

Press Release, 29th July 2025

DANIELLE BRATHWAITE-SHIRLEY *THE DELUSION*

At Serpentine North

30 September 2025 - 18 January 2026

Press View: 29 September 2025, 9:00 am-12 pm

Please RSVP to: press@serpentinegalleries.org



Images: *THE DELUSION*, 2025. Courtesy Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley and Portrait, 2025. Courtesy Stefano Venturi,

Serpentine is delighted to present *THE DELUSION*, the most ambitious project to date by London and Berlin-based British artist and game designer Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley.

THE DELUSION will debut a groundbreaking video game commission, a multiplayer immersive experience run on game engines that explores themes of polarisation, censorship and social connection. It will be presented at Serpentine North, from 30 September 2025 to 18 January 2026.

THE DELUSION will combine satire and absurd humour with cooperative gaming and participatory theatre to explore the real-world impacts of societal division.

Placing the audience at the heart of the experience, the project invites participants to pause, discuss, and reconnect. Conceived as a live “community play” and meeting space, the

exhibition will encourage open discussions, shared reflections, and ways to engage with some of the most challenging sociopolitical issues we face today.

THE DELUSION brings together artists, researchers, technologists and members of Brathwaite-Shirley's Black Trans and Queer community. The project combines advanced technologies with older or 'obsolete' techniques, including 2D and 3D sprite animation and the open-source, community-built game engine UPBGE (Uchronia Project Blender Game Engine).

This project continues Serpentine's engagement and support of Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley's practice, including a significant period of R&D in 2021, developing prototypes and experimental hybrid gaming projects including *WE CAN'T DO THIS ALONE, YOUR PRESENCE ALONE CHANGES HOW OTHERS BREATHE*, and *THE LACK*, co-commissioned by Art Night, NeON Digital Arts and Serpentine Arts Technologies for Art Night Dundee 2023.

Blending fact with speculative fiction, the original narrative concept for the project was a zine developed by the artist, called '*Below the Blue Line*', set in a post-apocalyptic fictional world at a moment of great turmoil: a new era called 'Peace by Isolation'.

The project marks the continuation of Serpentine Arts Technologies' ongoing commitment to exploring the creative and civic potential of video game technologies. An area of focus for the department is game engines and expanded forms of gaming that exist between both digital and physical contexts. Previous projects have included: Ian Cheng, *Bad Corgi* (2015) and *B.O.B.* (2018), Jakob Kudsk Steensen, *Catharsis* (2020); Trust, *Hivemind* (2022), and Gabriel Massan & Collaborators, *Third World: The Bottom Dimension* (2023) that has been touring since its first presentation at Serpentine North in 2023.

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley says: "*THE DELUSION* is about having difficult conversations. How can we use interactivity to offer a space for this? How can we make galleries functional again, supporting what emerges during a show as the work itself? We're working at a weird frontier of games, trying to break the expectations for games to be fun. Rather than a place to lose yourselves in, this game facilitates an environment I'm calling a 'human engine', that allows people to work through difficult emotions and feelings. We're using game engines and interactivity to pull people out of the virtual world and instead allow them to ground themselves in the physical world and what's going on at this present moment. The work is not

about what's in the games, it's about what comes out of people's mouths, enabling new connections and conversations in real-time.

Art should provide a safe space for grappling with real issues without anxiety or fear but we're in danger of losing that. *THE DELUSION* is an exercise of anti-censorship. It's an exercise of freedom to speak out and question things to make an environment for other people to feel like they can do the same. It expands my concern with social and historical erasure, but it's also a challenge to myself - not to erase certain conversations, people or views that I may disagree with. The work is a place to view yourself and a mirror of society - and it's messy! I'm focused on what archives can do and how they can function. How they can be used to allow people to process life and not be something that's stuck in the past or on the screen. *THE DELUSION* centres the decisions, actions and change happening in the gallery itself."

Bettina Korek, CEO, Serpentine, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director, Serpentine, say:
"We are thrilled to provide Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley with a platform for this groundbreaking live experiment. *THE DELUSION* embodies everything Serpentine stands for: a place of exciting experimentation, where new connections between artists and audiences come to life. Brathwaite-Shirley's visionary use of gaming and participatory performance to explore polarisation, censorship, and hope reflects the urgent conversations shaping our world today. This commission continues Serpentine Arts Technologies' commitment to pushing the boundaries of art and technology, while also showcasing the institution's ongoing leadership in R&D."

THE DELUSION will transform the gallery into an immersive installation that hosts and activates the new video game commission conceived by Brathwaite-Shirley and collaborators.

Visitors will be initiated into the experience through a set of Terms and Conditions that open the exhibition. At its centre are a collection of new multiplayer video games that function as portals through which players can enter deeper into this speculative world. The games are 'mods' of classic arcade or cooperative games such as *Monkey Ball*, with bespoke controllers designed by the artist together with Ivaylo Getov and Vincent Moulinet.

As visitors move through the space, a series of prompts and exercises will shift their experience, turning the gallery into a live theatrical space. Embracing improvisation as a critical method and welcoming the complexity of lived experience, *THE DELUSION* explores what it truly means to live together. Danielle invites engagement in honest and difficult conversations that ‘feed’ the game’s engine, encouraging reconnection with others in real time. Soundtracks by Loraine James will ground visitors in one of the three emotional moods through which the experience is available.

The environment’s visual language draws on the artist’s personal history, religious and spiritual symbols, and historical propaganda. It is interwoven with elements of horror including the game *Paratopic* and *The Backrooms*. The space is conceived in collaboration with set designer Lydia Chan.

THE DELUSION archives recent news headlines and social media posts, conversations with spiritual leaders and social activists, and testimonies from Brathwaite-Shirley’s community, alongside the artist’s own autobiographical notes, to reflect wide-ranging and diverse perspectives.

The exhibition also features original ink drawings, and newly commissioned works, including a stained-glass piece that narrates the story of the game world’s inciting incident: the ‘*Day of Division*’, and a series of sculptural effigies.

A dedicated reading space will offer access to the project’s originating zine, early sketches, and development materials, alongside selected texts from the artist’s community.

Alongside the exhibition, Serpentine will release a major publication co-published with Archive Books. The book will offer intimate insight into the project in a gamified interactive style and will also be the artist’s first official monograph. Contributors include Rebecca Allen, Barby Asante, Tamar Clarke-Brown, Shenece Oretha, Legacy Russell, Ebun Sodipo, Helen Starr, Mindy Seu, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Kay Watson and McKenzie Wark. The book is edited by Tamar Clarke-Brown with Cairo Clarke, Managing Editor and designed by Jamie Reid Studio. A Limited Edition will also accompany the exhibition.

THE DELUSION is commissioned and produced by Serpentine Arts Technologies, led by Kay Watson, Head of Arts Technologies. This project is curated and led by Tamar Clarke-Brown, Curator, Arts Technologies, with Ruth Waters, Arts Technologies Producer and Vi Trinh, Arts Technologies Assistant Curator, with additional support from Liz Stumpf, Assistant Exhibitions Curator.

It will also be supported by the Future Art Ecosystems initiative in the development of technical, legal and creative R&D to be shared with the wider cultural sector led by Victoria Ivanova, R&D Strategic Lead and Tommie Introna, R&D Producer.

Notes to Editors

About Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley (b. 1995, London) lives and works between Berlin and London. Working predominantly in animation, sound, performance and video game development, and with a background in DIY print media and activism, the artist's practice focuses on intertwining lived experience with fiction to imaginatively retell and archive the stories of Black Trans people. Danielle utilises interactive technologies to create participatory spaces that challenge traditional narratives and encourage active engagement. Their projects often take the form of immersive video games, where players navigate choices that confront their assumptions and biases, fostering deeper conversations about identity, privilege, and systemic oppression. Through their innovative use of digital media, Danielle not only preserves histories but also envisions inclusive futures where the voices of those that are ignored or erased are central. Their work is both 'archive and insurgency', a catalyst for dialogue, inviting audiences to reflect on their roles within broader societal structures.

Danielle has presented recent solo exhibitions at institutions such as LAS Foundation, Halle am Berghain, Berlin (2024); Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona (2024); Studio Voltaire, London (2024); Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève (2024); SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah (2023); Villa Arson, Nice (2023); HAU Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin (2023); FACT, Liverpool (2022); Project Arts Centre, Dublin (2022); Skånes konstförening, Malmö (2022); Arebyte Gallery, London (2021); QUAD, Derby (2021); Focal Point Gallery, Southend-on-Sea (2020). Her/their work has

been included in group exhibitions at institutions such as Art Museum at the University of Toronto (2024); National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Seoul (2023); Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, New York (2023); Das Centre Pompidou, Metz (2023); Julia Stoschek Foundation, Berlin (2022); Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo (2021); Les Urbaines, Lausanne (2019); and Barbican, London (2018). Her/their work has been the subject of screenings and performances at institutions including Tate Modern, London (2024, 2020); MoMA, New York (2023); DePaul Art Museum, Chicago (2023); Serpentine, London (2022); Spike Island, Bristol (2022); and South London Gallery (2022). Permanent collections include the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The dialogue and narrative scenarios were produced through a Writer's Room in early 2025 led by writer and performer Travis Alabanza, Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley and Serpentine Arts Technologies in which a group of writers including Alabanza, Tatenda Shamiso, Shaznay Martin and Brooke Maggs, responded to Brathwaite-Shirley's short graphic novel *Below the Blue Line*. *THE DELUSION* is intended for an adult audience.

Key Collaborators include

Writer's Room by Travis Alabanza, Tatenda Shamiso, Shaznay Martin

Music by Loraine James, Guillaume Tiger

Game Narrative Design by Brooke Maggs

Movement Direction by Malik Nashad Sharpe

Exhibition Design by Lydia Chan

Technical Direction, Game & Controller Design by Vincent Moulinet

Game Development & Engine Integration by Leo Auersperg

Game Development & Network Programming by Florian Brückner

Controller Engineering by Ivaylo Getov

Research and Advisory Support from Julia Ebner, Meghna Jayanth, Christopher Summerfield, Dr Stephen Reicher, Celia Hodent and Alan Resnick.

About UPBGE

Uchronia Project Blender Game Engine is an open-source game engine built on top of Blender. The engine seamlessly integrates with Blender's interface, allowing indie developers to create

games entirely within the Blender ecosystem, without learning separate tools and utilising the integrated workflow. Uchronia means “a genre of speculative fiction that reimagines historical events going in new, imaginary directions”, so named because it symbolises the ideals of the open source, rhizomatic structured development of a game engine.

About Serpentine

Building new connections between artists and audiences, Serpentine presents pioneering contemporary art exhibitions and cultural events with a legacy that stretches back over half a century, from a wide range of emerging practitioners to the most internationally recognised artists, writers, scientists, thinkers, and cultural thought leaders of our time.

Based in London's Kensington Gardens, across two sites, Serpentine North and Serpentine South, Serpentine features a year-round, free programme of exhibitions, architectural showcases, education, live events and technological activations, in the park and beyond the gallery walls.

The Serpentine Pavilion is a yearly pioneering commission, which began in 2000 with Dame Zaha Hadid. It features the first UK structures by some of the biggest names in international architecture.

Public art has emerged as a central strand of Serpentine's programme. Major presentations include a collection of Eduardo Paolozzi's sculptures (1987), Anish Kapoor's *Turning the World Upside Down* (2010), Lee Ufan's *Relatum-Stage* (2018/19), Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *London Mastaba* in the Serpentine Lake (2018), *I LOVE YOU EARTH* by Yoko Ono (2021) and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's *In remembrance of the coming alien* (Alienor) (2022), Gerhard Richter's

STRIP-TOWER (2023) and Yayoi Kusama's *Pumpkin* (2024) and Esther Mahlangu's mural *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (2024).

Proud to maintain free access for all visitors, thanks to its unique location, Serpentine also reaches an exceptionally broad audience and maintains a profound connection with its local community.

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