

Laurie Anderson wants to fly you to the moon with her virtual reality work, To the Moon

by Mark Westall
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Laurie Anderson at The Factory Groundbreaking photo: Tarnish Vision

50 years after the Apollo Moon landings, artist Laurie Anderson will be flying audiences there with the UK premiere of her virtual reality work, *To the Moon*, developed with the artist Hsin-Chien Huang.

Using images and tropes from Greek mythology, literature, science, sci-fi space movies and politics, *To the Moon* creates an imaginary and dark new moon. During the 15-minute VR experience, the viewer is shot out from earth, walks on the surface of the moon, glides through space debris, flies through DNA skeletons and is lifted up the side and then thrown off a lunar mountain.

Scenes include *Constellations* which features life forms that are becoming extinct; *DNA Museum* in which audiences fly through the skeletons of dinosaurs which morph into a Cadillac, in a play on the history of fossil fuels; *Technology Wasteland* in which the moon is imagined as a dystopic

dumping ground for plastics and nuclear waste; and *Snow Mountain* which takes its inspiration from the plot line of space adventure movies, where the viewer's virtual body dramatically tumbles away into deep space.

Laurie Anderson says:

"What humans can and can't do in the natural world is one of the several themes in *To the Moon*. The piece is dedicated to the ancient Chinese painter who made a huge vertical landscape - a painting of a mountain with groves of pine trees, a steep road winding up to the top, waterfalls, tiny hikers with walking sticks, thatched bamboo huts, and fishermen casting their nets in the sea far below. The painting was very intricate and it took many years to make. When he finally finished the painting, he walked into it. This is what we aim to do with *To the Moon*, allow the viewer to literally walk into a work of art."

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To the Moon is presented at Manchester International Festival alongside a new audio-visual installation - a rare and exciting opportunity to explore Anderson's ideas in development as she works towards a new piece which will premiere at The Factory, the new world-class cultural space currently being built in the heart of Manchester, operated by MIF.

Laurie Anderson, To the Moon Manchester International Festival
Royal Exchange Theatre, St Ann's Square, M2 7DH Friday
12 - Saturday 20 July, 11am to 9pm (timed slots), £5
mif.co.uk

About The Artist

Laurie Anderson is one of America's most renowned - and daring - creative pioneers. Known primarily for her multimedia presentations, she has cast herself in roles as varied as visual artist, composer, poet, photographer, filmmaker, electronics whiz, vocalist, and instrumentalist.

O Superman launched Anderson's recording career in 1980, rising to number two on the British pop charts and subsequently appearing on Big Science, the first of her seven albums on the Warner Brothers label. Other record releases include Mister Heartbreak, United States Live, Strange Angels, Bright Red, and the soundtrack to her feature film Home of the Brave. A deluxe box set of her Warner Brothers output, Talk Normal, was released in the fall of 2000 on Rhino/Warner Archives. In 2001, Anderson released her first record for Nonesuch Records, entitled Life on a String, which was followed by Live in New York, recorded at Town Hall in New York City in September 2001, and released in May 2002.

Anderson has toured the United States and internationally numerous times with shows ranging from simple spoken word performances to elaborate multimedia events. Major works include United States I-V (1983), Empty Places (1990), The Nerve Bible (1995), and Songs and Stories for Moby Dick, a multimedia stage performance based on the novel by Herman Melville. Songs and Stories for Moby Dick toured internationally throughout 1999 and 2000. In the fall of 2001, Anderson toured the United States and Europe with a band, performing music from Life on a String. She has also presented many solo works, including Happiness, which premiered in 2001 and toured internationally through Spring 2003.

Anderson has published six books. Text from Anderson's solo performances appears in the book Extreme Exposure, edited by Jo Bonney. Anderson has also written the entry

for New York for the Encyclopedia Britannica and in 2006, Edition 7L published Anderson's book of dream drawings entitled "Night Life".

Laurie Anderson's visual work has been presented in major museums throughout the United States and Europe. In 2003, The Musée Art Contemporain of Lyon in France produced a touring retrospective of her work, entitled The Record of the Time: Sound in the Work of Laurie Anderson. This retrospective included installation, audio, instruments, video and art objects and spans Anderson's career from the 1970's to her most current works. It continued to tour internationally from 2003 to 2005. As a visual artist, Anderson is represented by the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York where her exhibition, The Waters Reglitterized, opened in September 2005. In 2008, the Museum of Modern Art acquired her "Self-Playing Violin" which was featured in the "Making Music" exhibition in Fall 2008.

As a composer, Anderson has contributed music to films by Wim Wenders and Jonathan Demme; dance pieces by Bill T. Jones, Trisha Brown, Molissa Fenley, and a score for Robert LePage's theater production, Far Side of the Moon. She has created pieces for National Public Radio, The BBC, and Expo '92 in Seville. In 1997 she curated the two-week Meltdown Festival at Royal Festival Hall in London. Her most recent orchestra work Songs for Amelia Earhart, premiered at Carnegie Hall in February 2000 performed by the American Composers Orchestra and later toured Europe with the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra conducted by Dennis Russell Davies. The piece was performed as part of the Groningen Festival honoring Laurie Anderson in Fall 2008 with the Noord Nederlands Orkest.

Recognized worldwide as a groundbreaking leader in the use of technology in the arts, Anderson collaborated with Interval Research Corporation, a research and development laboratory founded by Paul Allen and David Liddle, in the exploration of new creative tools, including the Talking Stick. She created the introduction sequence for the first segment of the PBS special Art 21, a series about Art in the 21st century. Her awards include the 2001 Tenco Prize for Songwriting in San Remo, Italy and the 2001 Deutsche Schallplatten prize for Life On A String as well as grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. She recently collaborated with Bran Ferren of Applied Minds, Inc to create an artwork that was displayed in "The Third Mind" exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in Winter 2009.

In 2002, Anderson was appointed the first artist-in-residence of NASA which culminated in her 2004 touring solo performance "The End of the Moon". Recent projects

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include a series of audio-visual installations and a high definition film, "Hidden Inside Mountains", created for World Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan. In 2007 she received the prestigious Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize for her outstanding contribution to the arts. In 2008 she completed a two-year worldwide tour of her performance piece, "Homeland", which was released as an album on Nonesuch Records in June, 2010. Anderson's solo performance "Delusion" debuted at the Vancouver Cultural Olympiad in February, 2010 and toured internationally throughout 2011. In 2010 a retrospective of her visual and installation work opened in Sao Paulo, Brazil and later traveled to Rio de Janeiro.

In 2011 her exhibition of all new work titled "Forty-Nine Days In the Bardo" opened at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia. That same year she was awarded with the Pratt Institute's Honorary Legends Award. In January of 2012 Anderson was the artist-in-residence at the High Performance Rodeo in Calgary, Alberta where she developed her latest solo performance titled "Dirtday!" Her exhibition "Boat" curated by Vito Schnabel opened in May of 2012. She has recently finished residencies at both CAP in UCLA in Los Angeles and EMPAC in Troy New York. Her film Heart of a Dog was chosen as an official selection of the 2015 Venice and Toronto Film Festivals. In the same year, her exhibition Habeas Corpus opened at the Park Avenue Armory to wide critical acclaim and in 2016 she was the recipient of Yoko Ono's Courage Award for the Arts for that project. Anderson lives in New York City.

About Manchester International Festival

Manchester International Festival (MIF) is the world's first festival of original, new work and special events, staged every two years in Manchester, UK. MIF launched in 2007 as an artist-led festival presenting new works from across the spectrum of performing arts, visual arts and popular culture. The next Festival takes place from 4 - 21 July 2019.

MIF has commissioned, produced and presented world premieres by artists including Marina Abramovi, Damon Albarn, Björk, Boris Charmatz, Jeremy Deller, Elbow, Wayne McGregor, Steve McQueen, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Thomas Ostermeier, Maxine Peake, Punchdrunk, The xx, Robert Wilson and Zaha Hadid Architects.

These and other world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work, staged in venues across Greater Manchester - from theatres, galleries and concert halls to railway depots, churches and car parks. MIF works closely with venues, festivals and other cultural organisations globally, whose financial and creative input helps to make

many of these projects possible and ensures that work made at MIF goes on to be seen around the world.

MIF supports a year-round Creative Engagement programme, bringing opportunities for people from all backgrounds, ages and from all corners of the city to get involved during the Festival and year-round, as volunteers, as participants in shows, through skills development workshops and a host of creative activities, such as Festival in My House.

MIF will also be the operator for The Factory, the new world-class cultural space being developed in the heart of Manchester, designed by internationally-renowned architects Rem Koolhaas' OMA. Due to open in 2021, The Factory will commission, present and produce a year-round programme, featuring new work from the world's greatest artists and offering a space to make, explore and experiment. Attracting up to 850,000 visitors, The Factory will add £1.1 billion to the economy and create 1,500 jobs. Its pioneering programme of skills, training and engagement will benefit local people and the next generation of creative talent from across the city, whilst apprenticeships and trainee schemes are already underway during the construction phase.

MIF's Artistic Director and Chief Executive is John McGrath.