

## Ayesha Tan-Jones - ✨ *Tectonic Incantations* ✨ Solo Show



Ayesha Tan-Jones in their studio shot by [Henri Kisielewski](#)  
Courtesy of Harlesden High Street

Opening **10th Dec 2020**  
3:30pm - 9pm

Runs until **14th February 2021** by appointment only  
RSVP [here](#)

### ADDRESS

[Underground Flower - Belsize Park Gardens](#)  
81a Belsize Park Gardens  
London  
NW3 4NJ

Produced by [Harlesden High Street](#) with support from [Mimosa House](#)  
Curated by [Daria Khan](#)

Ayesha Tan Jones' solo exhibition is set in the striking offspace location of the deactivated swimming pool of [Underground Flower: Belsize Park Gardens](#), featuring artworks made in various media. The newly produced living sculptures are made of biodegrade materials with mushrooms, moss, and chlorella growing in them. Tracing the growth and decay of the sculptures throughout

the duration of the show, the artist questions survival and thriving in the current condition of ecological precarity.

The exhibition's narrative, based on the Chinese creation myth of Pangu, employs tools of speculative fiction and queer optimistic dystopia to envision a regenerative future. The show tackles methods of radical care, participation and interconnectedness, inviting the audience to feed the living sculptures via the accompanying online platform.

Ayesha's new series of artworks expand from their previous operatic performances and the upcoming book, *Parasites of Pangu* commissioned by Serpentine Gallery.

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Ayesha Tan-Jones's Interview with Daria Khan

Daria: Could you tell me about the title of the show, and where does it come from?

Ayesha: The title of the show is "Tectonic Incantations" - it's an extension of my project "Parasites of Pangu", so its full title is "Parasites of Pangu: Tectonic Incantations". Parasites of Pangu is an opera that's set very far in the future, in a climate where there are no humans left - basically, the earth has destroyed the humans but some of them- the "elite" humans, the 1% - were able to cast themselves off into space in cryogenic sleep, and wait for the earth to realign. The whole storyline has this thread of who deserved to survive, who can pay to survive, and what even is survival.

The name Pangu is the name of a deity or god from a Chinese creation myth called Pangu and the Cosmic Egg. Pangu was non-binary; before the world was created there was no gender, but in every Chinese writing or any historical text you'll see they've used "he". Pangu essentially held heaven and earth, or yin and yang, apart with their body, and it grew 10 feet every day as they held heaven and earth at bay & then one day it was too much for them and they dissolved. They collapsed, and their body became the earth, and their literal flesh became the soil, their bones became the rocks, their marrow became rare earth minerals, their voice became the thunder, their breath the wind, and the parasites that existed on Pangu's body became the humans.

Daria: Your upcoming book on Pangu and your work in general tackles ecological precarity. How is the approach of care toward nature manifested in the artworks you create and the materials you use?

Ayesha: The works are half biodegradable and half trash, and there's hardly any new material I've bought for the show. I wanted to be able to make the works as sustainable as possible; if I'm going to make big sculptures, I want them to not take a footprint on the earth. Because of this, some of them won't last that long, which is something that I'm dealing with - the grief of the sculptures evolving and decaying.

I'm currently growing oyster mushrooms in all of the sculptures, and moss, there's lots of moss involved! The structures and skeletons are made from tree branches, and one of my favourite sculptures is going to be producing bio-fuel which is made from algae called chlorella. As the show ends we can harvest the chlorella, and turn it into bio-fuel to fuel something - maybe another sculpture I've built.

Daria: So its really self-sustainable and self-generating; something is decaying, and something is growing. Every time people come and see the show, they'll see it change over time.

Ayesha: Yeah, definitely! You might come one day and there will be a plethora of mushrooms ready to harvest, you might come one day and there will be none because they will be decayed, or they will have been eaten. There are also plants growing on the sculptures, which means all of these sculptures have to be cared for. Someone has to water them, tend to the mushrooms, keep an eye on how the algae is growing, test the water. They're living sculptures, and they are breathing and reproducing.

Daria: In preparation for this show, you've been working in the striking location of the abandoned gym and swimming pool. How did you feel the site influenced your way of working?

Ayesha: The swimming pool is the location for the main sculptures. All of the sculptures represent an element and a deity. One of the sculptures - The Swamp Witch, which will be growing algae - was created fully in response to the site. She's going to be in the jacuzzi - that's where she lives, where she's going to be growing.

When you walk in the space you can smell the damp in the air - it was a squat before we moved in, and its very much got that apocalyptic vibe already so its been really nice to work here. I thrive in apocalyptic environments! Then you step outside and it's a bougie west London street; it's funny.

Daria: Talking about apocalyptic environments, you choose science fiction as a framework for your creation. What does it give you?

Ayesha: Oh, it gives me so much excitement! It does feel like a space where we can envision somethings that we desire, something that is an alternative world. Even though we are living in a very apocalyptic, dystopian time, envisioning this speculative future is like having a fantasy world, and in that world I'm a sculptor and it feels almost like magic.

With my work I intend to instill a glimmer of optimism. That's why I used the term "optimistic dystopia" to describe my art. It's accepting and acknowledging and surrendering to the dystopia; it's perpetual, and it's everywhere, and we're in it, but how do we take the skills that we know and survive it - and thrive, actually - not just survive it but thrive through it.

Daria: You're also creating a new website which will act as a platform for people to engage with the show virtually.

Ayesha: The website is going to be like a virtual space or portal where the audience will be able to engage. I sing to the sculptures when I water them, and the space has got incredible resonance in the swimming pool, these rituals will be livestreamed on Instagram. I'm also in surrender to the audience - if no one's engaging, the sculptures aren't getting fed! They need care, and it's not just up to me to care for them, but up to the audience to care for them as well.

Daria: I really like this radical participation you're offering, and I'm looking forward to the show. I'll see you next week in the pool!

Ayesha: See you in the pool, thanks Daria!

**AYESHA'S BIO - Ayesha's work is a spiritual practice that seeks to fuse activism and art to present an alternative, queer, optimistic dystopia. They work through ritual, meditating through craft, and building forms from their dreams. Ayesha approaches activism through art, creating diverse, eco-conscious narratives that aim to connect, enthrall and induce audiences to think more sustainably and ethically. Traversing pop music, sculpture,**

alter-egos, digital image and video work, Ayesha sanctifies these mediums as tools in their craft.

Ayesha is the co-founder of Shadow Sistxrs Fight Club, a physical and meta-physical self defence class for women, non binary people and QTIPoC, combining Brazilian JuJitsu and magical/medicinal herbalism to create a holistic approach to self defence. Through community ritual and collective healing, the energy created at SSFC is powerful and creative. Fertile Souls is their community apothecary and survival skill share community which they founded.

Selected recent commissions/exhibitions include: Shanghai Biennale (2021) Athens Biennale (2021) Serpentine Galleries, London (2019) IMT Gallery, London (2019) Mimosa House, London (2018), ICA, London (2018-2020) Cell Project Space, London (2018) Gropius Bau, Berlin (2018) Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2016-17).  
Ayesha is represented by [Harlesden High Street](#), London.

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