

# Live Art

## Histories of the Present

6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> April 2022 / Gilmorehill Centre / University of Glasgow

**Live Art: Histories of the Present** is a two-day event exploring the complex relationship between live art, and the material, historical conditions which have fostered and sometimes constrained the possibilities for experimental and interdisciplinary performance. Staged as part of the AHRC-funded **Live Art in Scotland** project, the event engages with live art and its communities of practice: the structures which they enable and generate, and how artists and researchers trace and construct its history. This symposium has been consciously designed as a slow event with space for thought and discussion, and in the hope of breaking with some of the conventions of 'formal' presentations. Each of our speakers is presenting new or ongoing research, and we invite you to be generous in engaging with their work and the questions that it presents. Thank you for joining us!

Steve Greer, University of Glasgow

### Day 1: Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April, 10am–4pm

- 10:00 — Introductions & welcome from Steve Greer and Bryony White
- 10:15 — Dominic Johnson: 'Love On Me: Life and Death in Jon John's Archive'
- 10:45 — Phoebe Patey-Ferguson: 'Too Close for Comfort: Sex, Gossip and Power-Knowledge in Live Art Research'
  
- 11:30 — Coffee & comfort break
- 12pm — Roundtable 1 : archives in/as practice
  
- 1.30 — 2.30 LUNCH
  
- 2:30 — Vanessa Damilola Macaulay: 'Historical Imagination: The Shadows & Gaps in Black Performance'
- 3:00 — Harriet Curtis: 'Mess as Live Art Methodology'
  
- 4:00 — **Live Art in Scotland** practitioner directory sharing

### Day 2: Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> April, 10.30am–4pm

- 10:30 — Introductions & welcome
- 10:45 — Gavin Butt: 'Live Class: Art School and "Militant Learning" in Bradford'
- 11:15 — Heike Roms: 'Live Class: Event as Parallel Institution – Pedagogizing Performance at Cardiff'
  
- 12pm — Coffee & comfort break
- 12.15 — Roundtable 2 : archives in/as history
  
- 1.30 — 2.30 LUNCH
  
- 2.30 — Workshop : Future Archives
- 3.45 — Launch of the **Live Art in Scotland** researcher resource map

### **Dominic Johnson: 'Love On Me: Life and Death in Jon John's Archive'**

Jon John (Jonathan Arias) was an artist and lay anthropologist from the French Basque region. He made a series of performances using piercing, scarification, and ritual endurance over the course of a decade until shortly before his premature death from lymphoma at the age of 33 in 2017. He generally evaded or avoided institutional spaces of live art, and therefore cultivated a small, cult following, sharing his work in private, or in artist-run spaces, small festivals, and tattoo and piercing studios. I reconstruct Jon John's live art through research in his archive, which contains schematic drawings, totemic objects, finished art works and photographs. I focus on the later, especially little-known works that explored his experiences of living with cancer and making preparations for death. I reflect on the ways his archive might save as well as animate this work, and the ethical and other problems prompted by the difficult materials his work leaves behind.

### **Phoebe Patey-Ferguson: 'Too Close for Comfort: Sex, Gossip and Power-Knowledge in Live Art Research'**

What are the ethical responsibilities and restraints of researching the present and recent past of live art and experimental performance? The UK Live Art sector is threaded through with knots of social entanglements which shape the field. Pulling on one of these threads in an attempt to historicise or contextualise contemporary practice will inevitably unearth uncomfortable, difficult and sensitive information that can impact lives, careers, and legacies. In the course of research, hidden knowledge might be disclosed as gossip in a smoking area of a festival or through the whispers of a dalliance after a show – should there be limitations placed on incorporating these concealed truths in our research when they hold the potential to challenge social and institutional hierarchy?

### **Vanessa Damilola Macaulay: 'Historical Imagination: The Shadows & Gaps in Black Performance'**

Lola Olufemi writes that 'the archive, with its shadow and gaps, is a colonial invention in narrative consistency. Its greatest trick is to convince us that time signals forward movement, a determined motion from which events may be regulated, predicted, and anticipated'. In this paper, I examine the narrative of Black performance for its inconsistencies, for its moments of intervention and most importantly, the opportunity for historical imagination. In doing so, I question the preservation of Black performance to determine what it means to revisit performances that have *never* been seen?

### **Harriet Curtis: 'Mess as Live Art Methodology'**

This presentation explores mess and messiness as categorisations for work that might be productively evasive, inconvenient, or illegible, that is, disruptive to institutionalising structures for Live Art and experimental practices. Over the past decade, 'mess' as a methodology of performance and Live Art has been used to characterise a range of processes, including: experiences of navigating institutional and creative spaces, particularly when accompanied by violence and a denial of agency; the transferral of figurative experiences of pain from one body to another; and messiness as a protective tool for trans and gender variant bodies.

In relation to the tangible outcomes of Live Art, this presentation takes up the physical, material, and political messiness of Live Art and asks: Who is mess for? Who makes it? Who cleans it up? Who attends to it, nurtures, and fosters it? How is it funded and archived? What might readings of messiness in performance reveal about the taste structures, economics, and 'uses' of Live Art within institutional frameworks?

### **Heike Roms: 'Live Class: Event as Parallel Institution – Pedagogizing Performance at Cardiff'**

This paper explores the use of performance as a pedagogical methodology in the history of British art education by considering the gradual integration of performance art into the teaching at Cardiff College of Art between the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. Beginning with the formation of an extracurricular 'study group' in 1969 that chose performance as it offered 'a parallel institution' within which students and teachers would take equal share in 'the development of a real state of learning', the increasing pedagogization of performance art at the college led to regular performance workshops for fine art students, followed by public sharings in the form of performative 'symposia', and finally to the establishment in 1973 of the 'Alternative Studies' department at the college, making Cardiff one of the first art schools in Britain that offered a dedicated provision for time-based art. My particular interest lies in exploring what became of the promise of alternative learning relationships as performance became progressively incorporated into the institutional teaching structures, and in the long-term legacy of this incorporation for the UK's emergent live art scene.

### **Getting around the Gilmorehill Building**

- The symposium takes place in the James Arnott Theatre on level 5 of the Gilmorehill Building. You can either take the main staircase or the lift from the street-level lobby.
- There are bathrooms on the right hand side of the lobby as you leave the theatre. Additional, wheelchair-accessible bathrooms are available on levels 2 and 3 via the lift.
- Following the latest guidance from the Scottish government and to help keep our campus safe, we ask that you wear a face covering indoors, unless you are exempt.
- Lunch and refreshments are available in the theatre lobby at lunchtime. All of the food offered is either vegetarian or vegan: please see platters for dietary advice.

Organised by Steve Greer and Bryony White with support from the AHRC and University of Glasgow as part of the **Live Art in Scotland** project. Special thanks to Tony Sweeten, Tanvi Sood, Nefeli Stoikopoulou and Olivia Vong.

### **Gavin Butt: 'Live Class: Art School and "Militant Learning" in Bradford'**

This paper explores the use of performance as a pedagogical methodology in the history of British art education by considering the work of Albert Hunt and the Bradford Art College Theatre Group. Focusing my reflections upon a period between 1968 and 1976, when the provision and value of an art education was undergoing significant change, I will consider what the experimental coming together of non-professional performance with radical learning in Bradford tells us about regional UK art schools as infrastructures of creative dissent. Critical attention is paid to attitudes toward 'professionalisation' in the 1970s art college in order to address the limits and possibilities of performance as learning both there and then, and by comparison, within the neoliberal university of today.