

We can no longer deny ourselves is a newly commissioned multi-part installation by body-focused artist and researcher SERAFINE1369.

Unfolding across the interconnected spaces of the River Rooms, *We can no longer deny ourselves* explores systems that shape perceptions of time. Creating a space for time’s expansion, contraction and diffusion, the exhibition is a reflection on relationships between time and labour, bodies and capitalism. The work explores how these interplays can lead to working in opposition to our circadian rhythms, our grief, and to the celestial bodies that connect all beings to the earth’s movements and root systems.

The installation is conceived as an ‘exploded clock’ made up of several elements. The gallery spaces house a series of objects representing oscillators, idiophones and substances that have historically been used to measure and keep time: water, a pendulum, bells and quartz crystals. The movement, video, lighting and sound elements of the installation, devised by SERAFINE1369 in dialogue with their long-term collaborators, set the conditions of the installation as changeable and unpredictable. Each day a performer tunes their attention and physical presence to the shifting ambience and sensory impact of the installation and its architecture.

*We can no longer deny ourselves* offers time as a tool of transcendence, opening up other dimensions or relations, as something non-linear, bodily, imaginary and spatial. You are invited to enter the exhibition as a place for reflection and feeling.

the long night  
29 October 2022

For the final weekend of *We can no longer deny ourselves*, SERAFINE1369 presents an extended opening of the exhibition with a special programme of live interventions, coinciding with the end of daylight saving time.

#### Exhibition Credits

Artist	SERAFINE1369 (Jamila Johnson-Small)
Curator	Rahila Haque
Sound Designer	Josh Anio Grigg
Light Designer	Jackie Shemesh
Performers	
Alexandrina Hemsley	@alexandrinahemsley / yewande103.com
Jamila Johnson-Small	@serafine1369
Steph McMann	@stephlmcm
Fernanda Muñoz-Newsome	@fernandam_n
Textile Production	Joseph June Bond
Latex	AGF HYDRA
Automation Device	Jack Dove

Director of Studios	Marie McPartlin
Head of Studios	Emma Hannon
Senior Programmer	Leonara Manyangadze
Exhibitions Manager	Joel Furness
Exhibition Graphic Design	Freddy Mills

2D Production	Omni
3D Design & Production	The White Wall Company
Audio Visual	KS Objectiv
Print Graphic Design	Peter Chadwick

*An exhibition organised by Somerset House Trust*

Somerset House would like to extend special thanks to the lenders and contributors, without whom the exhibition would not have been possible.

River Rooms, New Wing, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 1LA

## SERAFINE1369 in conversation with Rahila Haque

RH In developing this exhibition, your approach has been to work in synergy with the spaces of the River Rooms and the specificities of the building. The result is an ambient environment that exists inside the space as a sort of other dimension — there is a spatial and temporal layering created by the objects, movement, light and sound. I’m wondering how the gallery’s space and its architecture has shaped the evolution of this work?

S1369 The space has been a consideration since I received the invitation in 2021, and this is usually how I work that an idea flows into the container that is the architecture rather than an idea being adapted to the space. This way of working definitely has its limitations and I question my desire and tendency to be responsive, wondering if I am too flexible, too impacted by external things...

What struck me at first was the number of rooms to ‘fill’ and I thought, “I don’t want to fill them”. The flow between the spaces, how they are similar in style but each very particular, with different light and different entry ways and these architectures, felt like invitations to inhabit each space in a different way.

I’d say the rooms have been a collaborator and over the last month I’ve spent a lot of time in there sitting, lying, dancing, feeling, listening to what I feel the space is suggesting and where I want to go with that as well as where I want to challenge it. Sometimes, it’s felt like quite a lot to contend with — how to assert something in a space where no lasting intervention can be made. A space that speaks of colonial wealth, social hierarchies, the Navy, tax collectors and a kind of domesticity very far from my position. A history that has nothing and, at the same time, so much to do with me — a history of violent intervention. I’ve been asking myself how this space can become a refuge, a place I want to be in, somewhere I feel permission to spread out and take time.

RH In searching for a way to inhabit the space, you made decisions around the objects and materials you wanted to work with — can you say something about the material elements of the sculptures, supports, the screens and lighting? And in relation to the idea of creating a refuge, what kind of attention are you inviting when people are with the work?

S1369 I wanted the objects to be there as themselves, for the speakers, bells and pendulum to just be there suspended. The space is so full already, with angles, shapes, colours, textures and layers of infrastructure exposed. So much history, so many happenings that I wasn’t interested in erasing or denying, but instead working to invite a slight muting of the levels. The lighting didn’t want to be about bringing more objects into the space or installing any kind of theatre apparatus. Jackie’s first instinct (as lighting designer) was to work with the windows and we went all around with ideas but returned to this singular gesture of the tinted windows. The sculptures and the supports are all made to be functional with materials that are already found in the space, or around the building.

I am quite sensitive to space and the ways that angles in architecture and furniture, materials and textures, define and impact the flow of energy and the invitation to presence, so in my work I take all the time I can to attend to this. As a child I discovered the feng shui octagon, the Bagua, and felt affirmed in my insistence on arranging and rearranging my objects and furniture until things felt right. This to me feels like choreography, facilitating certain flows of movement and presence, directing even. It’s very much about resonance and relationship; rather than transforming the space, I’ve tried to soften the edges to allow for that shifting scale of looking — zooming in and zooming out — that can accompany contemplation.

RH I’m interested in how stillness and liveness are in dialogue, changing how we might experience the exhibition on any given day. Has this been an important consideration for you?

S1369 I think about stillness and silence as fictions, and over the last while I’ve been working more explicitly with the movement within stillness. In tuning to that movement, what I feel is there is so much aliveness. I guess there’s also something here that I’m trying to re-contextualise for myself around being still as being passive, around freezing as inaction, stuckness. I’m also interested in disturbing the narratives around stillness as something restful, that when we stop outwardly we might also be inwardly relieved of activity. It’s all forms of labour, this living, it’s all movement.

I was trained in dance and this is my filter and enduring fascination, and it’s to do with movement and the shifts and transformations that existing in relation can invite or enforce. Whichever medium I am working in, I’ve wanted the thing to feel alive, relational, open to being shaped by the experience of each visitor, not something fixed and rigid but still specific, still a container or vessel or frame for movement and feeling.

Something I learn from making work and putting together shows (and trying to have as peaceful a life as I can!) is that everything has an energy and impacts a space, therefore impacting those other bodies in the space. All the elements are involved in the regulation of bodies.

RH And how does this relate to your approach and collaborations for the movement element of this work?

S1369 I’m working with people, performers, all of whom I have long collaborative relationships with, and the invitation extended to them is to use the environment of the installation as a space for practice. I want to talk about, to expose, the labour of the kind of work we do; so it’s almost like the space before a performance in terms of how we are holding the space and following threads of thought, response, connection, attraction. And this asks for a lot of trust. I’m interested in whether we always change when we are seen, in the labour of allowing yourself to be seen and in the energetics of attention and intention. But also the sacred and devotional aspects of something like dancing, and how our presence as performers might support certain states of attention and presence in the bodies of visitors too.

RH I’ve been thinking about writer and cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter’s idea that the human species is both ‘bios’ and ‘mythoi’ — that we are hybrid beings defined by our biological bodies but also by the capacity to narrate our existence, to tell stories about who and what we are. Like other narratives of our species that are implicated in power and coercion, clock time is one that impacts our bodily experience, dictating how we live and move in the world. You’ve spoken about the body as oracular and also as technology — I’m wondering what you mean by this, especially in the context of this work?

S1369 Our bodies tell of not only this moment, but all the moments we’ve lived and moments lived by our ancestors (human and non-human). These moments also include imprints of environment and external conditions. I understand this embodied memory, cellular memory and capacity for porosity and adaptation to environment to be a wellspring of knowledge and incredible technology, and we each carry a particular knowledge that no other body can fully access. There is so much information in our patterns of responding and the ways our bodies speak to us through reactions, chemical shifts, the things we are attracted to and repelled by, that can support the establishing of more appropriate external conditions and a deeper understanding of environment — from the scale of the individual to global politics.

As someone who works with bodies, the more I see-feel-learn-experience the more I am amazed by these relational systems of communication and vitality.

I say oracular because it’s possible that the sign can appear through a body before it reaches mental, articulate cognition. So I work to ‘read’ the signs towards a better understanding of myself or a situation, and much like divination, the reading is a language that develops in relation with the tool or device.

RH The audio for this work produced with Josh Anio Grigg, builds on an earlier work you made together, *The Sound of An Uncertain “Yes”* (something flat, something cosmic, something endless), which was composed around your voice counting clock time by the minute. For *We can no longer deny ourselves* the soundscape builds on this construction of the minute, with layers of music, readings, and the live sound of the bell. Can you talk about the role of sound in this work and this process of collaborative composition?

S1369 Josh and I have been working together for about six years and the work is starting to become one journey, continually evolving through each context in which we present. The sound will be elaborations on things we have started and that may have featured as seeds or shoots of ideas in previous work. We are working on drawing out and extending pieces of music or sound worlds, often using samples and fragments from music we have in the archive — a kind of sonic world building.

The first live work I made coming out of lockdown was a 6 hour performance where each minute is announced by a speaking clock. I’ve been obsessed by the unit of one minute, its changeability and utter rigidity, the realness and falseness of this construction, for a long while. Josh wanted to make an online radio station that announced each minute, that could be tuned into and accurate, anywhere in the world. In trying to open things with my work, not to close or shut down or have any illusions that I ‘create’ anything, I’m often looking for existing structures that can be used as a framework in order to locate this opening, or potential for an altered state.

Sound is another element in the work that is dealing in ‘invisible’ movements of vibrational waves, as are the other, material objects in the space; an interplay of subtle and not so subtle vibrations that want to support a multi-dimensional relationship to space and bodies rather than a binary one. All the elements, and their movements, hold qualities said to soothe nervous systems and clear energetic fields. It’s a show that is there to be felt more than seen with the eyes, hoping to trouble the hierarchy of senses that can place the visual, eyesight, as the primary sense.

## SERAFINE1369

# WE CAN NO LONGER DENY OURSELVES

23 September —  
30 October 2022

River Rooms  
Somerset House

10am—6pm, performance daily 12—3pm



Like A Leopard In The Dust  
SERAFINE1369

You speak often of broken hearts. We deal in fragments of the earth's insides. Sometimes treasure is pushed out onto the surface because of inner cycles and tides, breaks and fractures, separation. Sometimes dug up and cracked from the walls of this body we call home, we find sharp bodies of light and movement. Crystallised at the point of encounter, demanding more and more heat to arrive once again at change. Refraction is the broken relationship between light and the surface it touches; we could say broken or we could say transformative, expansive, emanating. Any break is also a growth point, but what do you want to grow here?

The secret of blood, betrayed when it breaks the skin surface. You want to keep these things in, yet for so long the controlled release of the soon-sticky life-substance has been related to maintaining wellness, maintaining sanity. There are many kinds of violence and someone said something about the distinction between violence and brutality. Holding many timelines. Sometimes this is referred to as 'integration' but what about disintegration? If you follow that timeline, it's again something about integration but the vision, the vision is one of coming apart, of distinction, of distance, of addressing the desire to not be absorbed into the form we know now. Still, we are seeking that hum which is the peace that comes when able to hear all of the frequencies all at once, together, and each distinct, and hear so deeply that it feels they become us, and we become them. Sound the same as feeling.

These days though, you feel nothing, a colossal ambivalence that does not deny rage, hope, fire, but does not remember it. You feel things that you wouldn't want to name and you listen, you try to listen, to all the echoes and hauntings, the memories like trace elements speaking in the shapes and complaints of your body. Programmed like homeopathic remedies. Tastes like water but still hasn't let go. And time passes, trembling between moments and minutes.

The mindset that we must always steal or earn time is fucked. Time is eating us up. Licking our full bodies with its tongue and its hot breath from its hot mouth. Saliva softening skin. The need to anthropomorphise, to understand, is a flaw, is a boundary. Let's take other things as metaphor. Places where meaning coalesces beyond words. Language is a bind and a means for liberation simultaneously, not dissimilar from time. Neither must make a sound and yet we hear the tick ticking, a marker, marking. What is not a body? Always trembling. The anticipation of contact. Every encounter brings change.

Pendulum trembles in response to the belly breathing of the earth they call electromagnetic energy. We are conduits in all kinds of circuits. Sometimes we feel our skin bristle and it is a surge of electricity, hinting at a potential systems overload, or the receiving of a psychic transmission. Skin is our largest organ and we wear it like a coat. Which seems both sensible and not sensible.

We could also describe this trembling as oscillating — this response to environment, or description of relation, a rhythmic language that suggests maybe no decision is able to fix anything, and maybe stability isn't about fixing either. Tuning into continual states of flux can at turns feel like madness and clarity. We are talking about trembling because there is vulnerability, in the encounter. The bell rings and sends waves that slip up into your ears, along the canal and into your spine. This trembling could also be called vibrating. So many geometries of relation you would sometimes rather not open your eyes to all that crisscrossing light and shadow. Sometimes you call it the grid, and that word holds something about the delicate brutality of it. Light and heavy at the same time. And heaviness can be darkness or light and these things also sound, also voices endlessly touching, trembling, troubling.

These days, we do not want anything to touch us. Maybe because we are haunted by the knowing that when touching things, they touch back; when touched, we are also touching. This is a lot to bear. The environment always dense and alive and always in relation; when will we ever be alone so that we might choose to be with? And what. And who. It is no secret that I am nothing without you. Touch is inescapable and all this whispering in your ears, abdomen, genitals, lymph nodes... maybe, these are the voices of god.

basictension.com



Pendulum  
Giorgia Ohanesian Nardin

I feel like I am a translator, a continuous oscillating between interpretation and restitution. words have become an antidote for structure - structure is also order and organizing and I am mortally afraid of the future. I fear sickness and death and people and places and feelings and daylight and sometimes the morning when it comes. I fear language and the intimate impossibility of being understood and I wonder what it means that communication has become the only frame for meeting.

I don't fear my ancestors.

I want to be held like a baby - I want for someone to pick me up and wash my hair and put me to bed.

I think about reaching and how my joints hurt, how I miss space in my spine, between my vertebrae. something about brutality maybe abdicating to the word consequence is what determines adulthood?

In January I was at a friends house and I opened a book randomly and I read *to be in proximity to death is to live in the space of premonition* (Bahaar Ahsan - *Cut the apricot in half and remove the pit the pit can only get in your way*)

premonition is different from divination I always like to remember that the Armenian word for witches (or something like witches) literally translates as "the ones who are looking" I tell myself I don't look towards the future but I find myself interpreting signs premonition is geography is a margine something devoted to sustainability

on the metro yesterday I saw a person stroking their hair in a way that made me cry with their right hand across the back of their head from left to right leaning forward slightly starting the stroke firmly and slowly fading it how possible it is to be kind I never use the word kindness maybe I am making a conscious effort to use it more but there is an obsession with opening I am scared by it to receive something back doesn't necessarily feel like owning

the pendulum teaches me about the difference between a cycle and a loop between compromise and negotiation

to be experts at articulating around your own suffering - I'm trying to hold my grace here

It seems like the space I'm in might have something to say to me

*Sometimes words come out fast  
uhmmm..  
now it feels like a spiral  
hm.*

*you pointed out today that I often say I feel very empty and very full at the same time and you asked why I think that is and I said that it's because of - because I'm heartbroken  
as I say this there is some tensing in the diaphragm and I realize I often push my lumbar spine towards the front of my body - almost as if guts were to precede me - oscillation is agreeing*

*there is a pull between the entirety of the body and the heart  
(breathing)*

*I want to know if my heart is broken  
it's definitely heavy  
but heavy and broken are two different things  
or part of a similar thing that speaks to something you were also saying today - about vastness  
maybe in weight and rupture there is vastness  
I want to know what I am supposed to be looking at  
this is a very important question  
apparently  
(breathing)*

*it's almost like you know when there's a mirror in front of another and then there's like infinite reflection  
it feels like that  
I can be more relaxed with this  
I enjoy writing from the pendulum because I wait for words to emerge so  
writing and waiting maybe are two of my favourite things or  
two of the things I do the most (laughing)  
It makes a lot of space  
maybe I shouldn't go back*

giorgianardin.com

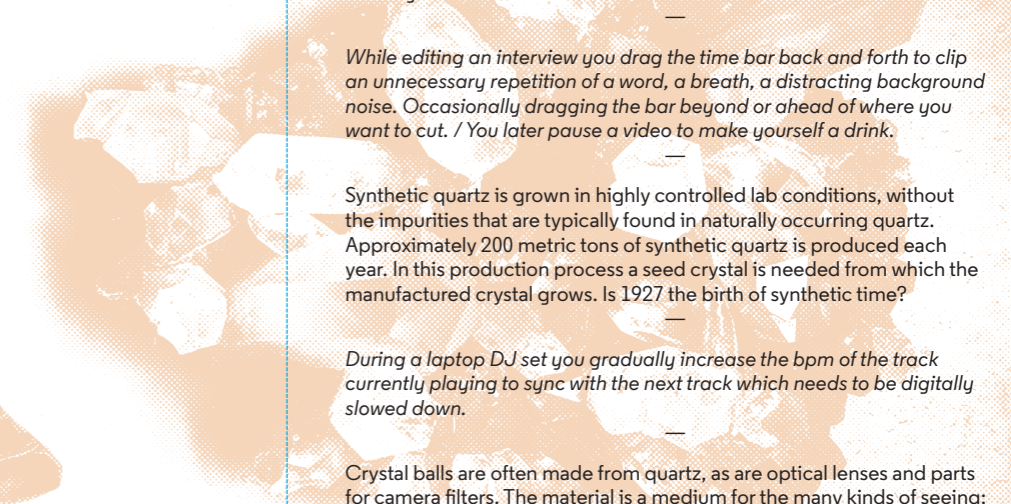
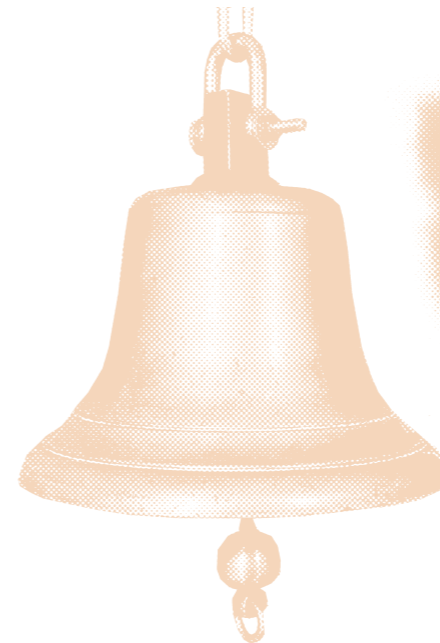
Bells  
Phoebe Collings-James

before I could tell you, I had to gouge one out. a perfect ice cream scoop, if the metal spoon were instead a bear's paw, an undulating rum mmmm, hazy in its aim but definite with each passing revolution. two pieces of clay sandwiched flat, it's edges pressed neatly with a pursed lip to accompany the motion, mouth opened to allow for a cows low timbre to rattle out. yes, two is an ideal clattering. familiarly stretched below the top edge of a knee high sock or swinging from a sports short waistband undisclosed, bullock style.

if joy comes with the morning it rises in power with the twinkly introduction of the stylistics people make the world go round. polyphonies of imported brass thimbles, crudely banded in patterns of a blacksmith's flame. petal, arrow, lion tail, fork. souvenir chimes forgotten to the red brick, as february winds conduct their attention. trashman didn't take my trash today, why because they were not paid... people make the world go round tubular bells, that faint rumbling of england. a hallowed out tree rifting off prog rock bad food and parasitic empire. so smooth. church lite. a twinkles baritone. long-limbed modular tomes *domino fall* again,,, again,,, again,,,

*for whom the bell tolls.* a preacher. a congregation. looking up to the tremors of a hermetic dome. the bell seed coughing a hot tonsil. each rope has its own hand to log times rhythm. hour. half. past the hour. a dog moons cycle. we were born within the echo of bow bells but i've not heard them. myth making at its finest.

phoebecollingsjames.com



With Quartz (seed crystal)  
Harun Morrison

Shards of a score after quartz: Let a current run through you and vibrate. How you vibrate depends on how you are cut.

For a text to be like crystal it would be many sided, repeating its structure in fragments. Split across structural planes. Variously clear, reflecting and opaque as it turns in the mind's eye.

"In this kind of clock, first built at Bell Telephone Laboratories in 1927, a small crystal of quartz takes the place of a pendulum or balance wheel. The crystal vibrates between 50,000 to 100,000 times per second, with a rate that depends upon how the crystal is cut. Through an electric current, that frequency drives a clock with a synchronous motor. The clock's gearing divides down the crystal vibrations to a rate that turns the hands. Similar to other observatories, quartz clocks replaced the best pendulum clocks as time standards from 1946 to 1966, when atomic clocks were accepted."<sup>1</sup>

*Pushing and darting through people, leaping two, three steps at a time, eyes flicking at the platform clock. Beeping as the train doors begin to close. Someone running ahead of you made it, someone behind you will not.*

There is *time* and the *division of time* / 'cleavage, tendency of a crystalline substance to split into fragments bounded by plane surfaces.'<sup>2</sup>

*A hand brushes a glass, your hand brushes a glass. You watch it slowly fall but cannot move to catch it in time, it shatters. Fragments of glass are now across the table and floor.*

Shards of a score after quartz: Divide one light beam into two.

'community within a stone'<sup>3</sup>

On December 25 1969, Seiko introduced the world's first quartz wrist-watch. "The Quartz Astron set a new standard in wristwatch precision with an accuracy rate of +5 seconds per month, made possible by several technological advances including the tuning fork shaped quartz oscillator and the open type step motor which are still standard components of quartz watches today."<sup>4</sup>

Shards of a score after quartz: Transition from smoky to transparent and back again.

*While editing an interview you drag the time bar back and forth to clip an unnecessary repetition of a word, a breath, a distracting background noise. Occasionally dragging the bar beyond or ahead of where you want to cut. / You later pause a video to make yourself a drink.*

Synthetic quartz is grown in highly controlled lab conditions, without the impurities that are typically found in naturally occurring quartz. Approximately 200 metric tons of synthetic quartz is produced each year. In this production process a seed crystal is needed from which the manufactured crystal grows. Is 1927 the birth of synthetic time?

*During a laptop DJ set you gradually increase the bpm of the track currently playing to sync with the next track which needs to be digitally slowed down.*

Crystal balls are often made from quartz, as are optical lenses and parts for camera filters. The material is a medium for the many kinds of seeing; of auras, spirits and futures as well as the retinal; the airflow sensitive hairs on a spider's back, the scales on a butterfly's wing and celestial bodies.

Shards of a score after quartz: When pressed generate electricity.

harunmorrison.net

<sup>1</sup> www.britannica.com/science/cleavage-mineralogy  
<sup>2</sup> www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\_1073658  
<sup>3</sup> www.seikowatches.com/us-en/products/astron/special/50th\_35sq  
<sup>4</sup> www.crystalvaults.com/crystal-encyclopedia/spirit-quartz/