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"The Renaissance meets sci-fi in Isaac Julien's new cinematic installation"

By Emily Dinsdale

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Isaac Julien, *All That Changes You* Curated by Lorenzo Giusti Palazzo Te, Mantua, 4 October 2025 - 1 February 2026
Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro and Jessica Silverman © The artist

In the cool, columned expanse of Palazzo Te in Mantua – an opulent palace built in the early 1530s by Giulio Romano for Federico II Gonzaga – time fractures, weaves and reconstitutes itself under the gaze of multimedia artist, Isaac Julien. His new film installation, *All That Changes You. Metamorphosis*, is a ten-screen symphony of image and architecture, mythology and ecology. It does not simply inhabit this Renaissance 'pleasure palace', it interacts with the building's frescoed walls and invites us into a metamorphic dream of past, present and speculative future.

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The film stars Gwendoline Christie and Sheila Atim as otherworldly goddess-beings travelling across epochs, architectures and philosophies. Part oracles, part-time-travellers, gliding across lush forests, glowing glass buildings, and the ancient painted walls of the Palazzo itself, they're not here to tell a story in the usual sense. They are the story: always moving, always changing.

In the newly reopened Fruttieri wing of the palace, Julien's cinematic artwork draws on the vaulted space that houses it. Palazzo Te become more than a venue – it is part of the film's narrative. Its cinematic, dramatic frescoes, such as the famous "Fall of the Giants", not only feature in the film, but their mythological scenes inform the very fabric of the story in a meeting of the Renaissance and futurism.



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The work takes its name and draws on inspiration from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a classical poem full of transformations – of people into trees, gods into animals, and everything in between. Julien excavates and reimagines the text as a starting point from which to traverse other temporalities: post-modern architecture in London, a futuristic glass spaceship designed by Richard Found, the forested depths of Redwood National and State Park in California.

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Central too is the film's ecological heartbeat: it may span epochs, but Julien anchors his allegory to our imperilled present. The novelistic nods to Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and Donna Haraway's poem *Staying with the Trouble* bring us back to the urgency of the here and now. It may feel utopian, but this is no escapist fantasy. Ecological collapse, inequality and the non-human otherness are at the core of *All That Changes You. Metamorphosis*.

In Julian transfigures the palace into a hybrid gallery space, theatre, spaceship in one; the film becomes architecture; the viewer becomes part of the metamorphosis. Julien's essay on film is one of wonder and urgency – of the constant shape-shifting between epochs, bodies and worlds. It asks: how will we, the human species, transform when the very world we inhabit is at stake; when the story we once believed in is unravelling?

All That Changes You. Metamorphosis is running at Palazzo Te in Mantua until 1 February 2026.

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