

# Manchester International Festival

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Press release — Embargoed until 00.01am, Wednesday 1 July 2020

## AVATAR ARTIST LATURBO AVEDON TAKES OVER THE FACTORY REIMAGINED IN FORTNITE CREATIVE

**World premiere of first Virtual Factory commission reimagines OMA's landmark design for MIF's future home**

**Other Virtual Factory artists premiering original digital work will include Jenn Nkiru, Robert Yang and Tai Shani**

The influential avatar artist and curator **LaTurbo Avedon** has created a new work for **Virtual Factory**, a series of online commissions by leading international artists, inspired by The Factory, the landmark cultural space being built in Manchester, UK, which will be MIF's future home.

LaTurbo's digital intervention *Your Progress Will Be Saved* takes place in a reimagining of The Factory, which has been built on an island in the global gaming platform **Fortnite Creative**. Designed in the real world by international architectural practice Rem Koolhaas' OMA, under the direction of OMA partner Ellen van Loon, it is believed to be the first major cultural building to be recreated in Fortnite, and the first to be launched in virtual space before it opens in the physical world.

LaTurbo's work plays with and deconstructs our ideas about identity, authorship and the conventions of artistic practice. Much of *Your Progress Will Be Saved* deals with mirrors, taking visitors on a constantly evolving journey through shifting spaces, across illuminated dance floors and into private booths, experimenting with and blurring the distinctions between what we call the real and the virtual worlds.

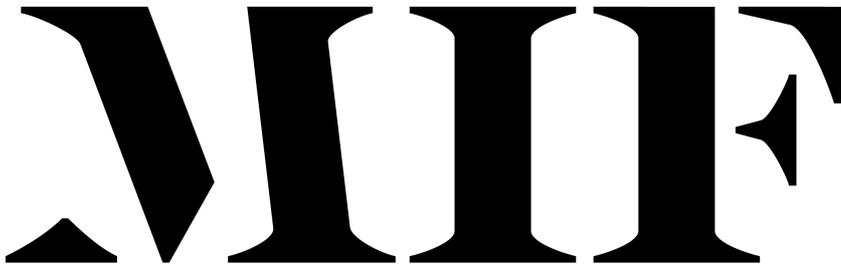
Gamers and non-gamers will be able to experience *Your Progress Will Be Saved*, which is free to try by playing the full game in Fortnite Creative, choosing their own adventure in an adapted journey on the Virtual Factory website and taking tours of LaTurbo's intervention on Twitch.

LaTurbo Avedon says: *"You begin to see reflections throughout the Virtual Factory. From the memesis of the installed works and locations, down to noisy reflections from the game engine itself. As much of the world grapples with a cultural moment of immateriality, Your Progress Will Be Saved shines back the close-yet-far tension of being alone online, together."*

Virtual Factory underlines the digital ambition that is a cornerstone of the real-world Factory. With LaTurbo Avedon leading the charge, the artists commissioned for the Virtual Factory series, have built reputations through very different artistic practices and offer commentary on the political, social and philosophical issues of the day.

Each artist is being invited to respond to, reconfigure and play with the different elements of the building, including the architecture, the people and the history of

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the site. Through augmented reality, interactive and mobile gaming, film and social media, Virtual Factory aims to imagine and create work that harnesses these new creative landscapes as spaces of infinite possibility.

*Your Progress Will Be Saved* opens on Wednesday 1 July and runs until the autumn. Subsequent commissions will be released over the next year, including a new project by the British-Nigerian artist and director **Jenn Nkiru**, whose global reputation was cemented by her work on Beyoncé and Jay-Z's *Apeshit* video; the New York City based game developer and professor of video games, **Robert Yang**, whose work often focuses on gay men, intimacy and queer spaces; and the British artist **Tai Shani**, whose work encompasses performance, film, photography and sculptural installations and was one of the joint winners of the Turner Prize 2019.

MIF began developing Virtual Factory in 2019, as part of its pre-Factory programme on the journey towards The Factory, where artists will be encouraged to create radical and interdisciplinary work that maximises the boundless potential of the highly flexible spaces within the building and the expanding digital spaces beyond its structure.

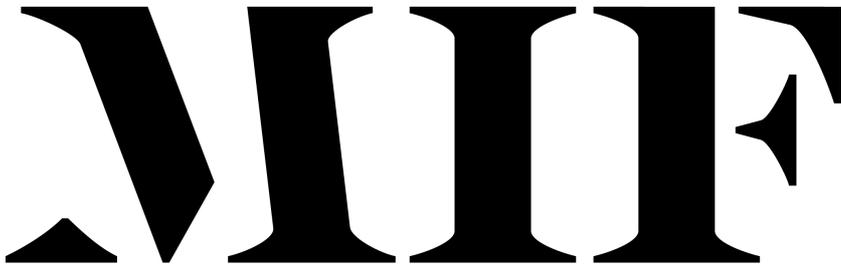
**Gabrielle Jenks**, Digital Director at Manchester International Festival, says: *"Virtual Factory reflects a time when we are increasingly inhabiting non-physical environments, from social media and virtual reality to live-streamed theatre and videogames. These artists through their distinct practices construct worlds through computer games, cinematic tools and augmented reality. They are creating work for a building that hasn't opened yet - alluding to the reconfigurable shape of things to come and sending out a message that The Factory will be open for everyone to re-interpret and re-use."*

**Mark Ball**, Creative Director for MIF and The Factory, adds: *"The Factory has always been an invitation to artists to make bold and radical work, whether that's within the walls of the building, or the virtual spaces we create around it. So it's thrilling that the very first work to be created for it is by a virtual artist within one of the world's biggest gaming platforms for our Virtual Factory programme. LaTurbo Avedon's project does everything we need The Factory to be: a place where new artistic forms and experiences are created, played with and enjoyed by richly diverse audiences."*

Talking about her commission, **Jenn Nkiru** comments: *"As a country, our relationship to the North is one that has always felt fractured and incomplete. Architecture, when in its most useful form, disrupts this — it is body and soul; it brings a sense of rootedness, completeness, progressiveness and prompts us to question, interrogate and enjoy."*

*"With Manchester and our site, The Factory, as the focus, these are all ideas I intend to speculate in abstraction within a film. As an artist, I'm excited to be in visual conversation with the architects and to explore how a coalescence of our philosophies will realise itself within this special project."*

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Architect Ellen van Loon states: *“From the outset, we have designed The Factory with the goal of stimulating exciting innovations in the arts. Virtual Factory reinforces the strength of The Factory as a versatile and flexible platform for experimentation in the cultural scene.”*

This latest series of commissions and The Factory’s ambitious experimentalism build on MIF’s record for commissioning innovative digital work, including **Björk’s [Biophilia](#)** app (MIF11), **Ed Atkins’ [Performance Capture](#)** (MIF15) and **Laurie Anderson and Hsin-Chien Huang’s [To the Moon](#)** (MIF19). MIF has also commissioned two games, which are available for free: **[Songs of the Lost](#)** by **Paloma Dawkins** featuring music by **Jlin** (MIF19), and **Nina Freeman’s [Lost Memories Dot Net](#)** (MIF17).

Whilst preparing for Virtual Factory, MIF has also been supporting Greater Manchester artists to develop work online during the lockdown, through initiatives such as **[Festival in My House and Yours](#)** and **[Remote Residencies](#)**. MIF supports local artists and makers year-round and during the Festival, through other programmes, including **[Creative Lab](#)**, which offer the opportunity to develop their skills and digital practice.

## ENDS

[mif.co.uk](http://mif.co.uk)  
[virtual-factory.co.uk](http://virtual-factory.co.uk) – live from 1 July 2020

Your Progress Will Be Saved map code: 1248 2128 4287

#VirtualFactory  
#TheFactoryMCR  
[twitch.tv/mifestival](https://www.twitch.tv/mifestival)

Events programme  
Wed 1 July

## About Manchester International Festival

Manchester International Festival (MIF) was founded as the world’s first festival of original, new work and special events and is an artist-led festival reflecting the spectrum of performing arts, visual arts and popular culture.

Staged every two years in Manchester, MIF has commissioned, produced and presented world premieres by artists including Marina Abramović, Damon Albarn, Laurie Anderson, Björk, Boris Charmatz, Jeremy Deller, Idris Elba and Kwame Kwei-Armah, Elbow, Philip Glass and Phelim McDermott, David Lynch, Wayne McGregor, Steve McQueen, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Yoko Ono, Thomas Ostermeier, Maxine Peake, Punchdrunk, Skepta, The xx, Robert Wilson and Zaha Hadid Architects.

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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 and a host of creative activities, such as Festival in My House.

MIF will also run The Factory, the new world-class cultural space currently being built in the heart of Manchester and designed by internationally-renowned architects Rem Koolhaas' Office for Metropolitan Architecture. 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 annually, 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.

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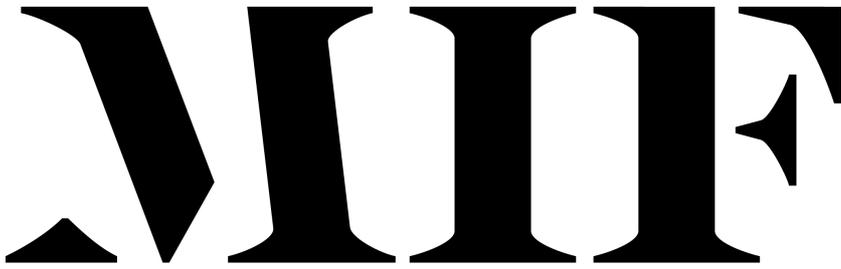
**LaTurbo Avedon** is an avatar and artist originating in virtual space. Their work emphasises the practice of nonphysical identity and authorship. Many of the works can be described as research into dimensions, deconstructions, and the explosion of forms, exploring topics of virtual authorship and the physicality of the Internet.

They curate and design Panther Modern, a file-based exhibition space that encourages artists to create site-specific installations for the internet.

LaTurbo's process of character creation continues through gaming, performance and exhibitions. Their work has appeared internationally, including TRANSFER Gallery (New York), Transmediale (Berlin), Haus der elektronischen Künste (Basel), The Whitney Museum (New York), HMKV (Dortmund), Barbican Centre (London), and Galeries Lafayette (Paris).

**Jenn Nkiru** is a British-Nigerian filmmaker, born and based in Peckham, London. Video director Nkiru is an award-winning artist + director from London. Director of Neneh Cherry's art music video Kong, she was also 2nd unit director for Beyoncé and Jay-Z's internet-breaking APESHIT. Previous work also includes visuals for Jazz musician Kamasi Washington on his latest album Heaven And Earth and

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Nowness film REBIRTH IS NECESSARY. An MFA film graduate of Howard University, her first film EN VOGUE shot by Bradford Young & Arthur Jafa screened internationally to critical success.

**Tai Shani's** multidisciplinary practice, comprising performance, film, photography and installation, revolves around experimental narrative texts. Shani creates violent, erotic and fantastical images told in a dense, floral language which re-imagines female otherness as a perfect totality, set in a world complete with cosmologies, myth and histories that negate patriarchal narratives. These alternate between familiar stylistic tropes and structures and theoretical prose in order to explore the construction of subjectivity, excess and the affects of the epic as the ground for a post-patriarchal realism.

Tai Shani's project DC Productions (2014-2019) proposed an allegorical city of women, it was an experimental and expanded adaptation of Christine de Pizan's 1405 pioneering feminist book, The Book of the City of Ladies within which Christine builds an city for notable women drawn from a medieval conception of history, where fact, fiction and myth are blurred. This non-hierarchical approach also determined the construction of the characters and narrative of DC. The collected texts were published in 2019 as 'Our Fatal Magic'.

Tai Shani is an artist living and working in London. She is the joint 2019 Turner Prize winner together with Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Helen Cammock and Oscar Murillo. In 2019 Tai was a Max Mara prize nominee. Her work has been shown at Turner Contemporary, UK (2019); Grazer Kunst Verein, Austria (2019); Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Italy (2019); Glasgow International, UK (2018); Wysing Arts Centre, UK (2017); Serpentine Galleries, London (2016); Tate, London (2016); Yvonne Lambert Gallery, Berlin (2016) and Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2016).

**Robert Yang (杨若波)** is a game developer and professor of video games in New York City. Robert Yang makes surprisingly popular games about gay culture and intimacy -- he is most known for his historical bathroom sex simulator The Tearoom and his male shower simulator Rinse and Repeat, and his gay sex triptych Radiator 2 has over 150,000 users on Steam. He is currently an Assistant Arts Professor at NYU Game Center, and he has given talks at GDC, IndieCade, Queerness and Games Conference, and Games for Change. He holds a BA in English Literature from UC Berkeley, and an MFA in Design and Technology from Parsons School for Design.

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