

# Hair and Body

Rachel Eulena Williams

Exhibition Notes | Sat 26 August - Sun 19 November 2023

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**DCA**

Dundee Contemporary Arts

152 Nethergate  
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Scottish Charity No. SCO26631

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

[www.dca.org.uk](http://www.dca.org.uk)



## INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

This major presentation from Brooklyn-based artist Rachel Eulena Williams marks her first solo exhibition in a UK institution.

*Hair and Body* brings together a new suite of works spanning painting, assemblage and installation foregrounding the artist's liberation of colour, radical exploration of materials and playful experimentation. The exhibition takes its title from the work *Swing in Protective Style*, which is suspended from the ceiling in Gallery 2. The braided ropes recall hairstyles, adornments and accessories, and the swing seat is an invitation for the viewer's body to move with the installation.

The artist's works sit between painting and sculpture. Over her career, Williams' work has constantly shifted, moving ever more into the three-dimensional. Drawing is at the core of her practice; this over time evolved into mid-scale paintings, before developing into multimedia assemblages consisting of materials which defy their common use.

Each canvas here is unfurled and reconfigured, with cumulative layers of paint and print coming together in low relief. Williams works in an intuitive and improvisational way: first creating the work, and through this seeking meaning and reference points. Tensions embedded within the work emphasise its sense of motion and energy – between readability and abstraction; flatness and sculpture; deconstruction and being held back together; natural and industrially produced tones, and energetic brushstrokes with built-up layers of paint. Lines, in the form of rope and stitches, criss-cross Williams' paintings, their complex inner compositions contrasting with their crisp outer silhouettes.

*Hair and Body* features Williams' first venture into film, constructed using the same techniques she applies to the canvas: cut-and-paste, found footage and collage. On screen, Black women's hair is carefully braided and polished nails are painted in bright shades; a fleeting glimpse into these private acts of care reads as a tender ode to the female body. The artist has described the exhibition as feeling "like a love letter, written long ago and finally sent."

In 2019, the artist undertook the Studio Immersion Project Fellowship at the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop at The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, New York. Within printmaking, there is often a layered approach to making and the influence of the medium can be found across the exhibition. In particular, *Pistillate* (2023) includes screenprinted imagery of hairstyles, fruit and a portrait of prominent civil rights advocate and lawyer Florynce Kennedy.

In Williams' round 'tondo' paintings, fabric is stretched taut across the canvas frame, pleated and twisted, as if following bodily contours. Tondo is a term for circular works of art in painting and sculpture. A popular format during the Renaissance, they were revived as a classical form in the architecture of 15th century Florence. Historically, these shaped canvases originated from religious imagery and the round relief carvings which decorated wall tombs.

Found materials are frequently employed in the artist's work, often widely available and everyday in nature. Through applying these objects directly, the artist considers each work a still life study. As Williams joyfully plays with materials, they shift into something new, neither hidden nor completely disguised. Changed by the artist's hand, they begin to speak the same visual language and give form to stories.

Ropes – twisted and unwound – are an integral element in the artist's making, holding together the canvas. Each work begins with untreated cotton and canvas, painted and dyed, then cut apart, akin to quilting. Meanwhile, the ropes are shaped and fixed to wire, becoming an armature for the deconstructed canvas as it is re-assembled. In finishing her works, the artist often uses scissors to cut and finish the ropes – controlling how much they can and cannot fray, become and unbecome a line. The artist describes the different kinds of ropes she uses as transferring numerous readings into her work – adventure, rest, pain, and beauty.

Williams breaks down the uniformity of the 'white cube' gallery by integrating its blank walls into her work. She does this through cut-outs and by utilising every inch of negative space in her compositions; even painting the usually overlooked reverse of the canvas in solid fluorescent hues, casting coloured shadows against the wall. The fluorescent tones are contradictory: man-made and found in the mass-market items used by the artist, yet also occurring in the natural world, for example in parrot feathers and the light of fireflies.

Fundamental to the artist's practice is a rejection of Western art history's preconceived notions of colour as 'other' – unruly, foreign, and vulgar. Colour has also often been associated with the feminine, which is further explored by Williams through the flower motifs which appear across her canvases. This new body of work brings a focus to darker tones, with a greater balance between black and white against her vivid use of colour.

## GLOSSARY

**Assemblage:** an artistic form or medium usually consisting of 3D objects attached to a solid base. It is similar to collage, where existing 2D or flat images are cut and pasted together to form a new work. Assemblage often incorporates manufactured and non-art objects found and collected by the artist, as opposed to work that is drawn, painted, or carved.

**Abstraction:** in general terms, abstraction is the process of simplifying or removing characteristics from something in order to reduce it to its essential qualities. In art, abstract artworks do not aim to portray a realistic image or representation of the visual world, but rather uses shapes, lines, colours, gestural marks and textures to present and communicate the way the artist sees or thinks about the world around them.

**Screenprint:** an artistic method of production used to transfer an image onto a surface, usually paper or fabric. The print is created by forcing ink through a prepared “screen” comprised of a fine mesh onto which a stencil has been transferred, creating areas where the ink cannot pass through.

**Florynce Kennedy:** American lawyer, radical feminist, civil rights advocate and activist born in Missouri in 1916. Kennedy used her flamboyant attire, including her signature cowboy hat, and outrageous comments to draw attention to intersectional issues and injustices from 1960 until her death in 2000.

**Tondo:** a tondo (plural: tondi) is a circular painting, relief carving, plaque or mural design. The word derives from the Italian *rotondo*, meaning ‘round’. The tondo was a popular format for works of art in Italy during the 15th century, and originated from the round relief carvings that decorated wall tombs.

**Armature:** a framework used by an artist as a supporting, often inner, structure for a sculpture. An armature is usually made from metal or wood, and materials such as clay or plaster are applied and shaped around it to build a three-dimensional work.

**Negative space:** the area around and between the subject(s) of an image – the empty space. It is a key element of many works of art, creating balance and movement within a composition.

**Fluorescence:** refers to the luminous quality of specific colours which reflect light intensely and appear to glow.

## **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Rachel Eulena Williams received a BFA from Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York in 2013. Her work has been exhibited internationally at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield (2022); The Modern Institute, Glasgow (2021); PACE Gallery, New York (2021); Canada Gallery, New York (2020); Loyal Gallery, Stockholm (2019); Ceysson & Bénétière, Sainte Etienne (2018); Night Gallery, Los Angeles (2018); Derek Eller Gallery, New York (2018); Cooper Cole, Toronto (2018); The Journal Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (2017); Mass Gallery, Austin (2017); SomeTime Salon, San Francisco (2017); and Center Street, New York (2017).

Williams has held the Studio Immersion Project Fellowship at the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, New York (2019); 68 Projects, Berlin (2018; 2020); and NY Studio Factory, Brooklyn (2014).

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The artist would like to thank Beth Bate; Tiffany Boyle; Valerie Norris; Kay Hamlyn; Adrian Murray and DCA's installation team; and all in DCA Print Studio, with special thanks to Katie Ravenscraig, Claire McVinnie and Marianne Livingstone.

With gratitude to Toby Webster, Andrew Hamilton, Bobby Sinclair, and all at The Modern Institute; Janelle Zara; Louise Benson; Melkorka Helgadóttir; Elizabeth Kidwell; Elzie Williams; Lauren Prousky; Kati Kirsch; Louis Block; Elizabeth Karp Evans; Nicolas Calcott; Marquele Ashley; Alixis and Justin; Walter Price; Sarah Brahman; Wallace Whitney and all at Canada Gallery, New York; Xavier Hufkens, Barthelemy Scholer and all at Xavier Hufkens, Brussels.

DCA would like to thank The Modern Institute for their support in realising this exhibition.

## NEW PUBLICATION & EDITION

We are publishing a new book as part of Williams' project, also titled *Hair and Body*. It will contain newly commissioned writing by Glasgow-based artist Irineu Destourelles, and London-based curator Jessica Taylor, as well as an introduction by DCA's Director Beth Bate and full colour images of the exhibition. The book will be available to buy in DCA Shop and online in late autumn.

In addition, Williams has been working with DCA's Print Studio team to develop a new limited edition print. It will be available shortly 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 an exhibition walkthrough narrated by Williams, alongside the reading materials listed below, selected by the artist and influential to her thinking.

## READING LIST

David Batchelor, *Chromophobia*

Octavia Butler, *Bloodchild and other stories*

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*

Jillian Hernandez, *Aesthetics of Excess*

Sheila Heti, *How Should a Person Be?*

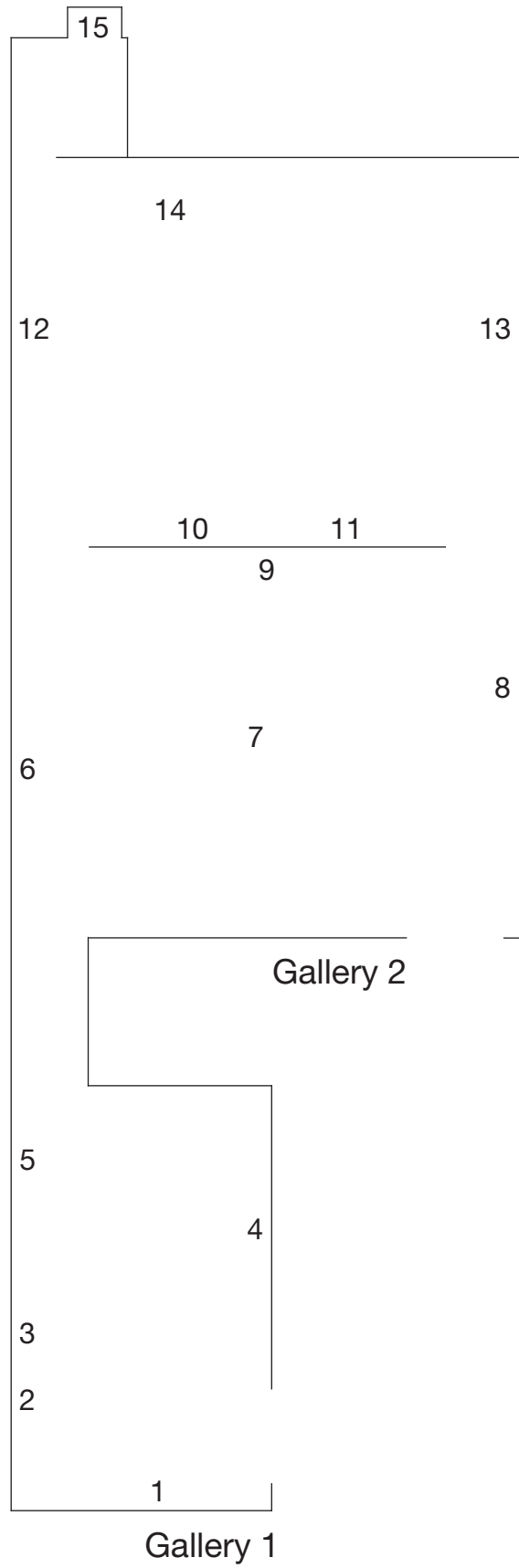
Sianne Ngai, *Our aesthetic categories: zany, cute, and interesting*

Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

The Modern Institute, *Rachel Eulena Williams: Silk Cotton Snow*

# EXHIBITION FLOOR PLAN





1. *Watered down, kind expressions*, 2023

Canvas, cotton, wood, MDF, acrylic paint, silk screening ink, rope, nylon thread on stretcher

2. *Wrapped head with directions*, 2023

Canvas, cotton, wood, MDF, acrylic paint, rope, nylon thread on stretcher

3. *Wrapped head*, 2023

Canvas, cotton, wood, MDF, acrylic paint, rope, nylon thread on stretcher

4. *Hourglass Blue*, 2023

Acrylic paint, acrylic mediums, canvas, cotton rope, stockings, nylon thread on wood panel

5. *Untitled Progression*, 2023

Canvas, cotton, wood, MDF, acrylic paint, acrylic mediums, silk screening ink, rope, nylon thread on stretcher

6. *Rhythm*, 2023

Canvas, cotton, wood, MDF, acrylic paint, acrylic mediums, rope, nylon thread on stretcher

7. *Swing in Protective Style*, 2022

Swing, rope, acrylic paint, wire, stockings and polyester fabrics

8. *Hourglass Black*, 2023

Acrylic paint, acrylic mediums, canvas, cotton rope, stockings, silkscreen, nylon thread on wood panel

9. *Pistillate*, 2023

Wood and MDF panels, rope, canvas, hooks, acrylic paint, acrylic mediums, nylon thread

10. *Color to Light*, 2023

Canvas, cotton, wood, MDF, PVC, acrylic paint, silk screening ink, rope, nylon thread on stretcher

11. *Blue, The Black Road*, 2023

Canvas, cotton, wood, MDF, silk organza, acrylic paint, silk screening ink, rope, nylon thread on stretcher

12. *Color Accolades*, 2023

Canvas, cotton, rope, nylon thread, wood, MDF, acrylic paint, acrylic mediums, screws on stretcher

13. *Understanding Absorption*, 2023

Canvas, cotton, wood, MDF, acrylic paint, acrylic mediums, rope, nylon thread on wood stretcher

14. *Color Relaxer*, 2023

Hammock, rope, canvas, cable ties, acrylic paint, acrylic mediums, nylon thread

15. *Her hand freehand*, 2023

Film, found footage  
1 minute 35 seconds

All works courtesy of the artist and  
The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd.

## TALKS AND EVENTS

For more information and to book tickets visit [www.dca.org.uk](http://www.dca.org.uk)

### Meet the Artist

Fri 25 August, 18:30–19:00

Gallery 2

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

Join Rachel Eulena Williams and Beth Bate, Director of DCA, for an introduction to, and discussion of, *Hair and Body* ahead of its official opening.

### In the Evening There is Feeling: Reading David Batchelor

Thu 21 September, 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 and listening group. It takes its name from Gertrude Stein's 1914 book *Tender Buttons* and focuses, in an informal and welcoming way, on texts from the worlds of art and literature, and selected musical works.

For this session as part of Williams' exhibition, we will be considering *Chromophobia* by David Batchelor.

Selected by the artist, the central argument of *Chromophobia* is that a chromophobic impulse – a fear of corruption or contamination through colour – lurks within much Western

cultural and intellectual thought. This is apparent in the many attempts to purge colour from art, literature and architecture, either by making it the property of some foreign body or by relegating it to the realm of the superficial. Batchelor seeks to go beyond the limits of earlier studies, analysing the motivations behind chromophobia and considering the work of writers and artists who have been prepared to look at colour as a positive value.

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

### In the Evening There is Feeling: Listening to Alice Coltrane

Thu 5 October, 18:00–19:30

Create Space

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

For this session of our reading and listening group we will focus on the works of transcendental jazz musician, Alice Coltrane.

Over the course of this event, we will spend some time listening closely together to her 1970 album *Ptah*, *The El Daoud*, discussing the legacy of Coltrane's music and the impact of abstraction and spirituality on her compositions.

You can listen to Coltrane's music on YouTube and stream it on many other online platforms.

**Dr. Natasha Eaton:**  
**On Colour, Art and Empire**

Wed 8 November, 18:00–19:00

Gallery 2

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

With an introduction by Tiffany Boyle, join scholar Dr Natasha Eaton for an evening lecture on her research into colour theory as it relates to Williams' exhibition.

Dr Eaton is Reader in the History of Art at UCL. Her research focuses primarily on British and Indian art, notions of cross cultural exchange and material culture. Currently she is at work on several projects – art and indenture in the Indian Ocean; collecting and empire; the agency of light in empire. She has published two monographs – *Mimesis across Empires: Artworks and Networks in India, 1765-1860* (Duke University Press, 2013) and *Colour, Art and Empire: Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation* (I.B. Tauris, 2013).

## ARTIST'S CHOICE SCREENINGS

These two films have been selected by Rachel Eulena Williams to accompany her exhibition.

### **The Wizard of Oz (4K restoration)**

Sun 3 September, 15:30

Cinema 1

Please see website for prices and to book tickets

Based on *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, L. Frank Baum's best-selling novel of 1900, the famous film version of 1939 begins in the monochrome world of Kansas before bursting into colour when Dorothy's house, uprooted in a terrible tornado, lands in the surreal fairyland of Oz. Dorothy (Judy Garland) and her dog Toto encounter three new friends: the brainless Scarecrow (Ray Bolger), the cowardly Lion (Bert Lahr) and the heartless Tin Man (Jack Haley), each in search of what he believes he is lacking.

One of the most enduringly enjoyable family films, *The Wizard of Oz* has enthralled generations of filmgoers, appealing to all ages and across all cultures. It remains the perfect cinema treat – a must for children, the young at heart, and all friends of Dorothy.

Dir: Victor Fleming / USA / 1939 / 1h 42m / U

### **Metropolis**

Sun 15 October, 13:15

Cinema 1

Please see website for prices and to book tickets

*Metropolis* is considered by many to be the mother of all sci-fi films. Fritz Lang and his co-writer Thea von Harbou's imaginative world of revolutionaries, mad scientists and robots has exerted a profound impact on the visual language of science fiction, influencing everything from *Star Wars* to *Blade Runner*.

Set in a futuristic utopia whose prosperity relies on the exploitation of countless subterranean workers who toil day and night, *Metropolis* is a dizzyingly creative work where Norse mythology and religious imagery meet German Expressionism, social commentary and a dozen other concepts and styles besides. Every penny of the film's enormous budget is visible on screen and *Metropolis* features some of the most impressive sets ever built.

Dir: Fritz Lang / Germany / 1927 / 2h 30m / PG

## AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

Listen to recordings by artist and visual describer Juliana Capes as she describes key works in the exhibition.

With more than 15 years experience providing audio descriptions and interpretation for galleries across Scotland, Capes has developed a poetic and emotional describing style which expands on and illuminates artworks in new ways, particularly for audiences who are blind, have low vision, or sensory impairments.

This online tour – available from the end of September – will move through Williams' exhibition, offering visual descriptions of selected artworks on display. Capes will spend time elaborating on the exhibition to encourage slow looking, listening, and contemplation.

The tour is accessible on your own device through the Bloomberg Connects app and DCA's Sound Cloud.

The Bloomberg Connects app is available for download from Google Play, the App Store, and via the QR codes at the entrances to our galleries. On it, alongside our content you'll find free digital guides to cultural organisations around the world.

Offering a new way to explore our exhibitions programme, the app allows you to listen to our exhibition

notes, watch exclusive artist interviews, and find out what's on.

Please see our website and the Bloomberg Connects app for further details – for assistance locating these recordings, please speak to one of our Visitor Assistants.

## FOR YOUNGER VISITORS AND FAMILIES

### **Create Space**

Tue – Sun, 11:00–18:00

Free, drop-in

Children must always be supervised

DCA Create Space is a flexible, comfortable and imaginative space, where people of all ages can see, think, make and do together.

There are art activities to do on the spot inspired by the current exhibition, using child-safe materials and a display wall for you to share your creations.

Create Space also has a display of art projects, a wee art library for children and a safe play area for very wee ones. Visit the exhibition then pop in and make something.

Create Space is occasionally closed for workshops: please check our website for full opening hours.

### **Family Art Lab:**

**Rachel Eulena Williams**

Sun 10 September, 11:00–13:00

Sun 15 October, 11:00–13:00

Sun 12 November, 11:00–13:00

Create Space

Free, but ticketed. Tickets must be booked for everyone who is coming along, adults and children.

Suitable for ages 3+

Family Art Labs offer relaxed time and space to get making as a family, with creative activities and techniques introduced and guided along by local artist teachers. Stay as long as you like or leave when you need to, these sessions are completely flexible but do try to be with us at the start.

Each date will have a new theme or technique to explore. Inspired by Williams' exhibition, we have lots of creative 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 27 August, 10:00–11:00

Sun 24 September, 10:00–11:00

Tue 29 August, 10:00–11:00  
and 11:30–12:30

Tue 26 September, 10:00–11:00  
and 11:30–12:30

Fri 29 September, 13:30–14:30

### Create Space

Free, but ticketed. Tickets must be booked for everyone who is coming along, adults and children.

Suitable for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers. All children must be accompanied by an adult.

Join us for a messy, sensory, and creative time for you and your little ones. The 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 our DCA Art Therapist and an artist tutor, with activities changing each month.

## 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 [www.dca.org.uk](http://www.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 [www.dca.org.uk/donate](http://www.dca.org.uk/donate)  
Thank you for your support!