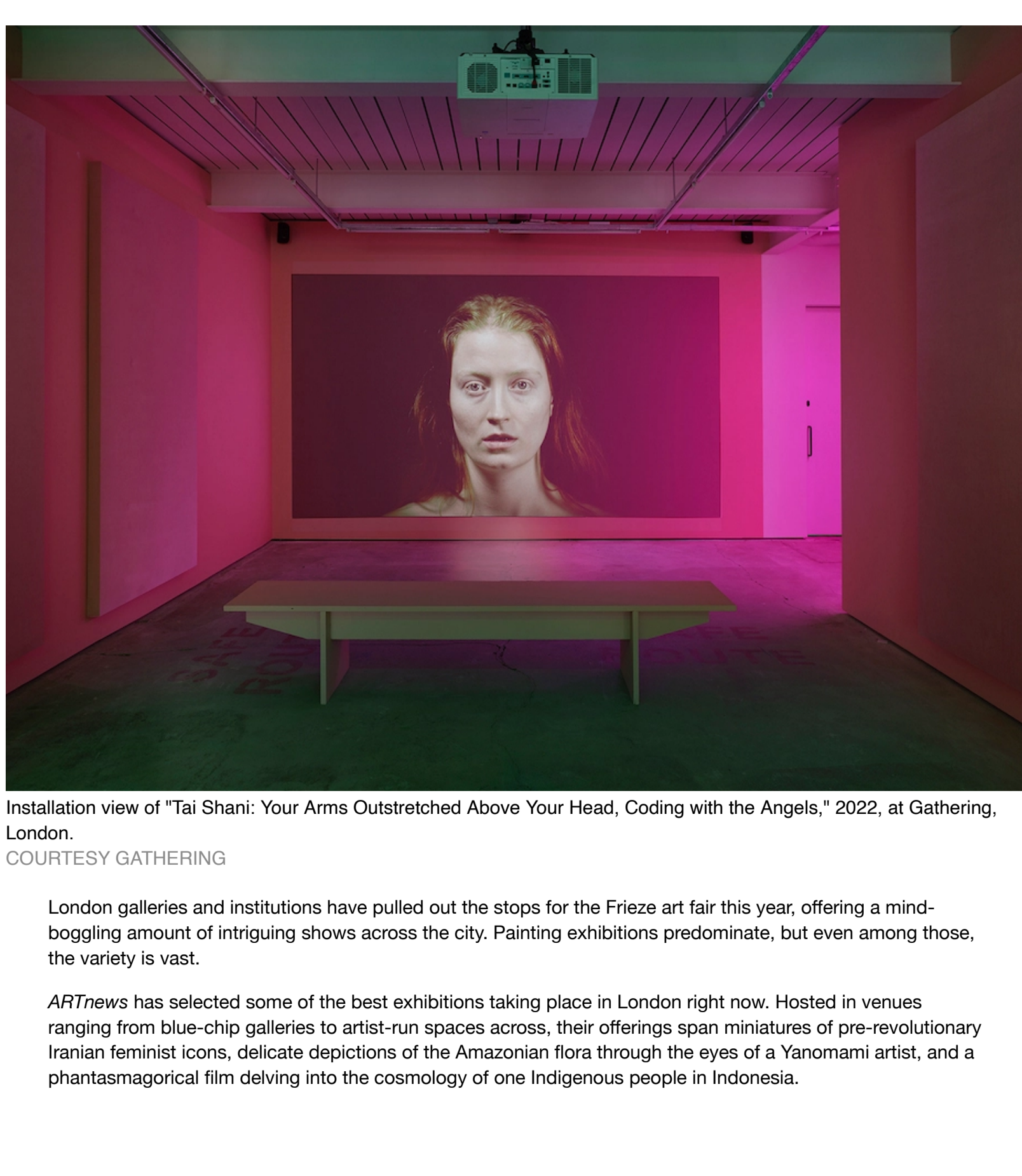


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8 Shows to See in London During Frieze, From Sam Gilliam's Late Paintings to a Celebration of Iranian Feminist Icons

BY **ELIZABETH FULLERTON**  October 11, 2022 3:21pm





Installation view of "Tai Shani: Your Arms Outstretched Above Your Head, Coding with the Angels," 2022, at Gathering, London.

COURTESY GATHERING

London galleries and institutions have pulled out the stops for the Frieze art fair this year, offering a mind-boggling amount of intriguing shows across the city. Painting exhibitions predominate, but even among those, the variety is vast.

ARTnews has selected some of the best exhibitions taking place in London right now. Hosted in venues ranging from blue-chip galleries to artist-run spaces across, their offerings span miniatures of pre-revolutionary Iranian feminist icons, delicate depictions of the Amazonian flora through the eyes of a Yanomami artist, and a phantasmagorical film delving into the cosmology of one Indigenous people in Indonesia.

Tai Shani at Gathering

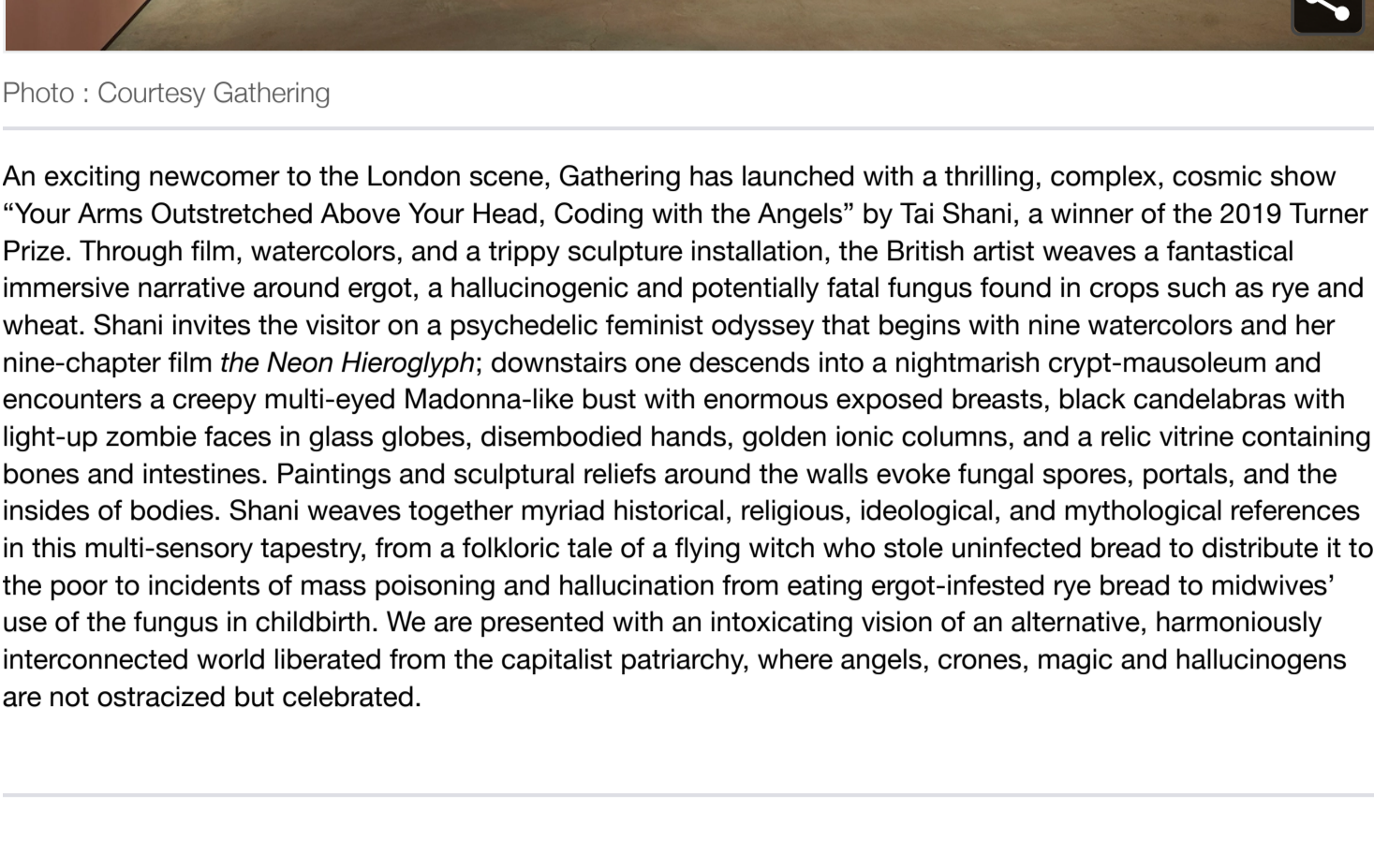


Photo : Courtesy Gathering

An exciting newcomer to the London scene, Gathering has launched with a thrilling, complex, cosmic show "Your Arms Outstretched Above Your Head, Coding with the Angels" by Tai Shani, a winner of the 2019 Turner Prize. Through film, watercolors, and a trippy sculpture installation, the British artist weaves a fantastical immersive narrative around ergot, a hallucinogenic and potentially fatal fungus found in crops such as rye and wheat. Shani invites the visitor on a psychedelic feminist odyssey that begins with nine watercolors and her nine-chapter film *the Neon Hieroglyph*; downstairs one descends into a nightmarish crypt-mausoleum and encounters a creepy multi-eyed Madonna-like bust with enormous exposed breasts, black candelabras with light-up zombie faces in glass globes, disembodied hands, golden ionic columns, and a relic vitrine containing bones and intestines. Paintings and sculptural reliefs around the walls evoke fungal spores, portals, and the insides of bodies. Shani weaves together myriad historical, religious, ideological, and mythological references in this multi-sensory tapestry, from a folkloric tale of a flying witch who stole uninfected bread to distribute it to the poor to incidents of mass poisoning and hallucination from eating ergot-infested rye bread to midwives' use of the fungus in childbirth. We are presented with an intoxicating vision of an alternative, harmoniously interconnected world liberated from the capitalist patriarchy, where angels, crones, magic and hallucinogens are not ostracized but celebrated.

Emmanuel Van der Auwera at Edel Assanti

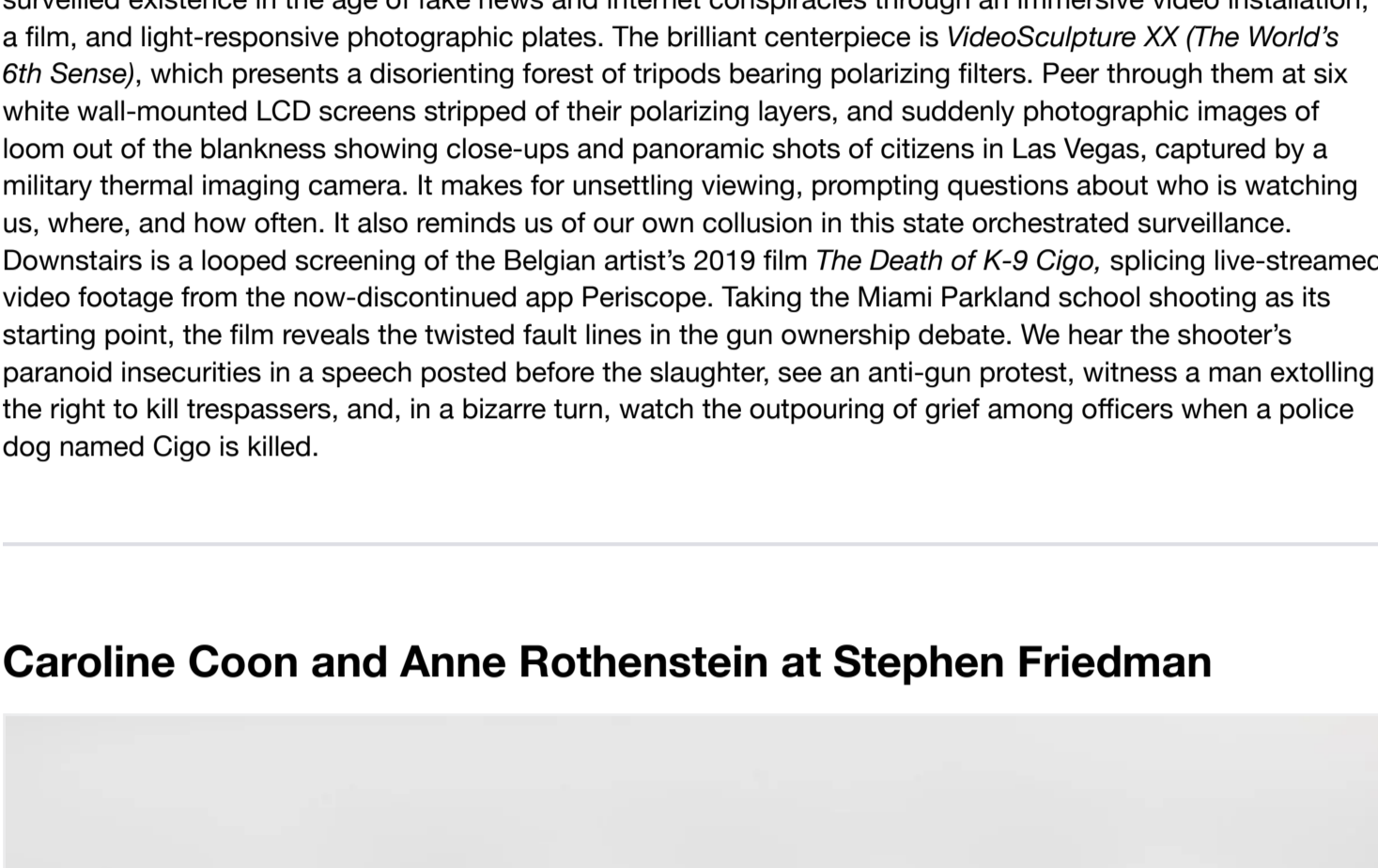


Photo : Courtesy Edel Assanti

Emmanuel Van der Auwera's new show, "Fire and Forget," presents a powerful meditation on our highly surveilled existence in the age of fake news and internet conspiracies through an immersive video installation, a film, and light-responsive photographic plates. The brilliant centerpiece is *VideoSculpture XX (The World's 6th Sense)*, which presents a disorienting forest of tripods bearing polarizing filters. Peer through them at six white wall-mounted LCD screens stripped of their polarizing layers, and suddenly photographic images of loom out of the blankness showing close-ups and panoramic shots of citizens in Las Vegas, captured by a military thermal imaging camera. It makes for unsettling viewing, prompting questions about who is watching us, where, and how often. It also reminds us of our own collusion in this state orchestrated surveillance. Downstairs is a looped screening of the Belgian artist's 2019 film *The Death of K-9 Cigo*, splicing live-streamed video footage from the now-discontinued app Periscope. Taking the Miami Parkland school shooting as its starting point, the film reveals the twisted fault lines in the gun ownership debate. We hear the shooter's paranoid insecurities in a speech posted before the slaughter, see an anti-gun protest, witness a man extolling the right to kill trespassers, and, in a bizarre turn, watch the outpouring of grief among officers when a police dog named Cigo is killed.

Caroline Coon and Anne Rothenstein at Stephen Friedman

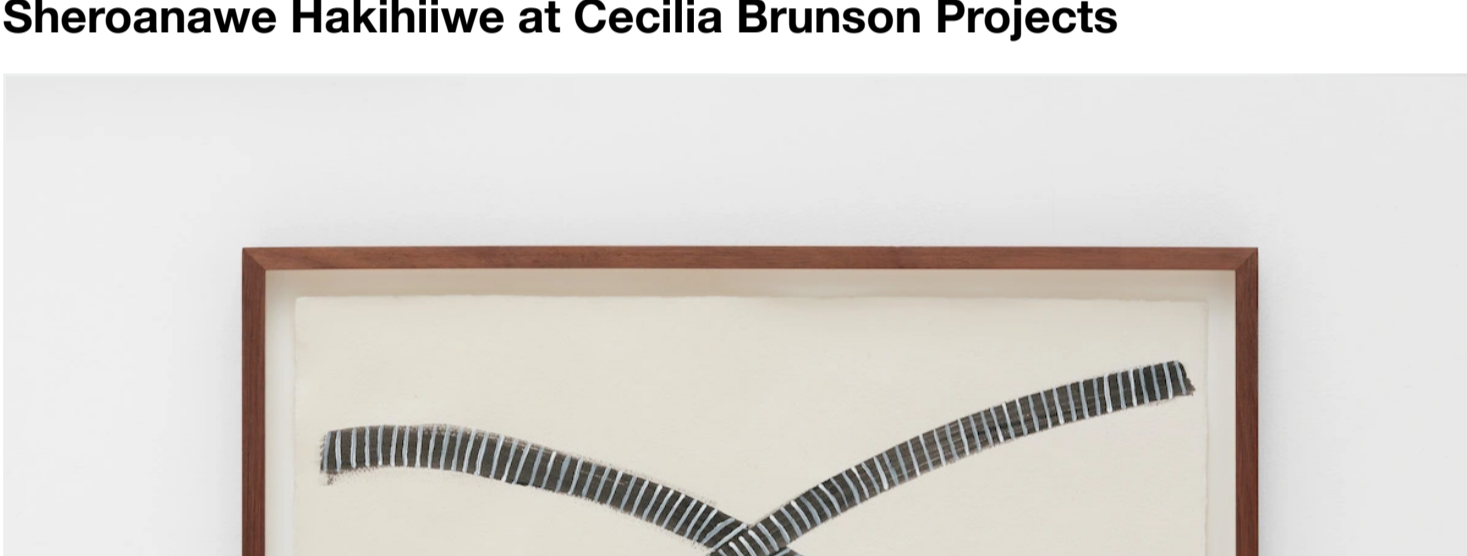


Photo : Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery

These two exhibitions by British women painters in their 70s make a thrilling pairing. Caroline Coon and Anne Rothenstein have evolved their own distinctive styles of figuration, both having found exposure racially late in life. Known for her muscular androgynous figures, Coon presents a liberated vision of gender and racial diversity in her work. In this show, "Love of Place," she has homed in on the west London neighborhood where she has lived for nearly 60 years, celebrating its cultural variety, urban parks, and underpasses without glossing over elements such as a shuttered unemployment agency. In a couple of arresting paintings that have the cool, stylized feel of German Expressionism, Coon imagines what all these city dwellers would look like without clothes. Rothenstein, by contrast, evokes meditative psychological landscapes and domestic interiors. Sparse in detail, her dreamlike, washed-out scenes draw the viewer in with their mysterious hints of narrative.

Sheroanawe Hakihwiwe at Cecilia Brunson Projects

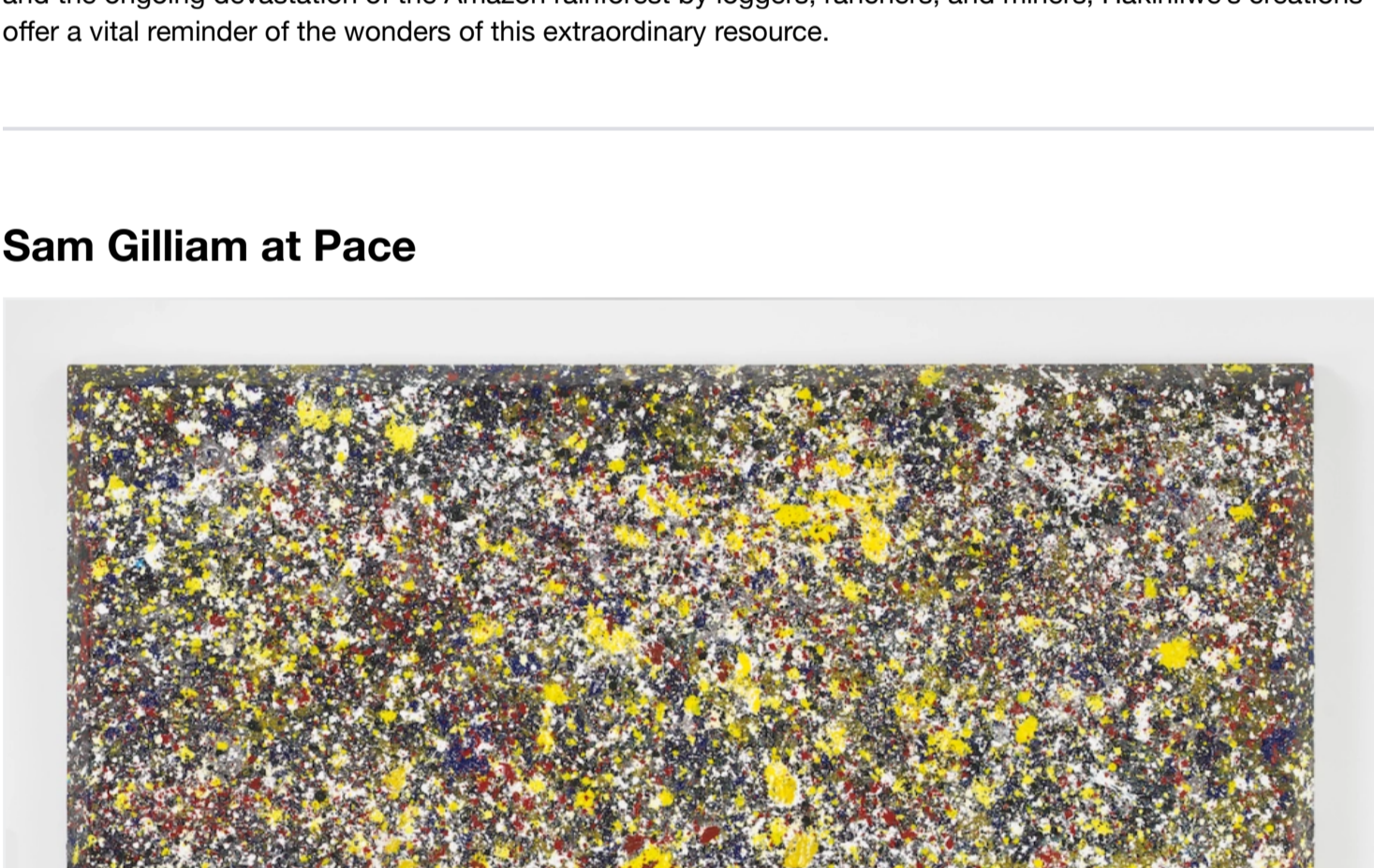


Photo : Photo Eva Herzog/Courtesy Cecilia Brunson Projects

The Yanomami artist Sheroanawe Hakihwiwe is having something of an art world moment, having been selected to present work at the Fondation Cartier and in Cecilia Alemani's main show at the Venice Biennale main show. Now, he's having his first-ever U.K. solo show. The artist, who was born in Sheroana, a community on the Upper Orinoco River in the Venezuelan Amazon, makes prints, drawings, and paintings that draw on his surroundings and beliefs, and look unlike anything else on display in London right now. Some of the works are clear depictions of the threatened flora of the Amazon, while others offer a partial glimpse into Hakihwiwe's world, which we cannot ever fully comprehend. A series of what look like blue triangles topped with little bars apparently denote earrings made from Tangara bird feathers, and thin red columns marked with tiny black lines refer to a female face decoration wand, according to the gallery. But even if we cannot fully access the artist's universe via these works, his delicate expressions of it are no less enchanting. That's especially the case in one work in which thick black arching lines striped with white cross at the center; this refers to branches grown with an iridescent fungus, which Hakihwiwe's tribe uses to see at night. In the context of the climate emergency and the ongoing devastation of the Amazon rainforest by loggers, ranchers, and miners, Hakihwiwe's creations offer a vital reminder of the wonders of this extraordinary resource.

Sam Gilliam at Pace

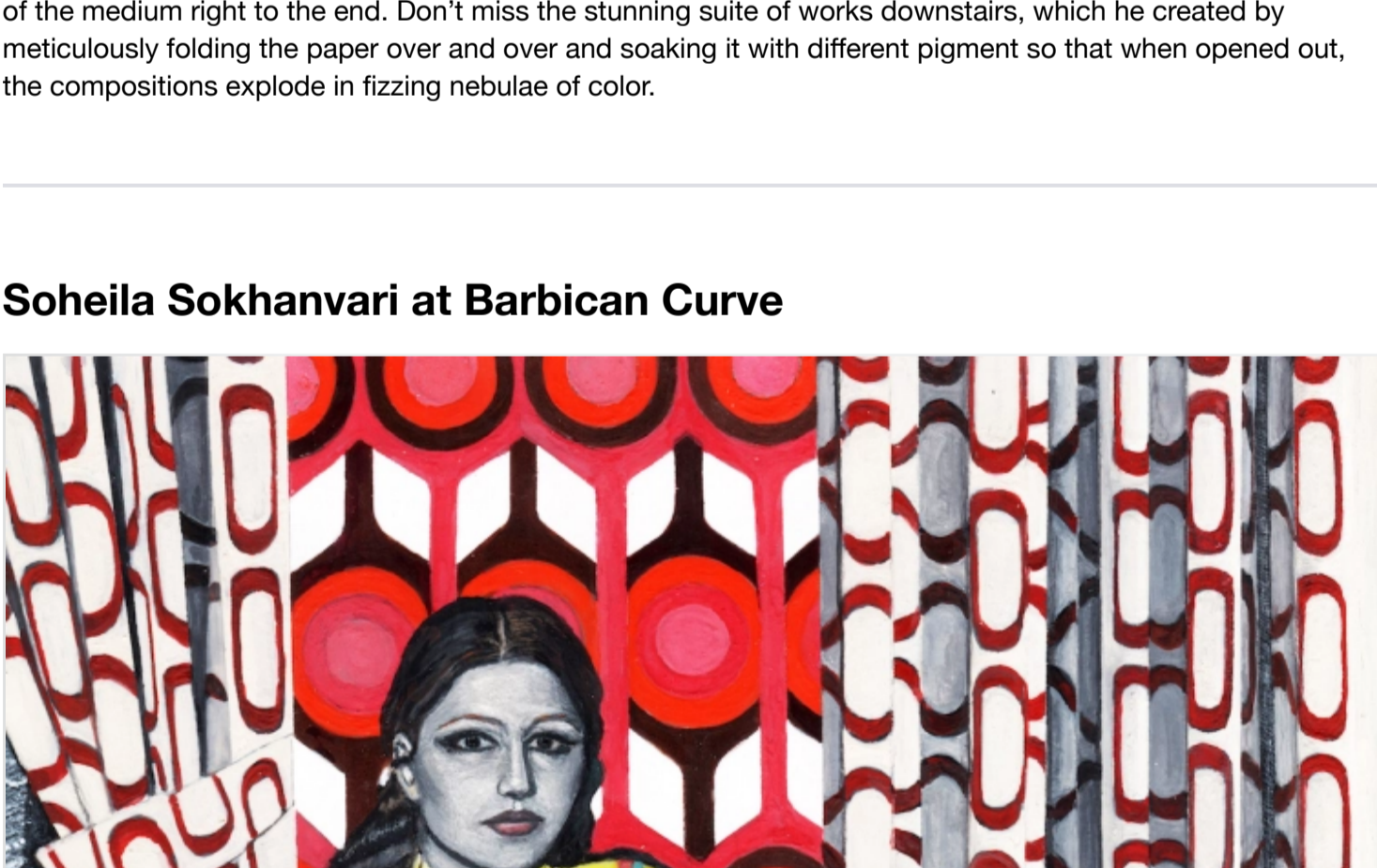


Photo : ©Sam Gilliam/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Astonishingly, this exhibition marks Sam Gilliam's first solo show in the U.K. The exhibition comprises monumental encrusted paintings with beveled edges and watercolor works on Japanese washi paper. The latter works were completed in the last two years before the artist's death this past June. Although perhaps best known for his pioneering draped canvases, Gilliam never abandoned wall paintings. The majestic textured canvases exhibited here incorporate sawdust, sand, and fabric, and resemble turbulent landscapes or cosmoses in upheaval. A determined abstractionist, the artist nonetheless rooted his paintings in everyday life, drawing inspiration from music, poetry and politics. These elemental energetic late paintings show his mastery of the medium right to the end. Don't miss the stunning suite of works downstairs, which he created by meticulously folding the paper over and over and soaking it with different pigment so that when opened out, the compositions explode in fizzing nebulae of color.

Soheila Sokhanvari at Barbican Curve

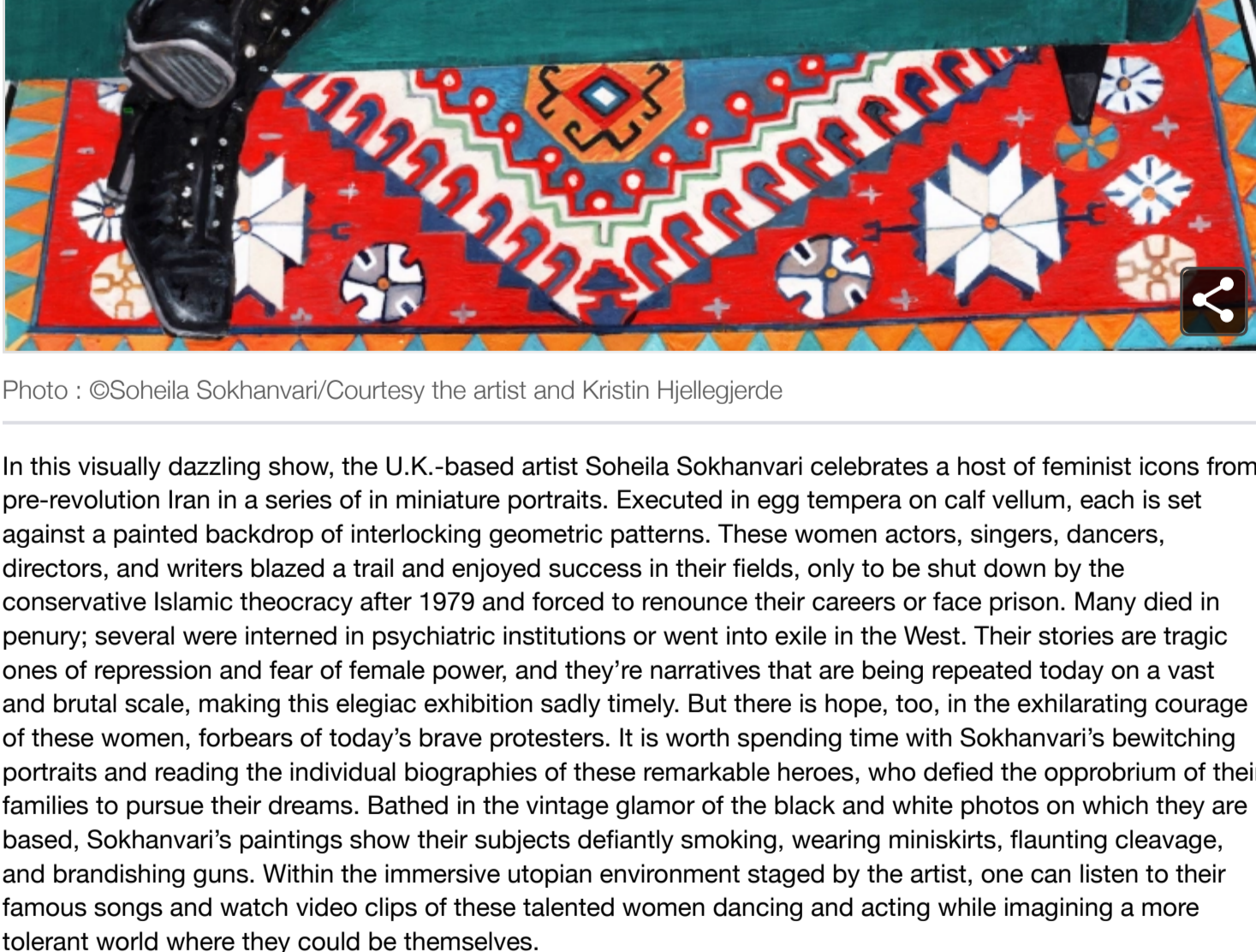


Photo : ©Soheila Sokhanvari/Courtesy the artist and Kristin Hjellegjerde

In this visually dazzling show, the U.K.-based artist Soheila Sokhanvari celebrates a host of feminist icons from pre-revolution Iran in a series of in miniature portraits. Executed in egg tempera on calf vellum, each is set against a painted backdrop of interlocking geometric patterns. These women actors, singers, dancers, directors, and writers blazed a trail and enjoyed success in their fields, only to be shut down by the conservative Islamic theocracy after 1979 and forced to renounce their careers or face prison. Many died in penury; several were interned in psychiatric institutions or went into exile in the West. Their stories are tragic ones of repression and fear of female power, and they're narratives that are being repeated today on a vast and brutal scale, making this elegiac exhibition sadly timely. But there is hope, too, in the exhilarating courage of these women, forbears of today's brave protesters. It is worth spending time with Sokhanvari's bewitching portraits and reading the individual biographies of these remarkable heroes, who defied the opprobrium of their families to pursue their dreams. Bathed in the vintage glamor of the black and white photos on which they are based, Sokhanvari's paintings show their subjects defiantly smoking, wearing miniskirts, flaunting cleavage, and brandishing guns. Within the immersive utopian environment staged by the artist, one can listen to their famous songs and watch video clips of these talented women dancing and acting while imagining a more tolerant world where they could be themselves.

Somaya Critchlow at Maximilian William

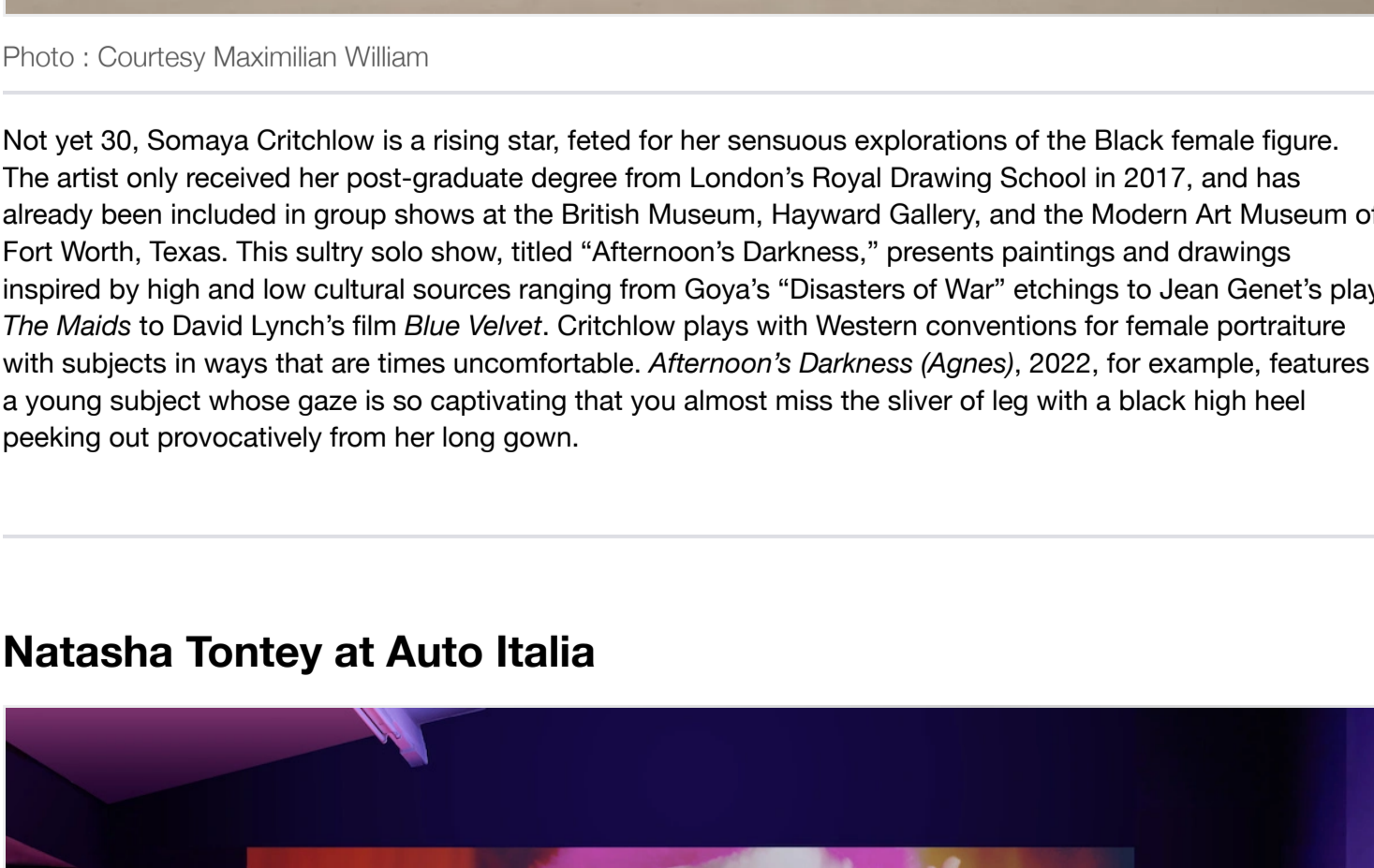


Photo : Courtesy Maximilian William

Not yet 30, Somaya Critchlow is a rising star, feted for her sensuous explorations of the Black female figure. The artist only received her post-graduate degree from London's Royal Drawing School in 2017, and has already been included in group shows at the British Museum, Hayman Gallery, and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas. This sultry solo show, titled "Afternoon's Darkness," presents paintings and drawings inspired by high and low cultural sources ranging from Goya's "Disasters of War" etchings to Jean Genet's play *The Maids* to David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet*. Critchlow plays with Western conventions for female portraiture with subjects in ways that are times uncomfortable. *Afternoon's Darkness (Agnes)*, 2022, for example, features a young subject whose gaze is so captivating that you almost miss the sliver of leg with a black high heel peeking out provocatively from her long gown.

Natasha Tontey at Auto Italia

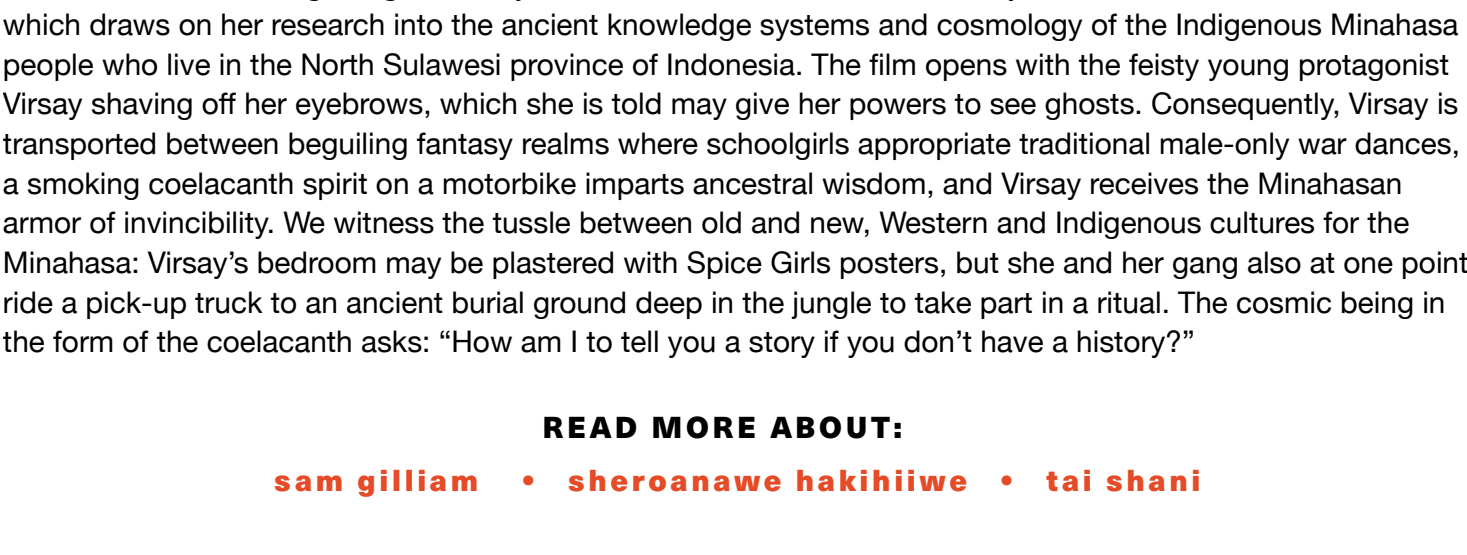


Photo : Photo Henry Mills

Auto Italia, which celebrates its 15th anniversary this year, was started by a community of artists in a squatted garage in Peckham, South London, with the aim of championing under-represented practices. Its latest commission is a moving-image work by the Indonesian artist Natasha Tontey called *Garden Amidst the Flame*, which draws on her research into the ancient knowledge systems and cosmology of the Indigenous Minahasa people who live in the North Sulawesi province of Indonesia. The film opens with the feisty young protagonist Virsay shaving off her eyebrows, which she is told may give her powers to see ghosts. Consequently, Virsay is transported between beguiling fantasy realms where schoolgirls appropriate traditional male-only war dances, a smoking coelacanth spirit on a motorbike imparts ancestral wisdom, and Virsay receives the Minahasan armor of invincibility. We witness the tussle between old and new, Western and Indigenous cultures for the Minahasa: Virsay's bedroom may be plastered with Spice Girls posters, but she and her gang also at one point ride a pick-up truck to an ancient burial ground deep in the jungle to take part in a ritual. The cosmic being in the form of the coelacanth asks: "How am I to tell you a story if you don't have a history?"

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