# Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley challenges US censorship with immersive Black trans narratives



Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, a 29-year-old British artist and game developer, has recently highlighted her experiences with censorship in the United States regarding her work. She noted that her video game, which explores the theme of walking home alone at night, was exhibited in a U.S. gallery. However, the venue restricted access to children due to her use of the word "state" in the accompanying text—a decision Brathwaite-Shirley described as unnecessarily political. She emphasized that the game does not focus exclusively on her identity as a trans person but rather addresses issues of safety.

Brathwaite-Shirley's art often centres on elevating voices that have been omitted from history, particularly those of Black trans individuals. Her work has been displayed in prestigious venues including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Berlin's Berghain, and Tate Modern. In a video call, she outlined her inspirations, which range from artists such as Sondra Perry and Travis Alabanza to video game creators like Hideo Kojima and the low-resolution horror gaming community, Haunted PS1.

Her immersive video installations often serve as interactive spaces filled with significant cultural references. One of her notable works is "Black Trans Archive" (2020), in which players must identify their gender and race, influencing their journey within the game’s environment. Brathwaite-Shirley has indicated that her intention is to provoke thought and facilitate dialogue, stating, "I want to activate people’s brains and allow them to have conversations with people that they don’t like."

At the upcoming Frieze New York art fair, she will present additional works, including "BlackTransSea" (2021), which invites players to explore their ancestral histories linked to the transatlantic slave trade. “If your ancestors are people that carry people across the ocean, that ship can never make it to its destination. It always sinks,” she explained, underlining the weighty themes explored in her contributions.

Brathwaite-Shirley’s most ambitious project to date, "No Space for Redemption" (2024), encompasses a wide array of themes including war, love, and online trauma. Describing her creative process, she elaborated on how conversation plays a pivotal role; she collects experiences and imagery from discussions with a collective of Black trans coders and developers to sculpt virtual environments.

Born in Streatham, south London in 1995, Brathwaite-Shirley developed a fascination with video games in her youth. After studying at the Slade School of Fine Art, she moved to Berlin, a city she credits for its slower pace conducive to contemplation.

Brathwaite-Shirley’s early works included intricate animations like "Blackzilla" (2018), which proposed a scenario where an AI-engineered environment is breathable only for Black trans individuals. While entertaining, she found the messaging ineffective. Her later works aim at fostering connections among audiences and encouraging dialogue about complex topics.

Reflecting on the importance of offline communication, Brathwaite-Shirley noted a recent participatory performance at Tate Modern that sparked an extensive conversation among participants—an experience she considers to underline the need for shared spaces to explore difficult subjects.

Anticipating an autumn exhibition at the Serpentine, she is developing a piece designed to prompt dialogue among visitors, utilising environmental cues to enhance interaction. “What you leave with, rather than what you’re seeing,” is what she values most as the essence of her art. She articulated her desire for audiences to engage with her works on a deeper emotional level rather than merely appreciating their aesthetic qualities.

As her art continues to develop, the core of Brathwaite-Shirley’s practice remains steadfast: to preserve and honour the narratives of those whose stories have been historically obscured.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.ft.com/content/74e57f25-c2ff-4e98-b756-2d8257dddd7d> - An article detailing Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley's experiences with censorship in the U.S., including the restriction of her video game due to the use of the word 'state' in the accompanying text.
* <https://www.berghain.berlin/en/event/79024/> - Information about Brathwaite-Shirley's exhibition 'THE SOUL STATION' at Berlin's Berghain, showcasing her immersive video game installations.
* <https://buffaloakg.org/person/danielle-brathwaite-shirley> - Details on Brathwaite-Shirley's work 'WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT', a digital game displayed at the Buffalo AKG Art Museum.
* <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/we-cant-do-this-alone/> - Information about Brathwaite-Shirley's participatory performance 'WE CAN’T DO THIS ALONE' at the Serpentine Galleries, designed to foster dialogue among visitors.
* <https://www.artrabbit.com/events/she-keeps-me-damn-alive-danielle-brathwaiteshirley> - Details on Brathwaite-Shirley's exhibition 'SHE KEEPS ME DAMN ALIVE' at arebyte Gallery in London, focusing on protecting Black Trans people.
* <https://www.deemjournal.com/stories/danielle-brathwaite-shirley> - An interview with Brathwaite-Shirley discussing her work 'Resurrection Lands' and the archiving of Black trans experiences.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/74e57f25-c2ff-4e98-b756-2d8257dddd7d> - Please view link - unable to able to access data