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Pulitzer Presents *Susan Philipsz: Seven Tears*

Exhibition features five sound installations, including new work commissioned by the Pulitzer and the U.S. premiere of a recent piece

Susan Philipsz: Seven Tears opens Sep 6, 2019; Pulitzer is only venue



Pulitzer Arts Foundation Water Court

ST. LOUIS, MO, JUN 5, 2019—The Pulitzer Arts Foundation presents *Susan Philipsz: Seven Tears*, an exhibition of five immersive sound installations by the Turner-Prize winning artist. Born in Glasgow and based in Berlin, Philipsz explores sound as found objects with the potential to

heighten our experience of space, architecture, and history. The works in the Pulitzer exhibition range from one of her earliest recorded pieces to a 2019 work that has never been shown in the U.S., to a new work commissioned by the Pulitzer and created for its central water court.

On view from September 6, 2019, through February 16, 2020, *Susan Philipsz: Seven Tears* has been curated by Pulitzer Arts Foundation Associate Curator Stephanie Weissberg. The Pulitzer is the exhibition's only venue.

Pulitzer Director Cara Starke notes, "Since its first exhibition, the Pulitzer has been celebrated as a superb environment in which to view art. This exhibition of work by the brilliant Susan Philipsz adds a new dimension to the experience of the museum, using sound to heighten our perceptions of the building and its context. We look forward to sharing this with our visitors."

Weissberg says, "Susan Philipsz's work, which she has described as 'visual, aural, and emotive landscape[s],' link the personal and the collective, provoking an awareness of both where we are

at a particular moment and the larger architectural and historic contexts of those places. It is our hope that *Susan Philipsz: Seven Tears*—which will bring the Pulitzer galleries to life with sound that ranges from a seventeenth-century madrigal to a song by rock band Radiohead—will shed new light on Philipsz’s profound and poetic practice, as well as on the Pulitzer, its architecture, and its location in the city of St. Louis.”

Exhibition

Susan Philipsz: Seven Tears will be installed throughout the Pulitzer building. The first work in the exhibition, *Filter* (1998), originally created for a bus station in Belfast, occupies the museum’s entry courtyard—an intermediary space between the street and the museum. There, visitors will hear Philipsz’s untrained voice singing Radiohead’s 1997 tune *Airbag*. Performing a slow, lilting rendition that sounds more like a Scottish ballad than a contemporary rock tune, she imbues the song with new meaning, reflecting her view of the original site—the bus station—as a place of transition rather than a destination, and as a site of longing and escapism. As with all of her works, *Filter* will take on new resonance when restaged in this different location which, though also transitional, is a quiet, contemplative space, sheltered from the street by architect Tadao Ando’s composition of concrete and glass.

The Pulitzer’s water court, with its ever-changing reflections of the surrounding environment, will be the site of *Too Much / Once Lamented*, a new work commissioned by the Pulitzer for this exhibition. The five-channel immersive sound installation will feature Philipsz’s own voice singing a seventeenth-century madrigal of the same title by Welsh composer Thomas Tomkins, which

expresses the torments of love through an alternately woeful and spirited composition. Together, the song and the site combine to evoke reflection and lamentation, and are a response not only to the site of the work at the Pulitzer, but also to St. Louis’s position at the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers.



Susan Philipsz, *Seven Tears*, 2016. Installation view at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York

The exhibition’s namesake, *Seven Tears* (2016), is installed in the expansive main gallery. Philipsz was inspired to create this work by a group of seven melodies by the Elizabethan

composer and lutenist John Dowland titled *Lachrimae*, the Latin word for tears. Each of the tunes contains rising and falling notes intended to evoke the welling and flowing of tears. While Dowland’s work was written for viola and lute, Philipsz played the piece by running her finger around the rims of seven wine glasses filled with varying amounts of water to determine the pitch.

Each of the seven recordings that constitute Philipsz's version of *Lachrimae* is played on a traditional record player, a reference to the original location of the work, in Hannover, Germany, where vinyl was invented. As a whole, the work provides a unique sonic-spatial experience, where visitors can literally walk through the song, experiencing the sound differently depending on their physical location. Moreover, it takes on new meaning at the Pulitzer, where the gallery looks out on to the water court, reinforcing the evocations of tears and water.

The exhibition continues in the Pulitzer's lower south gallery with *Together IV* (2019), consisting of three organ pipes installed on a platform. Philipsz recorded her breath moving through these component parts of a disused organ and then projected the sound through a small speaker inside each pipe. When filtered through the metal pipes, the artist's exhalation is deeply resonant, with the convergence of the three recordings resembling a call and response dialogue.



Susan Philipsz, *Vernebelt VII*, 2016

In its installation at the Pulitzer, *Together IV* is accompanied by *Vernebelt* (2016), a series of photographs by Philipsz that capture the condensation of her breath on glass. The inherently elusive subject of this series is referenced by its title: "Vernebelt" is a German word, related to "mist," that was used to describe individuals who vanished during the Third Reich. Yet both the sound work and the photographs evoke not only absence and frailty, but also human presence, signaling persistence and connection.

Susan Philipsz: Seven Tears concludes with the U.S. premiere of *White Flood* (2019). This immersive installation centers on a 14-minute film of the same name, produced by Frontier Films in 1940. Focusing on glaciers and their environmental impact, the documentary encompasses stunning black-and-white footage shot in Alaska. At the time of its making, the film would not have been foreboding, but today, footage of colossal sheets of ice melting and joining with rushing waterways holds a very different set of associations. Within the context of St. Louis, which is located on a flood plain, the images are both familiar and ominous.

The original score for *White Flood* was written by Austrian composer Hans Eisler, to whose music Philipsz has returned several times. For this work, she isolated the violin from Eisler's score, separating each of the instrument's twelve tones onto one of twelve speakers. At the Pulitzer, they are installed on two walls running the length of the gallery, with the screen in the center of the space. Philipsz's soundtrack contains long pauses punctuated by dramatic trills and staccato notes. The pauses, which stand as reminders of absence and loss, are as important as the notes, providing space for thoughts and associations that take visitors beyond the walls of the museum.

About the Pulitzer Arts Foundation

The Pulitzer Arts Foundation is a museum that provides dynamic experiences with contemporary and historic art presented in dialogue with its celebrated Tadao Ando building. Since its founding in 2001, the museum has organized a range of exhibitions featuring art from around the world, exploring a diverse array of ideas and inspiring new perspectives. Highlights have included the exhibitions *Ruth Asawa: Life's Work* (2018-19); *Blue Black*, curated by artist Glenn Ligon (2017); *Medardo Rosso: Experiments in Light and Form* (2016-17); *raumlaborberlin: 4562 Enright Avenue* (2016); *Reflections of the Buddha* (2011-12); *Urban Alchemy / Gordon Matta-Clark* (2009-10); and *Brancusi and Serra in Dialogue* (2005). These exhibitions are complemented by programs that bring together leading figures from the fields of art, architecture, design, urban planning, and others. The Pulitzer is a place for contemplation and exchange that brings art and people together.

Located in the Grand Center Arts District of St. Louis, Missouri, the museum is open Thursday through Sunday between 10am–5pm, with evening hours until 8pm on Friday.

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Image Captions:

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Pulitzer Arts Foundation Water Court
Photograph © Alise O'Brien Photography
Courtesy Pulitzer Arts Foundation

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Susan Philipsz
Seven Tears, 2016

Installation view at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York
Seven-channel vinyl installation
Dimensions variable
Edition 1 of 3, 2 AP
Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles

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Susan Philipsz
Vernebelt VII, 2016
Chromogenic print mounted on Aludibond behind glass
12 7/8 x 19 5/8 inches (32.7 x 49.8 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles