

# Susan Philipshz

## Seven Tears

Sep 6, 2019–Feb 2, 2020

*This exhibition is presented in six galleries: the Entrance Courtyard, Water Court, Main Gallery, Lower South Gallery, Lower Main Gallery, and Lower East Gallery. Visit the Mezzanine on the second level for additional resources.*

Berlin-based artist Susan Philipshz (b. 1965) is best known for works that explore the potential of sound to transform space, memory, and emotion. Created in response to the histories and environments of specific locations, Philipshz's installations often include her own, untrained voice and bring new light to the places in which they are sited. She has said, "I work with sound, but that sound is always installed in a particular context, and that context, with its architecture, lighting, and ambient noises, forms the entire experience of the artwork. It is a visual, aural, and emotive landscape."

*Susan Philipshz: Seven Tears* features seven works that have been brought together to animate the Pulitzer's building. The works in this exhibition span the artist's practice, from an early recorded piece to the United States premiere of a 2019 installation. Philipshz has also created a new work, titled *Too Much I Once Lamented*, for the museum's water court.

Encompassing sound, sculpture, video, painting, and photography, the works in *Seven Tears* draw on a diversity of historical and musical sources, from Elizabethan ballads to twentieth-century rock albums. With references to rivers, tears, springs, and floods, Philipshz responds to both the centrality of water within the Pulitzer's architecture and the location of St.

Louis at the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

Born in 1965 in Glasgow, Scotland, Philipsz studied sculpture at Duncan of Jordanstone College in Dundee, Scotland, and the University of Ulster in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Her work has been exhibited widely in major international venues, and her contributions have been recognized with critical acclaim including the Turner Prize in 2010, making Philipsz the first artist to receive the award for a sound work.

1. **Susan Philipsz (b. 1965)**

*The River Cycle III, 2010*

Single-channel sound installation

2:06 min., plays every 10 minutes, starting at 10am

Courtesy of the artist, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York/  
Los Angeles, and Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin

The sound of Philipsz's voice fills the Pulitzer's entrance courtyard as the artist sings the lyrics to "Pyramid Song" (2001) by the English rock band Radiohead. In *The River Cycle III*, Philipsz sings the song without any musical accompaniment, exposing the untrained quality of her voice. She embraces this characteristic, which lends the work a sense of unexpected intimacy, as though overhearing someone singing to themselves in a private moment.

For Philipsz, the song evokes the story of a drowning told from the first-person perspective. She was drawn to the track "for its fantastical lyrics which convey a sense of solemn peacefulness."

The lyrics, referencing bodies of water as sites of transition, read:

I jumped in the river and what did I see?

Black-eyed angels swam with me

A moon full of stars and astral cars

All the figures I used to see

All my lovers were there with me

All my past and futures

And we all went to heaven

in a little row boat

There was nothing to fear

and nothing to doubt

Philipsz frequently engages with songs from popular culture, seeing them as triggers for memory and emotion. She layers these familiar compositions with new meanings by presenting them in unexpected ways. The work gains added significance at the Pulitzer, for example, where a public address speaker directs Philipsz's voice outwards towards the city and the surrounding Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

# Susan Philippsz

## Water Court

2. **Susan Philippsz** (b. 1965)

*Too Much I Once*

*Lamented*, 2019

5-channel sound installation

3:14 min., plays every 10 minutes

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist, Tanya

Bonakdar Gallery, New York/

Los Angeles, and Galerie Isabella

Bortolozzi, Berlin

This sound installation takes the museum's architecture and a 1622 song by Welsh composer Thomas Tomkins as its starting points.

Titled *Too Much I Once Lamented*,

Tomkins's song takes the form of a madrigal, a type of musical composition that involves the overlay of multiple voices joined in harmony. The five-part ballad describes a heartbroken lover in a state of solitary reflection and evokes themes of loss, longing, and hope. Tomkins's lyrics read:

Too much I once lamented,  
while love my heart tormented,  
fa la la la.

Alas, and ay me,  
sat I wringing,  
now chanting go, and singing,  
fa la la la.

In her own rendition, which Philippsz developed specifically for the Pulitzer's water court, the artist sings all five parts herself. Recorded separately, each track is played on one of five speakers installed within the water court and adjoining reflecting pool.

Madrigals traditionally aim to achieve the illusion of breathlessness by layering multiple voices over one another to create a seamless whole. In contrast, Philippsz makes her inhalations and pauses clearly audible, thereby emphasizing separation over unity. According to Philippsz, "The voices weave in and out of each other but at the same time are disconnected, emphasizing feelings of solitude and isolation."

# Susan Philippsz

## Main Gallery

3. **Susan Philippsz** (b. 1965)  
*Seven Tears*, 2016  
7-channel vinyl installation,  
continuous loop  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist, Tanya  
Bonakdar Gallery, New York/  
Los Angeles, and Galerie Isabella  
Bortolozzi, Berlin

This work is comprised of seven turntables and vinyl records, each playing a single tone from English composer John Dowland's 1604 ensemble *Lachrimae*, meaning "tears" in Latin. While the original score was written for violas and lutes, Philippsz produced this recording with glass. She replicated each of the seven parts from Dowland's composition by running her finger around the rims of wine glasses filled with varying amounts of water to determine pitch. The circular form of the spinning records is a visual reminder of Philippsz's act of tracing the rim of the wine glasses to produce the sound.

Dowland produced his composition in seven melodies

and scored each with rising and falling notes intended to evoke the swelling and flowing of a single tear. *Lachrimae* was one of the most popular examples of a musical interpretation of melancholy, a state of pensive sadness that was seen as a fashionable mood during Dowland's lifetime.

# Susan Philippsz

Lower South Gallery

4. **Susan Philippsz (b. 1965)**  
*Together IV*, 2019  
Organ pipes and speakers,  
continuous loop  
Combined  $43 \frac{5}{16} \times 35 \frac{7}{16} \times 7 \frac{7}{8}$   
inches (110 × 90 × 20 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Tanya  
Bonakdar Gallery, New York/  
Los Angeles, and Galerie Isabella  
Bortolozzi, Berlin
5. **Susan Philippsz (b. 1965)**  
*Vernebelt IV*, 2016  
Chromogenic print mounted on  
Alu-Dibond behind glass  
 $19 \frac{1}{16} \times 13 \frac{3}{16}$  inches  
(50 × 33 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Tanya  
Bonakdar Gallery, New York/  
Los Angeles, and Galerie Isabella  
Bortolozzi, Berlin
6. **Susan Philippsz (b. 1965)**  
*Vernebelt V*, 2016  
Chromogenic print mounted on  
Alu-Dibond behind glass  
 $19 \frac{1}{16} \times 13 \frac{3}{16}$  inches (50 × 33 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Tanya  
Bonakdar Gallery, New York/  
Los Angeles, and Galerie Isabella  
Bortolozzi, Berlin

7. **Susan Philippsz (b. 1965)**  
*Vernebelt VII*, 2016  
Chromogenic print mounted on  
Alu-Dibond behind glass  
 $13 \frac{3}{16} \times 19 \frac{1}{16}$  inches (33 × 50 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Tanya  
Bonakdar Gallery, New York/  
Los Angeles, and Galerie Isabella  
Bortolozzi, Berlin

In *Together IV*, the deeply resonant sound of Philippsz's breath emanates from three organ pipes. After producing the recordings of her breath moving through the metal forms, Philippsz projected the sound from a small speaker placed inside each pipe. The noises from the three pipes overlap and diverge, resembling a call-and-response dialogue.

*Together IV* is paired with a series of works produced in 2016 that capture the fleeting condensation of Philippsz's breath on panes of glass. These photographs are titled *Vernebelt*, a German word relating to "mist" that was used to describe individuals who vanished without a trace under the Third Reich (1933–1945). The works reflect

# Lower South Gallery

Philipsz's extended engagement with German history, which is of particular interest to the artist, who has lived in Berlin for the past two decades.

Both *Together IV* and *Vernebelt* signal the presence of the human body indirectly, pointing to the artist's ongoing interest in "the physicality of producing sound and how that sound then defines the space you're in."

# Susan Philippsz

## Lower Main Gallery

8. **Susan Philippsz** (b. 1965)  
*Lachrimae Antiquae VII*, 2017  
Acrylic, silkscreen ink, and salt  
on canvas  
23 5/8 × 23 5/8 inches (60 × 60 cm)

*Lachrimae Tristes*  
Sad Tears

*Lachrimae Coactae*  
Forced Tears

*Lachrimae Amantis*  
A Lover's Tears

*Lachrimae Verae*  
True Tears

*Lachrimae Gementes*  
Sighing Tears

9. **Susan Philippsz** (b. 1965)  
*Lachrimae Antiquae X*, 2017  
Acrylic, silkscreen ink, and salt  
on canvas  
23 5/8 × 23 5/8 inches (60 × 60 cm)

10. **Susan Philippsz** (b. 1965)  
*Lachrimae Antiquae XXIII*, 2017  
Acrylic, silkscreen ink, and salt  
on canvas  
23 5/8 × 23 5/8 inches (60 × 60 cm)

In these three works Philippsz continues her engagement with composer John Dowland's ensemble *Lachrimae*. These paintings belong to a larger series named for each of the seven melodies Dowland wrote for his musical reflection on tears and melancholy, including:

*Lachrimae Antiquae*  
Old Tears

*Lachrimae Antiquae Novae*  
Old Tears Renewed

To create the paintings, Philippsz submerged the canvases in a salt water bath, varying the length of exposure for each work. Abstract patterns of crystallized salt in the resulting surfaces reveal the ways the water pooled and dripped across the canvases, creating a visual representation of Dowland's musical theme.

# Susan Philippsz

Lower East Gallery

11. **Susan Philippsz** (b. 1965)

*White Flood*, 2019

12-channel sound installation,  
HD film, 14:11 min.

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist, Tanya  
Bonakdar Gallery, New York/  
Los Angeles, and Galerie Isabella  
Bortolozzi, Berlin

With a double-sided projection surrounded by a series of speakers, *White Flood* is meant to be experienced in the round, exemplifying Philippsz's sculptural approach to sound. The installation features footage from a 1940 film titled *White Flood*, originally commissioned as an educational picture about glaciers and their transformational impact on the environment.

Shot in Alaska, the black-and-white film features scenes of laborers tilling the earth in expansive valleys and volcanoes violently erupting, ultimately culminating with images of colossal sheets of ice melting and joining with rushing waterways. Although the film's production company

produced a number of politically charged projects, *White Flood* read as a straightforward nature documentary when it was released.

The original film included a voiceover that provided context for the footage in addition to a score by German composer Hanns Eisler, who settled in Los Angeles in 1942 and made a brief career working on Hollywood movies before being deported in 1948 by the House Un-American Activities Committee for his socialist convictions. For this piece, Philippsz isolated the violin from Eisler's original score, separating each of the instrument's twelve tones onto unique speakers installed along the length of the gallery on either side of the screen.

*White Flood*'s soundtrack has long moments of pause punctuated by dramatic trills and staccato rhythms. For Philippsz, the silences are just as important as the notes as they emphasize considerations of "absence and separation" that are central to the work.