

Spike Island

PRESS RELEASE

PEGGY AHWESH

VISION MACHINES

25 September 2021 to 16 January 2022

Preview: Friday 24 September 2021, 6–8.30pm



Vision Machines is the first survey exhibition in the UK by American artist Peggy Ahwesh (b. 1954, Pennsylvania, USA). Curated in collaboration with London-based scholar Erika Balsom, the exhibition includes single-channel films and video installations made between 1993 and 2021.

Since the early 1980s, Peggy Ahwesh has forged a distinctive moving image practice in the ruins of originality and authority. Whether by working with nonprofessional performers, especially children, or by repurposing existing images – such as a decaying pornographic film, the video game *Tomb Raider*, or computer-animated news coverage – Ahwesh embraces improvisatory strategies that probe the critical potential of play. With keen attentiveness to the materiality of bodies and media technologies alike, her works articulate a feminist commitment to the marginal and the minor.

Even as Ahwesh rejects the notion of style as authorial signature, her concerns with sexuality, subjectivity, and troubling the boundary between the animate and inanimate have remained constant across the decades. Focusing on a selection of works that explore the relationship between the body and the technologized image, the exhibition at Spike Island spans issues and ideas as diverse as gender, climate change and war.

A new paperback reader – the first monographic publication on Ahwesh's work to date – will accompany the show. Presenting an overview of the artist's practice from the 1980s to the present day, the book is designed by Mike Gallagher and features newly commissioned essays by film scholars



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Erika Balsom and Elena Gorfinkel, writer Tendai Mutambu, novelist Shola von Reinhold, and an interview between Ahwesh and academic John David Rhodes.

– Ends –

Image: Peggy Ahwesh, *She Puppet* (2001), digital video with sound, 15 mins. Courtesy the artist and Microscope Gallery, New York

For further information and high-resolution images please contact Jane Faram, Communications Manager at Spike Island on jane.faram@spikeisland.org.uk or +44 (0)117 9292266.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Peggy Ahwesh is an American experimental filmmaker and video artist. Born in 1954 in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, she received her B.F.A. at Antioch College, Ohio. Retrospective exhibitions include: *Girls Beware!*, Whitney Museum of American Art; Filmmuseum, Brussels; Anthology Film Archives, New York; *Peggy's Playhouse*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University. Screenings include: the Whitney Biennial (1991, 1995, 2002); New York Film Festival (1998, 2007); Flaherty Film Seminar (2003); Pompidou Center (2002, 2004); Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival (2017). Film festivals include: Berlin; London; Cairo; Toronto; Rotterdam; and Creteil, France. *Certain Women* (codirected with Bobby Abate) (2004) was an official selection at the Rotterdam International Film Festival and the opening night film at the New York Underground Film Festival (2004). Other films include: *Martina's Playhouse* (1989), *The Deadman* (codirected with Keith Sanborn) (1987), *Strange Weather* (1993), and *Nocturne* (1998), all of which are in the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection. Ahwesh has received grants from Jerome and Guggenheim Foundation fellowships, Alpert Award in the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, and Art Matters. She teaches Film and Electronic Art at Bard College, New York.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- Erika Balsom is a Reader in Film Studies at King's College London. She is the author of *An Oceanic Feeling: Cinema and the Sea* (2018) and the co-editor of the anthology *Artists' Moving Image in Britain since 1989* (2019). She is also the author of *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation* (2017) and *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (2013), and the co-editor of *Documentary Across Disciplines* (2016). In 2017, she was awarded a Leverhulme Prize and the Katherine Singer Kovacs essay award from the Society of Cinema and Media Studies. She is a frequent contributor to *Artforum* and *Cinema Scope*, and in 2017 was the international curator in residence at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre, New Zealand. With Grégory Castéra, she curated the film programme 'Shoreline Movements' for the 2020 Taipei Biennial. Her book about James Benning's film *TEN SKIES* was published in June 2021.
- *Vision Machines* at Spike Island is Peggy Ahwesh's first solo exhibition in the UK.
- Spike Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design, located close to Bristol's harbourside. It is a place where artists and the public can meet, enabling audiences to engage with artists' research and production. Within the 80,000 square foot building, Spike Island offers visitors a year-round programme of internationally relevant exhibitions, events and activities, as well as providing working space for artists, designers and creative businesses. The link



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between the production and presentation of art on this scale and under one roof is unique within the UK. Spike Island's programme emphasises the commissioning of new ambitious work and often provides artists their first significant gallery exhibition in the UK. Spike Island Exhibition Services support the development of commissions, including in-house post production facilities for artists' film and video, audio visual technical services and equipment provision for ambitious moving image installations, on site fabrication workshops, resin rooms, skilled art technicians and fabricators.

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