

Sarah Cunningham

Midnight Sun

09.10.26 – 10.01.27

Midnight Sun is British painter Sarah Cunningham's (1993 - 2024) first institutional solo exhibition, one that marks a deeply meaningful homecoming, with the return of the artist's work to the city where she was born and raised.

Sarah was a prolific and celebrated artist and regarded as one of the UK's most distinctive painters of her generation. Her expansive, gestural and expressionistic paintings take inspiration from multiple forest worlds, including the trees and natural habitats of Nottingham's Wollaton Park and the jungles of Panama, where she lived and worked during a pivotal residency with the Kuna community in 2018. This

fascination with the forest developed into a deep, long-standing connection to imaginary wildernesses and speculative landscapes, with her inspirations spanning science fiction, worldbuilding, ecology and interspecies relations. Sarah worked with an understanding of nature and culture as being interconnected, rather than separate, with paint and canvas acting as living agents entangled with her human experience.

Sarah's paintings move through multiple worlds; they are representative, not representational, of a landscape or environment. She would lay her canvases directly onto the studio floor and step within their edges, often in the darkness of night, working layers upon layers of thick oil paint through sweeping gestures with brush, hand and body. Her nocturnal practice became

synonymous with her otherworldly and abstracted paintings; as though within those dark hours she was entering new realms with her mind and body, conjuring a Midnight Sun.

The exhibition brings together earlier paintings and never-before-seen bodies of work from Sarah's studio to explore the interplay of pace, rhythm, night and day - understanding Sarah's image-making as a process of becoming.

Specific works guide our journey through the exhibition, beginning inside *The World It Softly Lulls*; a dark, nocturnal, mythical forestscape; moving through *Via Lucis* [*Way of Light*] as a nod to the transition from night into day; and ending in the clearing of *Starshine and Clay*, a bold, vibrant and eruptive new beginning - a dawn chorus charged with Sarah's own dynamic force and energy, a celebration of life and of the power

of minds, bodies and spirits, wherever they might be.

This exhibition was made possible thanks to the support of Headline Supporter: Lisson, and The Sarah Cunningham Exhibition Circle: The Nixon Collection, Tilman Kriesel, Timo Miettinen, ABCollection, Art of Palm and those who wish to remain anonymous.

Exhibition graphics by Waste Studio.

We would like to extend our deepest thanks to Sarah's family, Eddie, Sue and Anthony and to Kay Dawson for their huge generosity and support in the realisation of this exhibition.

Special thanks to Max Bossier, Elissa Goldstone, Victoria Mitchell, Andrew Price and Ruya Worthy at Lisson and to all the lenders who have supported us in bringing together this selection of Sarah Cunningham's works; to the contributors to the accompanying publication and live programme, whose ideas and research will offer new viewpoints into Cunningham's practice: Hettie Judah, John Newling, Niall Ó Faircheallaigh, Martin Clarkson, Dr. Adam Searle, Jason Redwood, Millie Quick, Dr. Lara Pucci, Irina Razumovskaya and Matthew Chesney; and to Daniel Chehade for realising the publication design.

And finally, a very special thanks to the entire team at Nottingham Contemporary.

Nottingham Contemporary is a registered charity and dependent on the generosity of our visitors, partners and supporters.

If you would like to use any alternative forms of interpretation, we have a range of accessible versions on our Access Wall beside Reception or alongside the wall text in the exhibition.

Environmental: Nottingham Contemporary is committed to advancing sustainability within the organisation and aims to explore and embed sustainable working practices and habits within our workplace and across the sector. This includes standardising environmental considerations at all stages of decision making.

In *Midnight Sun* the exhibition graphics have been produced by local suppliers Hayman Creative. Since spring 2026 we have switched

our wall texts from cut vinyl to Xanitaprint, a recyclable material. Our exhibitions are always built and installed by local fine art technicians. Our exhibition notes are printed on FSC Mix paper (Forest Stewardship Council ® certified products manufactured with a variety of sources including FSC-certified virgin fibre, controlled wood and/ or recycled materials).

Curated by: Katie Simpson and Niall Ó Faircheallaigh, assisted by Klara Szafrńska and Xin Chen

3D Design and Exhibition Build Lead: David Thomas

Bench Fabrication: Jack Narewski and David Thomas

Exhibition Build and Installation: Helen Bartholomew, Jon Chambers, Jack Narewski,

Craig David Parr, Emily Stollery, and Hannah Templeman

Condition Checking: Jenna Jones, Lara Mattinson, and Simon Withers

Development: Emma Graves and Antonia Seroff

Marketing: Catherine Masters and Holly Nowak

Learning programme: Sandra Austerfield, Amelia Daiz, Chan Hyacinth Fagan, Pasha Kincaid, Susannah Lambert, Milee Lee, Ursula Rae, Peter Rumney, Rachel Scanlon, Amanda Spruyt, Andrew Martyn Sugars, Holly Tea, Charlotte Tupper, Stephanie Wardle and Sian Watson Taylor

Exhibition Invigilators: Winter Beaumont, Tom Chamberlain, Nadim Chaudry, Lynn Chippendale, Olwen Davies, Quinn Greytryx, Lachlan Hui, Jenna Jones, Milee Lee, Karen Lunt, Lara Mattinson, Craig David Parr, Millie Quick, Nikki Stevenson, Olu Taiwo and Simon Withers

Visitor Experience: Emma Beischer, Paul Buddle,
Nadim Chaudry, Olwen Davies, Sam Harrison,
Jenna Jones, Lucy Martin, Holly Matthews, Craig
David Parr and Jordan Sterry

People and Culture: Lauren Riley

Finance and Operations: Andy Batson, Jon
Chambers, Mandy Newbold and David Thomas

RELATED EVENTS

WALKTHROUGHS

Wed 21 Oct, 1pm

Curators' Walkthrough

Join Nottingham Contemporary's curators for a
tour of our autumn exhibitions.

Wed 4 Nov, 1pm

With Martin Clarkson, fine art painter and friend.

Wed 18 Nov, 1pm

**With Dr. Adam Searle, Assistant Professor in
Human Geography, University of Nottingham.**

Sat 28 Nov, 1pm

BSL Exhibition Tour

**With Jason Redwood, BSL tour guide for the
Turner Contemporary & British Museum, BSL
teacher & presenter.**

12.30 Talks

**12.30pm every Tue, Thu, Sat, and Sun, starting
Tue 20 Oct**

**Join one of our friendly Gallery Assistants for a
short exploration of one of our current
exhibitions.**

WORKSHOPS

Sat 31 Oct, 2pm

Workshop on speculative design histories by Pina and Biblioteka

An interdisciplinary workshop exploring the design histories of exhibitions and libraries as worldview machines.

Sun 25 Oct & Sun 29 Nov, 2pm

Grow your own planet

Learn, play and keep a worldbuilding game with artist and gallery assistant Millie Quick. Inspired by science fiction, we will craft maps surrounded by Sarah Cunningham's vivid naturescapes in Gallery 3. Suitable for artists, writers, GameMasters and anyone curious (Age 14+).

PERFORMANCES

**Fri 13, Sat 14 & Sun 15 Nov, 12pm – 2pm & 3pm –
5pm**

Bar Tango by Beni Bosetto

Join us for this new production exploring the corporeality of love through stage objects and a surreal choreography in which tango dancers inhabit costumes inspired by animals, plants, and minerals.

CONTEMPORARY X ART HISTORIES

A collaborative strand of programming between the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Contemporary.

Wed 25 Nov, 3pm

Ways of Seeing, Learning and Making: With art historian, Dr. Lara Pucci (University of Nottingham), in conversation with ceramic sculptor, Irina Razumovskaya (Royal College of Art).

Wed 9 Dec, 3pm

**Ways of Seeing, Learning and Making: With
Backlit Gallery Co-Director, Matthew Chesney.**

**For more information about the exhibition, related
events and learning programmes, visit
nottinghamcontemporary.org or scan here:**

