

symphony for a fraying body

Saoirse Amira Anis

Exhibition Notes | Gallery 1 | Sat 20 May - Sun 6 August 2023

DCA

Dundee Contemporary Arts

152 Nethergate
Dundee, DD1 4DY
01382 432444

Scottish Charity No. SCO26631

Open Tue - Sun 11:00-18:00
Open late Thu 19:00
Admission free

www.dca.org.uk

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

This exhibition marks the first major UK show by Dundee-based artist Saoirse Amira Anis.

The artist works across sculpture, performance, photography, film, writing and drawing; proudly working in all these mediums without finesse but with a lot of love. Anis's practice prioritises radical care, informality, and empathy. Her work is informed by Black queer literature, her personal ancestry, and her own body as it moves through the world. She incorporates bodily knowledge and care into each facet of her work, considering the ways in which the body holds ancestral and lived memories.

The artist's newly commissioned film gives the exhibition its title *symphony for a fraying body*. The moving image sits within a sculptural frame, surrounded by walls awash with colour, alongside what the artist refers to as 'detritus': the by-products from the film's creation. These remains give a sense of the film creeping out from the screen into the gallery, blurring the lines between screen, materials and surroundings. The gallery has been crafted as a space of comfort for audiences: to rest, breathe, watch. It is the artist's intention that visitors will be encouraged to slow down and consider what it feels like to be in a body in this moment in time: not alone but as a part of a community linked by shared worry, shared rage, and shared love.

In the film, Anis channels her bodily experience of rage through a rope-laden, amphibious mythical creature as it journeys in return to the sea – emerging from a cave, travelling past waterfalls and the shore to meet the tide. The gradual shedding of its tentacles poetically alludes to the artist's own experiences of disentangling and unravelling emotions; the creature ultimately finding joy at the water's edge. The design of the costume started with a drawing, weaving together folkloric creatures from the sea, land and sky, and annotated with the words 'SWIM – FLY – SLITHER,' which the artist returned to when working with DCA Print Studio to produce a limited edition print.

The creature's costume was produced through processes of rope-making and dyeing yarn with madder root. The tendrils of the dress trail along the ground and swing while the dancer moves their arms and legs. The colours and the textures of the work draw influences from sea creatures, earthy materials and Moroccan and Scottish culture, echoing Anis's own heritage.

The film has taken shape from – but its interpretation is not limited to – a cacophony of influences. It gives voice to the rebellion and rage of those overlooked by dominant society and assigned as ‘other’- their collective agitation by turns quiet, insidious, and powerful.

Anis notes that:

‘borrowing from histories, mythologies, ecologies and the cultures of my paternal and maternal home countries, the film is an interrogation of the ways in which anger arises in my body, and how to respond to it. Despite the personal, bodily root of the show, it is an invitation to the audience to sit with me in acknowledgement of the beauty and power of our collective rage.’

Anis weaves the film’s meandering story together with what feminist scholar and writer Donna Haraway describes as ‘tentacular thinking.’ This way of interpreting the world comes from a place outside human-based knowledge: to touch, feel and inhabit ideas the way non-humans might.

The physical process of making and the materiality of the work has significantly informed the exhibition, with the artist purposefully undertaking new experiments in production. These new ventures include the ambient, percussive soundtrack which overlays the film. Journeying between swelling melody and repetitive rhythms, the soundtrack takes influence from music that can be found across Morocco and Scotland – particularly evoking Gnawa, Celtic, and Islamic Arabic music. Equally rhythmic is the film’s structure, described by a collaborator as watery; tidal in its flow and crescendos.

FILM CREDITS

The artist would like to extend her gratitude to the following individuals for their rich contributions to *symphony for a fraying body*:

Dancer: Sarah Barr

Videographer: Rachel McBrinn

Sound Technician: Cindy Islam

Production Assistant: Laura McSorley

GLOSSARY

Radical care: this term originated within the medical community from the 1950s onwards, through a focus on patient-centered medicine and a subsequent emphasis on individual practices that would improve the patient's health. In the present, it is understood to affect the mind, body and spirit, as a set of vital but underappreciated strategies for enduring precarious worlds.

Bodily knowledge: a way of thinking about, analysing and understanding one's own body, physical movements, intuitions and sensations. Its aims are to then use this information to enable increased practical knowledge and self-understanding.

Madder root: a herbaceous perennial plant species belonging to the bedstraw and coffee family *Rubiaceae*, sometimes also referred to as Dyer's Madder. It has been used since ancient times as a red vegetable dye for leather, wool, cotton and silk.

Tentacular Thinking: this phrase originates from feminist scholar and author Donna Haraway's 2016 book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. The word 'tentacular' comes from the Latin *tentare*, meaning 'to feel' and 'to try'; and *tentaculum*, meaning 'feeler'. Haraway uses the idea of 'tentacular thinking' to both critique and explore alternatives to visually dominated, human-centred forms of thinking. The tentacles represent the 'other' – the non-human – and question how we can move beyond thought patterns that are limited by the sensations and experiences of our human bodies and brains to generate other kinds of knowledge that consider a multispecies approach.

Gnawa: an ethnic group inhabiting Morocco, generally believed to originate from the north of present-day Nigeria. Gnawa music mixes classical Islamic Sufism (a mystic body of religious practice) with pre-Islamic African folk traditions. Gnawa musicians are often associated with also practicing healing rituals.

Cacophony: A cacophony is a varied mix of unpleasant sounds, often at loud volume.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Saoirse Amira Anis grew up in the countryside near Lanark and is now based in Dundee. Her work has been exhibited recently in the form of a solo show at Campleline, Dumfries, and as part of the Platform commissions for the 2022 Edinburgh Art Festival. Other recent projects include: *Jupiter Rising*, Jupiter Artland, 2021; *A Lesson in Vanity*, David Dale Gallery and LUX Scotland, 2021; and *We Can Still Dance*, Jupiter Artland, as part of the Black Lives Matter Mural Trail.

She recently curated *Miss(ing) Information* at Perth Museum and Art Gallery, an exhibition that features the work of Tayo Adekunle, Nkem Okwechime, Tako Taal and Natasha Ruwona. Since graduating from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, Anis has completed residencies at Cove Park, Argyll and Bute; Hospitalfield in Arbroath; and Collemacchia, with the Museum of Loss and Renewal. She was also a committee member at GENERATOR projects from 2018–2021.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The artist would like to thank:

Tiffany Boyle, Eoin Dara, Kay Hamlyn, Beth Bate, Adrian Murray and Valerie Norris; Annis Fitzhugh, Marianne Livingstone, Claire McVinnie, Scott Hudson and Sandra de Rycker; Mickey Fenton, Marc Johnston and Jessie Giovane Staniland; Sarah Barr, Rachel McBrinn and Riah; Laura McSorley; Rory King; Natasha Thembiso Ruwona; Rachael Simpson and Jek McAllister; Alaya Ang, Sabrina Henry, Francesca Masoero, Shayma Nader; Kris Copeland, Amina Benmalek, Rosie Handley, Zoë Gibson, Josey Donald, Kate Harvey; Helen Nisbet, Lizzie Day and the whole Art Night team; Mim Seddon; Sarah Shin, Jamie Donald and Maeve Redmond; Variant Framing; Sophia Al-Maria, Ursula K. Le Guin, Solange Knowles, Saul Williams and Akwugo Emejulu.

NEW PUBLICATION & EDITION

We are publishing a new chapbook in summer 2023 as part of Anis's project, also titled *symphony for a fraying body*, containing newly commissioned writing by writer, publisher and curator Sarah Shin; and by Dundee-based artist, writer and curator Jamie Donald.

The chapbook will be launched on the evening of 24 June, to coincide with Anis's performance as part of Art Night Dundee, and will be available to buy in DCA Shop. You can find more information on Art Night on page 14 of these notes.

In addition, Anis has been working with DCA's Print Studio team to develop a new limited edition print which can be viewed in the gallery as part of the exhibition. It is available to purchase online and in DCA Shop.

INFORMATION SPACE

Visit the Information Space next to the galleries to learn more about the exhibition. Here you will find a video interview with the artist, alongside the reading materials listed below that have been influential to their thinking.

READING LIST

Virginie Despentes, *King Kong Theory*, 2006

Akwugo Emejulu, *Fugitive Feminism*, 2022

Johanna Hedva, *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain*, 2020

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, 1986

Audre Lorde, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*, 2017

Carmen Maria Machado, *Her Body and Other Parties*, 2018

So Mayer, *A Nazi Word for a Nazi Thing*, 2020

TALKS AND EVENTS

For more information and to book tickets visit www.dca.org.uk

Meet the Artist

Fri 19 May, 18:30–19:00

Gallery 1

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

Join Saoirse Amira Anis and DCA's Head of Exhibitions, Tiffany Boyle, for an introduction to, and discussion of *symphony for a fraying body* ahead of its official opening.

In the Evening There is Feeling: Reading Prof. Akwugo Emejulu and Dr. Esa Aldegheri

Thu 1 June, 18:00–19:30

Create Space

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

Led by DCA's Exhibitions Team, *In the Evening There is Feeling* is DCA's reading group. It takes its name from Gertrude Stein's 1914 book *Tender Buttons* and focuses, in an informal and welcoming way, on feminist and queer texts from the worlds of art and literature.

For this joint session as part of Saoirse Amira Anis's and Zineb Sedira's exhibitions, we will be considering two selected books – *Fugitive Feminism* by Prof. Akwugo Emejulu and *Free to Go* by Dr. Esa Aldegheri.

For Anis's selection, we will be exploring *Fugitive Feminism*, where sociologist Prof. Akwugo Emejulu combines the concepts 'fugitive' and 'feminism' to signal that Black women's becoming must be grounded in a collective process of speculative dialogue and action for liberation. This audacious manifesto investigates Black women's processes of divesting from humanity, drawing on the legacies of bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis and others in the pantheon of Black feminism.

Free to Go charts a story of shrinking and expanding liberties and horizons, and of motherhood, womanhood, xenophobia and changing geopolitical situations. Author Dr. Esa Aldegheri examines the challenges of navigating a world where many assume that women ride pillion, both on a motorbike and within relationships. Part around-the-world adventure, part-literary exploration of womanhood, *Free to Go* is about the journeys that shape and transform us.

Digital copies of selected excerpts from the books will be sent out to all participants upon booking a place.

In Conversation:

Dr. Esa Aldegheri and Beth Bate

Thu 29 June, 18:00–19:30

Gallery 2

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

Join DCA Director Beth Bate for a conversation with writer, researcher, and educator Dr. Esa Aldegheri. Jumping off from her recent book

Free To Go, which we will be covering as part of our DCA reading group *In The Evening There is Feeling*, this conversation will explore the ideas and waters that flow between the exhibitions and Dr. Aldegheri's work. We will touch upon ideas of identity and migration, intercultural connectivity, shared histories, waters and post-colonial practices, as well as shifting borders swallowed by both policy and the sea.

Dr. Aldegheri is a multilingual writer, educator and researcher with a PhD in community education and migration studies. She works as a Research Associate at the University of Glasgow. Her non-fiction debut *Free to Go* (John Murray Press, 2022) moves beyond the parameters of a simple travel narrative to explore different aspects of freedom and borders, both geopolitical and personal. It is a story about travelling from Orkney to New Zealand on a motorbike shared with a willing companion, interwoven with a parallel tale of diminished liberties linked to the author's experiences of motherhood, Brexit and pandemic restrictions. Dr. Aldegheri's non-fiction writing has also been published by Granta, Gutter Press, the Dangerous Women Project and others. Her poetry has been read on Radio 4 and Radio Scotland and features in several anthologies. She is from Scotland and Italy, and lives by the sea near Edinburgh.

In the Evening There is Feeling: Listening to Nina Simone

Thu 20 July, 18:00–19:30

Create Space

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

Led by DCA's Exhibitions team, *In the Evening There is Feeling* is DCA's reading group. It takes its name from Gertrude Stein's 1914 book *Tender Buttons* and often focuses, in an informal and welcoming way, on feminist and queer texts from the worlds of art and literature.

As part of Anis's exhibition, instead of just thinking about writers and poets, we will be also considering musicians who have been influential to the artist. We will be listening instead of reading.

This session will focus on Nina Simone's debut album, *Little Girl Blue*, recorded in 1957 which would go on to top to global charts in R&B, pop, and jazz in the coming years. Over the course of this event, we will be discussing elements of Simone's extraordinarily influential career as a musician, singer, and activist, and will spend some time listening closely together to excerpts from this and other albums including *Silk & Soul*, also selected by the artist.

You can listen to both albums and excerpts from Simone's wider discography on YouTube, and on many other online streaming platforms.

ARTIST'S CHOICE SCREENINGS

These three films have been selected by Saoirse Amira Anis to accompany her exhibition in Gallery 1.

Daughters of the Dust

Tue 27 June, 20:30

Cinema 1

Please see website for prices and to book tickets

Julie Dash's majestic first feature is a poignant portrait of three generations of Gullah women (descendants of West African slaves) at the turn of the 20th century as their family struggle with the decision to migrate from their island home off the coast of South Carolina to the mainland.

Dash's perspective is determinedly feminist as she fuses together image, sound, authentic dialect and traditions of African oral storytelling to portray the power, beauty, and resilience of Black women. Her vision and aesthetic sensibilities perfectly capture a forgotten moment of the African American experience and charts new ground in the representation of Black women on screen.

Dir: Julie Dash / USA / 1991 / 1h52m / 12A

Luca

Sat 15 July, 11:00

Cinema 2

Please see website for prices and to book tickets

Set in a beautiful seaside town on the Italian Riviera, Disney and Pixar's *Luca* is a coming-of-age story about one young boy experiencing an unforgettable summer filled with gelato, pasta and endless scooter rides. Luca (voiced by Jacob Tremblay) shares these adventures with his newfound best friend, Alberto (voiced by Jack Dylan Grazer), but all the fun is threatened by a deeply held secret: they are sea monsters from another world just below the water's surface.

Dir: Enrico Casarosa / USA / 2021 / 1h35m / U

Neptune Frost

Sat 5 August, 20:30

Cinema 2

Please see website for prices and to book tickets

Neptune Frost takes place in the hilltops of Burundi, where a group of escaped coltan miners camping in an otherworldly e-waste dump attempt a takeover of the authoritarian regime exploiting the region's natural resources – and its people. When an intersex runaway and an escaped miner find each other through cosmic forces, their connection sparks glitches within the greater divine circuitry.

Set between states of being – past and present, dream and waking life, colonised and free, male and female, memory and prescience – *Neptune Frost* is an invigorating and empowering film and a call to reclaim technology for progressive political ends.

Dir: Saul Williams & Anisia Uzeyman
/ Rwanda/USA / 2021 / 1h45m / 15 /
Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Swahili, French
with English subtitles

FOR YOUNGER VISITORS AND FAMILIES

Create Space

Tue – Sun, 11:00–18:00

Free, drop in

Children must be accompanied by an adult at all times

Create Space is located between Gallery 1 and the Information Space and is a flexible, comfortable and imaginative environment; a space in which people of all ages can see, think, make and do together. Here you can find displays, child-safe materials and art activity sheets inspired by our current exhibitions.

DIY art making activities will include thinking about journeys and sea crossings, making maps, board games and rope sculptures. Our art library for children is there for you to browse and our Play Box has safe play for our youngest visitors.

Create Space is sometimes closed for a workshop, please phone in advance if you are making a special trip.

Family Art Labs

Sun 28 May and Sun 23 July,
11:00–13:00

Create Space

Free, but ticketed

Please book a separate ticket for each person who is attending
Suitable for ages 3+

Family Art Labs offer relaxed time and space to get making as a family, with creative activities and techniques

introduced by local artists. Stay as long as you like or leave when you need to, these sessions are completely flexible but try to be with us at the start. Each date will have a new theme or technique to explore.

Inspired by our current exhibitions, you can expect a range of materials with the sea as a key feature. We have lots of creative ideas and projects to finish on the day or to take home. We look forward to sharing and making with you.

Messy Play for 0-3s

Sun 21 May and Sun 11 June,
10:00–11:00

Tue 23 May and Tue 13 June,
10:00–11:00 and 11:30–12:30

Fri 26 May and Fri 16 June,
13:00–14:00

Create Space

Free, but ticketed

Please book a separate ticket for each person who is attending
Suitable for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers accompanied by an adult.

Join us for messy, sensory, and creative time for you with your little ones. Sessions respond to our exhibitions with activities designed to engage our youngest visitors together with their big people.

You can expect an art activity, a sensory play activity and lots of ideas for things to do at home or out and about. There are a variety of days and times available each month to give as many people as possible the chance to try the activities. Each session will

be led by DCA's Art Therapist, Vicky Armstrong, and an artist tutor with activities changing each month.

Soundplay Drop-In Sessions

Sat 10 June, 14:00–16:00

Create Space

Free, drop in

Children must be accompanied
by an adult at all times

Suitable for ages 3+

Join the Soundplay team for some hands-on experimenting with digital tools for creative sound and image making.

Soundplay are a team who create multi-sensory, audio-visual playgrounds where sound, animation and interactive technology collide. They design for people of all backgrounds and abilities, so their work is accessible to everyone.

Come along for a rich audio visual experience and tips on low-cost kit you can use at home.

ART NIGHT DUNDEE

We are delighted to be lead partner of Art Night Dundee, which sees the festival deliver its first full iteration in a city outside London. On the evening of 24 June, Art Night will present ten major commissions by internationally significant artists and more emergent artists in civic and public spaces across Dundee.

Art Night is a biennial contemporary art festival presenting ambitious new work by artists at pivotal moments in their career. Art Night takes place in public spaces and civic buildings. The festival is free and everyone is welcome.

DCA will be an Art Night Information Hub throughout the festival, with staff available to answer any questions and copies of festival maps to help guide you through the event.

For more information about the festival visit artnight.org.uk.

breach of a fraying body

Sat 24 June

19:00, Gallery 1, DCA

21:00, Discovery Point to V&A

23:00, V&A to HMS Unicorn.

Each performance will last 20–40 minutes. Free, drop in.

Saoirse Amira Anis presents a performance for Art Night as an extension of *symphony for a fraying body* at DCA, which takes inspiration from the watery music, rituals and

folklore of Anis's Scottish and Moroccan maternal and paternal cultures. In her exhibition, Anis channels her bodily experience of rage through a rope-laden, amphibious mythical creature as it journeys to return to the sea. For Art Night, Anis embodies the creature, freeing it from the galleries of DCA to move along Dundee's waterfront to HMS Unicorn, to seek the waters of the nearby river Tay. The costume for this performance has been devised and constructed in collaboration with a community of Black peers – including costume designer and curator Sabrina Henry and textile artist Dr Sequoia Barnes – imbuing it with the love and anger of a community. Proudly and ceremoniously it parades through the streets, leaving residues of hope and rage in its wake.

Find traces and remnants of Anis's DCA exhibition aboard the Unicorn's decks, which will be open to the public until the closing segment of the performance.

A co-commission between Art Night and DCA.

RRS Discovery
Discovery Point, Discovery Quay,
Dundee, DD1 4XA

V&A Dundee
1 Riverside Esplanade,
Dundee, DD1 4EZ

HMS Unicorn
South Victoria Dock Road,
Victoria Dock, Dundee, DD1 3BP

GALLERY 2

Can't You See the Sea Changing? Zineb Sedira

Gallery 2

Sat 29 April – Sun 6 August

This major solo exhibition by Zineb Sedira, developed in collaboration with De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, will be her first project in UK public galleries for 12 years.

Working across photography, installation and film, Sedira draws upon her personal history and close connections to Algeria, France and the UK to explore ideas of identity, gender, environment and collective memory.

Throughout her career, Sedira has become a leading voice in addressing the question of what it means to live between different cultures, often bringing together autobiographical narration, fiction and documentary genres. Through her varying approaches to storytelling, Sedira interrogates what she refers to as 'spaces where mobility expires'. She often focuses on individuals' abilities, or not, to depart, return, escape, or exist in transit between certain lands and identities. Whilst her narratives are embedded with histories of migration and exile – particularly in relation to her home countries of Algeria and France – through her work Sedira considers what it means to be transported through visionary acts of imagination, acts that carry us to different places through the merging of past and present time frames.

JUST ASK

Our friendly Visitor Assistants are always happy to help with your questions.

LARGE PRINT, AUDIO & BRAILLE

Large print, audio and braille versions of this leaflet are available, please ask a Visitor Assistant for more information.

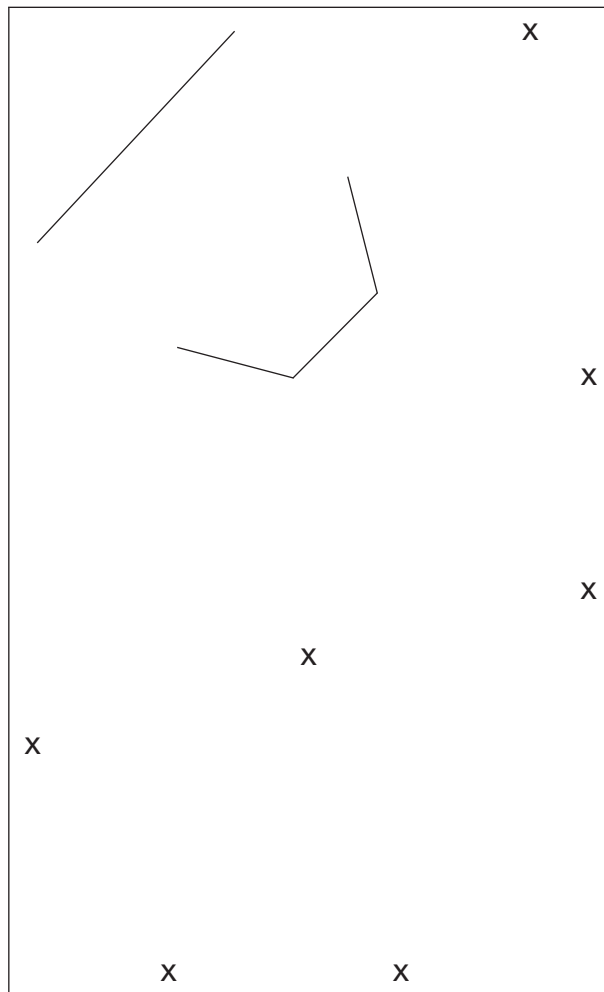
KEEP IN TOUCH

Keep up to date with the very latest from DCA by visiting dca.org.uk or by following us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Share your thoughts on the exhibition using **#helloDCA**.

SUPPORT DCA

Our exhibitions are always free to access, but DCA is a charity and donations are welcome and appreciated. You can tap to donate at one of the contactless points in our building or donate online at dca.org.uk/donate. Thank you for your support!

EXHIBITION FLOOR PLAN – GALLERY 1



symphony for a fraying body

14 minutes 26 seconds

Single-screen film installation with bespoke painted walls, sofa, hand-dyed cushions, madder root, measuring stick, rope-making machine, drum, lettering in hand-dyed yarn and film detritus, 2023

With DCA Artist's Edition:

Let Loose, 2023
Varied edition of 10

Framed screen-print and emboss on Fabriano Rosaspina Bianco 285gsm paper