



# SAM WILLIAMS

Deep in The Eye and The Belly  
(Part One)

23 Feb-8 Apr 2023

San Mei Gallery  
Loughborough Road  
London SW9 7TB

# Sam Williams: Deep in The Eye and The Belly (Part One)

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San Mei Gallery presents a solo exhibition by London-based artist Sam Williams, featuring *Deep in The Eye and The Belly (Part One)*, three chapters of a new multi-part moving image work presented here for the first time.

The three films on display are linked by a singular character who tells stories of cetacean bodies entwined with an imagined oceanic future where whales become shelters for humans who have returned to the oceans in the wake of climate collapse.

Interlacing historical events, museum specimens, fictional futures, and song, *Deep in The Eye and The Belly* details the deconstruction and reconstruction of whale bodies housed in museums in London and Gothenburg and hints at possible survival through reassessing relationships with our cetacean kin and the reconsideration of bodies as worlds.

A single artefact, a pair of sculptural forms in the shape of the wax plugs retrieved from cetacean ear canals, sit in the room.

Blurring the boundaries between bodies, species and temporalities, the films take us beyond anthropocentric timescales and into the deep time of past, present and future ways of being.

## Works

*Deep in The Eye and The Belly:*  
Chapter 1, 22 mins  
*Deep in The Eye and The Belly:*  
Chapter 2, 16 mins  
*Deep in The Eye and The Belly:*  
Chapter 3, 10 mins  
*Words Held In Waxy Time,*  
beeswax, 40cm

## Artist biography

Sam Williams is an artist with a multidisciplinary practice, working with moving image, collage, choreography and text. Sam is based in London where he is a resident at Somerset House Studios. His ongoing research focuses on multispecies entanglements, ecological systems, bodies-as-worlds and folk mythologies and how they can inspire ideas for present and future ways of non-human-centric living. He has exhibited and screened work at institutions including Arnolfini, Baltic39, Siobhan Davies Dance, Somerset House, Tate Britain, Studio Voltaire and South Kiosk (UK), She Will (Norway); Kino Arsenal, Akademie der Kunst, Tanzhalle Wisenberg and B3 Biennale (Germany).

## Events Programme

*Words Held in Waxy Time*  
Saturday 4 March, 2pm  
Artist Sam Williams in conversation with Richard Sabin (Principal Curatore, Mammals) Natural History Museum.

*Children's Art Workshop*  
Saturday 11 March, 10-12am  
Fun and accessible workshop making seashells using clay and natural materials.

*FADE (undercurrents)*  
Thursday 9 March, 6.30-8.30pm  
Artists Sam Williams and Lauren Craig host an active listening workshop exploring words and sounds connected to themes in Williams' exhibition.

*Supperclub x Annapurna Café*  
Friday 24 March  
First in a series of collaborations between San Mei Gallery and AnnaPurna Cafe, dining within the exhibition.

*Friends and Patron's Tour*  
Saturday 1 April, 11am  
Special tour of Sam Williams' exhibition for Friends and Patrons of San Mei Gallery.

## The Inscrutable House, A Response to Deep in The Eye and The Belly (Part One)

The microbial flora lining the gut of the organisation works toward the preservation and progression, in part, of the major organism's life. Willingly or not, knowingly or not; the Jamie-Lee-Curtis-advocated microbiota, the collective organisation, the institution of bacteria, fungi and viruses carry out their duties in an amoral oasis of putridity. This collective microbiota carries out many of these duties to support immunity, aid digestion, synthesise and so on.

I find myself in the architecture of an inscrutable organisation. I'm inside the gut of a building, the lining of its intestines and even on the surface of its exterior skin. Rough. I mingle and network with all sorts of questionable elements. Within the architecture, the makings, the composite parts, something tells me it's a bad man. I haven't the faintest idea who this person might be, I'm only inside the micro of their functioning. For all I know, the gut I dwell inside may reside in that of a murderer, a sales administrator, or any other such blatant terrorist.

I had grown up impatient in the doorway of my parent's bedroom. I stand waiting. My mum is getting ready to go, sitting in front of a mirror I can't remember the shape of. With a jerk of her wrist, her face scrunched closed, a stream of bone-white Elnett Strong Hold fills the room. Shot in the head with glue. She dampens the air with isobutane, the particles, the fragrance stinging at my eyes and choking up my lungs. The smell tickles my nose. The atomised adhesive disturbs me. I splutter and cough, I feign a small performance of death in the doorway until it fades. The polymer cures on the surface of her hair. It disappears at the stroke of a brush.

I ask, in the muck, do the microorganisms all agree to keep the organisation alive? Healthy? The bits, the pieces nestle among the protruding villi in this garden of flesh. Some among my surroundings have intentions to cause cancer or sepsis. Others hope to cause inflammation or slow the structure down.

I can't know for sure, it's all conjecture. I can't get my answer from the microbes, none of them are willing. The microorganisms in the building are too numerous and rampant. Too saturated is the architecture, to pin one down and ask its intentions—I can't really know. 'What are you up to?'

[continued]

Inside a circle outside the body-building, I move around and around in a swirling rotted waste. Exiled, I float belly up in the pool. In the bowl of a toilet, in the sick, shit or blood. I feign a performance of death. I pass that which is venial, vitiating, volatile.

— Andy Grace Hayes

## Reading list

This reading list has been compiled by Sam Williams in conjunction with his exhibition, expanding on its themes of oceanic ecology, cetanean stories and queer futurities.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *M Archive After the End of the World*, 2018

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, 2020

Ann Washburn, *Mr Burns: A Post-Electric Play*, 2013

Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, 2017

José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 2009

Jenny Offill, *Weather*, 2020

László Krasznahorkai, *The Melancholy of Resistance*, 1989

Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Futurity and the Death Drive*, 2004

Lydia Yuknavitch, *The Chronology of Water*, 2011

Pandora Syperek, *Hope in the Archive: Indexing the Natural History Museum's Ecologies of Display*, 2020

Rebecca Giggs, *Fathoms: The World Inside The Whale*, 2020

## Production Credits

### Chapter 1

Written and directed by Sam Williams

Editing, post-production and secondary camera by Sam Williams  
Camera by Paul Bates (London) and Marte Vold (Gothenburg)

Voiced by Nando Messias  
Dramaturgy support by Laura Lomas

Music by Simon Fisher Turner  
Sound recording by Jordan Hunt  
Sound mastering by Harry Murdoch  
Animation by Andrew Gooch  
Archive footage courtesy of British Pathé

Special thanks to:  
Richard Sabin, Principal Curator (Mammals) at Natural History Museum, London

Magnus Gelang, Senior Curator (Vertebrates); Kennet Lundin, Senior Curator (Marine Invertebrates) and Åsa Holmberg at Gothenburg Museum of Natural History

Additional thanks:  
Henrik & Eva Bäcklund  
Somerset House Studios

## Chapter 2

Written and directed by Sam Williams  
Editing, sound design and post-production by Sam Williams  
Camera by Alexandra Boanta  
Produced by Priya Palak  
Performed by Nando Messias  
Dramaturgy support by Laura Lomas  
Costume by Max Allen  
Set and props by Jonathan van Beek  
Make up by Anete Salinieka  
Hair by Aimeric Amiot  
Filmed at The Hornecker Centre, London with special thanks to Tony Hornecker

The line “We questioned the end point of evolution when we realised it wasn’t us” is a direct quote from Alexis Pauline Gumbs “M Archive”

## Chapter 3

Directed by Sam Williams  
Editing, sound design and post-production by Sam Williams  
Camera by Alexandra Boanta  
Produced by Priya Palak  
Performed by Nando Messias  
Costume by Max Allen  
Music by Jordan Hunt

The song contains a repeated set of lyrics from Pete Seeger “The Song of the World’s Last Whale”

## Words Held In Waxy Time

Sculpture fabrication by Alex Glass

Funded with support from Arts Council England and Artist Network Development Bursary with thanks to Laura Sweeney, Ruth Lie, Jade Montserrat, Somerset House Studios and San Mei Gallery



## Limited edition

In conjunction with Sam Williams’ exhibition, San Mei Gallery has produced a limited edition print available in person and online.

Income from artist editions directly support our programme of exhibitions and events.

**Sam Williams**  
*Deep in The Eye and The Belly*  
giclée print  
290 x 163.20 mm  
edition of 50

£110

## Feedback

Your feedback enables us to know more about our audiences and how we can improve.

Please complete a evaluation form by scanning the QR code below.



## About San Mei Gallery

San Mei Gallery is an independent non-profit space for contemporary art in South London, committed to research-led, educational and collaborative exchanges. Operating with an artist-led approach, we support artists and curators to experiment with new ideas.

San Mei Gallery  
39a Loughborough Road  
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