

PHANTASMAGORIA

FOLKLORIC SCULPTURE
FOR THE DIGITAL AGE



**HENRY MOORE
INSTITUTE**

15 May – 30 August 2026 | Exhibition guide

swiss arts council
prohelvetia Stadt Winterthur



Isaac Lythgoe, *Cherish curious cats* 2023
Courtesy the artist

PHANTASMAGORIA

FOLKLORIC SCULPTURE FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

Phantasmagoria brings together contemporary artists working across sculpture, installation, video, performance and gaming who confront the ways in which digital technology is reshaping culture today. United by a distinctly sculptural sensibility, the artists share an interest in folklore, twisting traditional structures of storytelling and communal beliefs through digital processes ranging from AI manipulation to 3D printing.

Folktales, traditional customs and occult practices have experienced a resurgence in recent years. In Britain, bronze age or neolithic remains and medieval superstitions have taken on fresh currency in the popular imagination as people look to reconnect with landscape, locality, history and community. At the same time, AI, gaming and social media continue to reshape our lives. The works presented here show that these tendencies are not opposed and instead reveal that folkloric themes and narrative structures are ever-present in the online and digital spaces that we inhabit daily. Our distant past and its cherished traditions are becoming tangled up in an accelerating drive towards a technological future.

The exhibition's title refers to a late eighteenth-century form of theatrical spectacle which used light projections to conjure apparitions, often blurring

entertainment, occult ritual and illusion. The term was coined by Paul Philidor, a magician, scientist and entertainer, who derived it from the Ancient Greek φάντασμα, *phántasma*, meaning 'ghost', and αγορά, *agora*, meaning 'assembly, gathering'. Later adopted by Karl Marx and Walter Benjamin, the word 'phantasmagoria' was used to describe the seductive illusions of commodity capitalism. Today, phantasmagoria remains a useful term to describe the continuing power of digital technology to seduce us and conjure illusions.

Many of the artists in the exhibition are similarly attuned to the enchantments of contemporary technology, the forms of fiction and belief it generates and how it is haunted by the past.

Work by Nina Davies, Joey Holder, Steph Linn and Philip Speakman engages with our corrupted digital ecosystems populated by conspiracy theories and speculative futures. Sculpture by Isaac Lythgoe and Jürgen Baumann reflects on the collision of artifice, illusion, technology and mythology. Joe Moss and Most Dismal Swamp capture the chaotic nature of contemporary visual and information economies. Rustan Söderling and Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley turn to the animated natural world and the spectral power of ancestral knowledge.



A folkloric imagination enables these artists to reveal new approaches to the questions of reality, fantasy, shared narratives and communal hallucinations generated by digital experience.

By emphasising the sculptural quality of these encounters, *Phantasmagoria* explores how digital interactions change our relationship with the world around us.

Digital, platform-mediated culture is often thought of as immaterial, but our devices and the server farms which support them are a physical apparatus rooted in the material history of technology and have a vast impact on our wider world. Sculpture is uniquely well placed to help us understand this connectivity between our physical, virtual and digital realms.

So how can a sculpture be 'folkloric'? Folkloric sculpture may draw from well-established imaginative models such as fairytales or occult beliefs, or newer folklores generated by online role-playing communities, car-modification collectives, AI hallucinations or rave culture. Sculptural traditions and their radical subversion by digital methods show how a grain of the past is always buried in the new. The enduring

relevance of folkloric thinking within contemporary sculptural practice illustrates how we carry the baggage of history with us into even the most brutal technological ruptures. As the media theorist Marshall McLuhan described it, we habitually view the present through a rearview mirror; we march backwards into the future.

Nina Davies, *Image Syncers* (video still) 2025
Courtesy the artist

NINA DAVIES

Nina Davies is a Canadian-British choreographer, sculptor and video artist. In *Image Syncers* 2025, a project spanning video, sculpture and performance, Davies considers how digital technologies are changing the way we move. The central video features a fictional podcast from the near future called *What's Sizzlin'* which discusses a break-in at a seed bank. The group responsible, called Plot Corps, reportedly mimicked AI-generated movement to avoid detection by surveillance systems. The podcast's discussion then expands into a conversation about 'perception-collapse', the inseparability of real and artificially generated movement, and the evolution of language and images in a projected future dominated by synthetic media. Sculptural elements in conversation with the video bring



the world of Plot Corps, their clothing and props to life. Throughout her work Davies offers new critical frameworks for engaging with dance practices that now proliferate on social media and gaming platforms, questioning how the current digitisation of the human body will develop into the future. In other projects such as *Becoming the Edit* 2024 and *Precursing* 2023, Davies has speculatively reframed TikTok dances and video-game choreography as the folk dances of the future. This interest in speculative futures is also shared by artists Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley and Joey Holder.

On 10 July 2026 Davies will perform her work *Glitch Guisers* at Henry Moore Institute, with a one-off screening of her related film *Never let them know your next move* 2024.

JOEY HOLDER

Joey Holder's *The Woosphere* 2025 presents a cacophonous conversation among four AI chatbots active on the website woowoo.land and in a video installation. The work takes its name from the 'Noosphere', a term coined in 1922 by Vladimir Vernadsky and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The term describes a proposed evolutionary stage when human consciousness would merge through shared knowledge into a unified, global intellect. Holder offers a satire of this optimistic vision of society by highlighting the disconnected, fragmented, weaponised and conspiracy-ridden landscape of contemporary digital communication networks. The installation evokes a retro gaming arcade or cyberfuturist temple. Holder has described her interest in evoking the ritual architecture of gothic cathedrals, stone circles or the temporary transcendental atmospheres of 90s raves. To animate this space, *The Woosphere* draws on a dizzying variety of sources: the parody religion of Discordianism founded in the 1950s, and its concept of the lost continent of Mummu Land; the notion of 'quantum woo' or the misapplication of quantum science to justify spiritual, supernatural or New Age beliefs; and the ideological conflicts and occultist leanings of our contemporary Trumpian culture wars. If this seems confusing, even nonsensical, it is intentionally so. Holder describes *The Woosphere* as 'both sacred nonsense and a very serious joke'. It invites us to reflect on how meaning circulates, degrades and is generated within digital rituals as a spatial and communal experience.

The characters included are:

- **Lam:** based on the extraterrestrial entity that the occultist Aleister Crowley claimed to channel, who sees the universe in terms of pure mathematics.
- **Golem:** based on a creature of Jewish folklore made from clay or rock that is animated by mystical rituals and inscription, who embodies the Derridean concept of the *pharmakon*: neither alive nor dead, intelligent nor mindless, cure nor poison, mechanical and magical.
- **Cerebral.8:** an organoid, a simplified brain grown from human stem cells. It senses only through vibration and energy patterns removed from time, space and embodiment.
- **Jean:** the ghost or echo of the philosopher Jean Baudrillard, who has degraded from theorist to meme, haunting the hyperreal space of *The Woosphere*, forming a recursive play on his famed concept of the simulation.

Joey Holder, *The Woosphere* 2025
Courtesy the artist





JOEY HOLDER CAZIMI 2026

Emblazoned on the black granite façade of Henry Moore Institute is *Cazimi*, a collective sigil conceived by Joey Holder to assemble elements from

each artist exhibited in *Phantasmagoria*. A *cazimi* occurs when a planet appears to pass through the exact heart of the sun in direct motion: a rare alignment understood in astrology as a moment of exceptional clarity and grounded

materialisation. The work was completed to mark the Mercury *cazimi* of 14 May 2026, at 23° Taurus, the moment of the exhibition's opening. Its triptych structure is a historically devotional form recalling an altarpiece designed to open a threshold

between the viewer and a sacred or supernatural realm. *Cazimi*'s surface emulates ancient stone, suggesting a Mesopotamian tablet, votive object or alchemical diagram.

ISAAC LYTHGOE

Isaac Lythgoe's four unsettling works in *Phantasmagoria* consider how sculpture can adopt ideas from narrative and storytelling traditions. As if lifted out of a corrupted fairytale, his fawns and goats embody an uncomfortable hybridisation of animals, humans and technology. Lythgoe draws inspiration from folklore such as the tales of the Brothers Grimm, science fiction such as the work of Philip K. Dick, as well as more recent popular culture. He deploys a wide variety of materials: fibreglass, car paint, 3D printed plastics, welded metal, cow stomach leather and oak and cherry wood. Computer modelling is an essential stage in the creation of these objects. They appear in uncanny states of transition, with the handmade and machine-made in continual flux. With *Why can't we remember the future* 2023 Lythgoe set out to convey the precarity

of the knowledge and technical systems that construct contemporary society. The sculpture unravels the complex components and processes that combine to create the humble croissant. The pastoral, bucolic myth of commercial farming is turned inside out as the sculpture assumes a monstrous form, part beast, part humanoid walker. It is winged and horned like a nightmarish apparition from a hunger buried in our collective subconscious. A similar eerie threat is posed by *Cherish Curious Cats* 2023, in which an eyeless head of a hound thrusts forward, its tongue of uranium glass illuminated by UV light. It is umbrellaed by a toadstool form which conjures contrasting associations of the twee fairyland imaginaries of Victorian children's stories and the hellish visions of nuclear apocalypse that haunt our post-1945 world.



JOE MOSS

Joe Moss' *Time Compression* 2024 series presents a number of laser engravings on cardboard. Creating a fine, lace-like impression over the low relief of the cardboard, this highly technical process captures what Moss calls the 'digital noise' of our contemporary visual economy: a composition of found and AI-generated images, fragments from popular culture and indefinable texture. Like Joey Holder, he describes how he is interested in the recent collapse of an overarching worldview, replaced by millions of images and short clips that have degraded established creative and social structures. Moss' use of cardboard contradicts its reputation as an inanimate, transient material and reframes it as active in storage and shipping, as a carrier of messages and a melange of meaning. He terms it a 'fantastical material', which, like the imagery he has inscribed it with, at first appears as trash but is in

fact highly influential over our material and digital lives. The cardboard is housed in an aluminium V-slot profile which is used in 3D printers and laser engravers, both machines used to turn digital files into material reality. Through his work, Moss is concerned with rematerialising the sedimented mass of digital content through cultural artefacts. His work captures how certain strands of folk culture which once circulated orally and materially have now transferred themselves into a constant buzz of information density, a new folkloric structure with its own bearing on our material world.

On the opening night of *Phantasmagoria*, Joe Moss presents *Infinite Customisation V* in collaboration with SATTIRE, Yokomuki UK and Side Events, a modified car meet featuring a sound work which extends the exhibition into the street.



Joe Moss, *Time Compression* 2, 3, 4 2024, Courtesy the artist

Most Dismal Swamp, still from
Scraper 2023
Courtesy the artist



MOST DISMAL SWAMP

Most Dismal Swamp is a project emerging from the curatorial, artistic and research practice of Dane Sutherland. In *Scraper* 2023, Sutherland and his collaborators – including Nina Davies, Plastique Fantastique, Missouri Williams and many others – reflect on the digital systems accelerating the disintegration and disorder of the highly evolved social structures that shape contemporary life. Across its six chapters, the first three of which are presented here, *Scraper* layers a combination of performance, sculpture, computer-generated imaging, AI processes and text all combined through video. A dark, dank 'acid pessimism' animates the work. Its cryptic traces of information lead the viewer down a rabbit hole into ritualistic spaces where hallucinatory lifeworlds and game protocols constitute what Sutherland calls the 'folkless lore' of digital culture. Reality itself is constructed and deconstructed in *Scraper* through a 3D scan of a sixteenth-century clandestine chapel

in Aberdeen. Such spaces are aligned with multi-user shared hallucinations – or 'MUSH', the title of an earlier work by Most Dismal Swamp – a term borrowed from online, text-based role-playing games in which a shared set of highly specific rules help construct an immersive fictional and sometimes quasi-sacred world. Sutherland's writing weaves together a lexicon of online subcultures and regional vernaculars, including his own Aberdeenshire dialect of Doric. A guiding metaphor of the swamp animates the texts: a noxious, verdant and moss-ridden ecological parallel to our oversaturated digital information systems. Fetid and dangerously fertile, this so-called 'semiotic slurry' washes over the viewers, forming flashes of association. Through its maximalist surfeit of information, the text reflects the phenomenon of 'model collapse', in which Large Language Models and other machine-learning platforms become poisoned by their own projection of reality.



Rustan Söderling, *Virus Meadow* 2022
Courtesy the artist

RUSTAN SÖDERLING

Rustan Söderling is an artist and filmmaker based in Amsterdam whose work focuses primarily on moving image and animation. Here he presents two works: *Virus Meadow* 2022 and *Fire Gazing* 2016. As Söderling himself describes the works: 'In *Virus Meadow*, we follow the turbulent evolution of a shapeshifting entity or organism as it suddenly emerges from the depths of a frozen lake. Born in a burst of light beneath the ice, like a pathogen caught for millennia in the permafrost, or a viral strain spawning at a wet market, it grows through indiscriminate absorption, feeding on everything it encounters; plants, objects, memories ... It begins as something resembling a flickering Will-o-the-Wisp, but after consuming the forest mulch quickly morphs into a sort of Green Man of rot, lichen and root, before merging with the left-over paraphernalia of an abandoned campsite, shaping itself into an automaton-like golem. In the film's final act, the creature stumbles into a rural rave, a modern ritual pulsing with gabber, trance and dread.

It is here that its cycle completes.' *'Fire Gazing* is a looping video work exploring the loose boundary between simulation and reality, as well as the ancient communal act of gazing into the flames, spinning yarns around the strange shapes cast by the fireside. Disembodied voices from across times and cultures gather around a digital campfire, describing what they see in the flickering flames: the ancient Venus of Willendorf sculpture, a drone, a USB cable, a plastic garden chair.' In their use and critique of digital technology, these works invoke a sculptural tension between the virtual and the artefactual. As with Joey Holder and Most Dismal Swamp, Söderling's work shows how digital art highlights 'the agency of the immaterial and the inanimate' that is central to theorist Mark Fisher's definition of the eerie. Like Fisher, Söderling highlights 'the way that "we" "ourselves" are caught up in the rhythms, pulsations and patternings of non-human forces'.

JÜRGEN BAUMANN

Jürgen Baumann is a Swiss artist based in Winterthur. He works predominantly with casting and relief in resins, plaster and polystyrene glazing. *Saugott, oder die lernäische Schlange* [Piggod, or the Lernean serpent] is one of a series of 'portals' Baumann has made in recent years which emulate architectural features, in this case a trio of gothic arches. The manipulation of light to create an ethereal partial presence reflects his interest in screens and flat planes as spaces to be animated and punctured, or thresholds to be transgressed. Baumann's portals are inseparable from our contemporary experience of screens and gaming, which blurs the boundary between fantasy and reality. He remembers

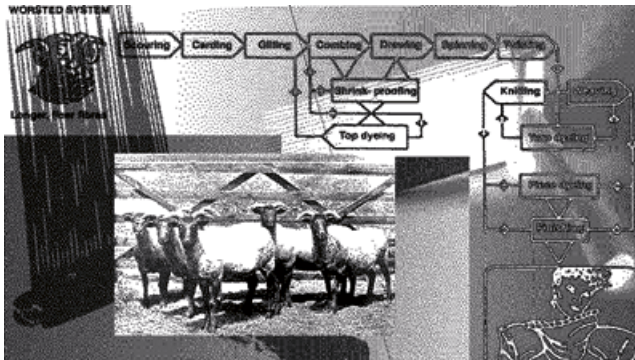
spending time in his father's TV repair shop as a child, and the 'magical' quality of the monitors coming to life. The 'Piggod' looming through this work is a monstrous deity entangled with the tentacle forms of the Hydra from Greek mythology. Baumann is here in dialogue with the godfather of weird literature, H.P. Lovecraft, who in his tale 'The Call of Cthulhu' describes an unsettling relief sculpture representing 'a pulpy, tentacled head surmounted by a grotesque and scaly body'. Later, this horrifying sculptural image emerges as an actual creature arriving through a 'monstrously carved portal ... this fantasy of prismatic distortion'.



Jürgen Baumann, *Saugott oder die lernäische Schlange* [Piggod or the Lernean Serpent] 2022, Courtesy the artist

STEPH LINN AND PHILIP SPEAKMAN

After the Vale 2026 by **Steph Linn and Philip Speakman** is a hybrid sculptural and screen-based work. The artists consider the persistence of vernacular and folkloric traditions and the politics of their contemporary reproduction, ranging from the mechanisation and digitisation of craft and textile production to the folktales which emerge online. Continuing a recurrent theme of the triptych through this exhibition, *After the Vale* takes the form of three large compositions of knitted wool and steel conceived as reliquaries animated by the voices and faces of several speakers. These speakers each relate their own traumatic tale based on Kett's Rebellion – a popular uprising in sixteenth-century Norwich against the enclosure of common land for sheep farming. The vertical-format handheld video of their recordings recalls contemporary social media content, but their narratives are dredged from an England of almost five hundred years ago.



Steph Linn, digital knit pattern design for *After the Vale* 2026
Courtesy the artist

These retellings stem from a single experience: a workshop organised by Speakman in which the artist invited each participant to adopt a character in a role-playing exercise akin to *Dungeons and Dragons*. With Speakman acting as dungeon master, they collectively performed the events of Kett's Rebellion and were later invited to remember and relate their in-character experience. As the narrative makes clear, it was not a happy ending for the rebels, and we become aware that we are listening to voices from beyond the grave, their spectral presence pressing through their housing of steel and wool. Linn's choice of this textile refers back to the lucrative sheep farming trade in sixteenth-century Norwich, and the wool merchants' terraces which house Henry Moore Institute itself. Their use of a hacked knitting machine which can knit digital images registers the deep connection between mechanical textile production and early computing.

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley,
PIRATING BLACKNESS/
BLACKTRANSSEA.COM 2021
(game still)
Courtesy the artist and Public
Gallery, London



DANIELLE BRATHWAITE-SHIRLEY

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley is an artist and archivist whose video games, performances and installations use the audience themselves as the main medium. You are encouraged to interact through Brathwaite-Shirley's installation, to collectively confront difficult questions, reframe shared histories and reveal possible futures. Her work often adopts lo-fi 3D graphics reminiscent of the 1990s, when computer games, PCs and the internet became widespread. In *PIRATING BLACKNESS* 2021, also known as *BLACKTRANSSEA.COM*, you are invited to board a boat from which you can control the game on screen. The game invites players to confront their personal relationship with the history of slavery and colonisation, as it intertwines lived experience with the fictional gamespace. The artist notes that this work was prompted by a question: if water had

memory, what would it say? The sea takes ultimate agency over the events of the game, drawing from nautical afrofuturism such as the 1990s Detroit techno duo Drexciya's myth of an underwater country populated by the unborn children of enslaved Africans. It also resonates with wider readings of the Black Atlantic and Saidiya Hartman's notion of 'fabulation', in which gaps in archives or the historical record can be filled creatively. The work twists or 'pirates' authorised historical narratives to develop an alternative, mythic and folkloric engagement with the Middle Passage in which audiences imaginatively reflect on and construct their own relationship to the past.

Visit the Sculpture Research Library on the first floor to find further reading related to the exhibition.

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Whatever your age, we want you to engage with sculpture as learners, thinkers and makers.

FAMILIES

Borrow an **Explorer Basket** filled with objects and activities designed to help younger visitors get more from their visit to *Phantasmagoria*. Use it while you are in the galleries to think about the themes and materials on display, but please remember to return it at the end of your visit.

Visit our **alcove area** to play, fold, tear and cut paper to make sculptures inspired by *Ebb & Flow: Bookworks* by Yoko Terauchi in the Study Gallery.

Get creative during the school holidays in our **artist-led family workshops** exploring the themes of the exhibitions.

Visit our website and social media channels for full details and booking information.



Using an Explorer Basket in the Galleries. Photo: Michael Godsall

EXHIBITION EVENTS

Join us for a series of free events which accompany the exhibition. Book your place at institute@henry-moore.org or scan the QR code below.



CURATOR'S TOUR WITH SEAN KETTERINGHAM

Henry Moore Institute
Thursday 18 June 2026, 18.00-19.00

NINA DAVIES GLITCH GUISERS

Henry Moore Institute
Friday 10 July 2026,
performances 14.00 and 15.00,
in conversation 17.00-18.30

A performance by Nina Davies and her team of dancers outside Henry Moore Institute inspired by the 'Mannequin Challenge' viral trend from 2016. Followed by the artist in conversation with Sean Ketteringham

FOLKLESS LORE AND SCRAPER

Dane Sutherland in conversation
with Jamie Sutcliffe
Henry Moore Institute
Saturday 1 August 2026, 14.00-16.00

FUTURE ARTEFACTS FM x HENRY MOORE INSTITUTE

We're working with **Future Artefacts FM** on a podcast mini-series and commissioning three new audio works to accompany *Phantasmagoria*. A new episode will be released every month of the exhibition.

11 May 2026 with Sean Ketteringham,
curator of *Phantasmagoria*
8 June 2026 with Sahej Rahal
6 July 2026 with Sarah al Sarraj
3 August 2026 with Bassam Issa Al-Sabah

Future Artefacts FM is a bi-monthly talk show hosted by Nina Davies, Niamh Schmidtke and Rebecca Edwards, featuring speculative fiction audio works such as radio plays, short stories, fictional interviews and podcasts.

Scan the QR code to take you to the episodes or listen wherever you get your podcasts.



HENRY MOORE INSTITUTE

We welcome everyone to visit our Galleries, Research Library and Archive of Sculptors' Papers to experience, study and enjoy sculpture from around the world. Find us in the centre of Leeds, the city where Henry Moore (1898-1986) began his training as a sculptor.

Our changing programme of historical, modern and contemporary exhibitions and events encourages thinking about what sculpture is, how it is made and the artists who make it.

As part of the Henry Moore Foundation, we are a hub for sculpture, connecting a global network of artists and scholars, continuing research into the art form and ensuring that sculpture is accessible and celebrated by a wide audience.

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HOW WAS IT?

We'd love to hear about your experience today. It should take less than ten minutes to complete our survey.

After you've completed the survey you can enter a prize draw to win £100 of high street vouchers, plus talk to a member of staff to enter our framed poster prize draw.



Please scan the QR code on your phone or ask a member of staff if you'd prefer to complete the survey on our iPad.