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Platform:2020

Rabindranath A Bhowse
Mark Bleakley
Rhona Jack
Susannah Stark

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We are delighted to welcome you to the 2020 edition of *Platform*, a dedicated and supported opportunity for artists at the outset of their careers to make and present new work as part of Edinburgh Art Festival.

Earlier in the year, as a result of the ongoing global pandemic, we took the sad decision to cancel the 2020 edition of Edinburgh Art Festival. We are particularly pleased, therefore, to be able to mount this exhibition of a new generation of artists outwith our usual festival dates, after what has been an exceptionally challenging time for cultural organisations the world over, and for individual artists in particular.

Our 2020 edition was selected from an open call by artist Ruth Ewan and Sophia Hao, Principal Curator, Cooper Gallery, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art; and includes work by Rabindranath A Bhowse, Mark Bleakley, Rhona Jack and Susannah Stark.

Selected several weeks before the UK went into lockdown, there is an added poignancy and resonance to some of the themes which emerge across the four projects. From Mark Bleakley's interest in collective gathering, to Susannah Stark's thoughtful reflections on our relationships to domestic space, Rhona Jack's interest in touch and craft, or Rabindranath A Bhowse's strategies for survival expressed through drawing and text, the ideas explored by the artists in this 2020 edition have acquired a new urgency and relevance.

The exhibition is curated by Abigail Webster, who joins the festival on a 12 month internship designed to support the next generation of curators; and who for the past 6 months has been working closely with the selected artists as they revisited proposals first conceived in a pre-Covid world, supporting them to adapt and adjust their ideas in the context of new restrictions.

We are enormously grateful to David Patterson, Maeve Toal, and the whole team at City Art Centre for partnering with us on the exhibition, and for welcoming us into the building just a few short weeks after the galleries reopened following many months of closure.

This exhibition is made possible thanks to the generous support of the PLACE Programme, a partnership between Edinburgh Festivals, Scottish Government, City of Edinburgh Council and Creative Scotland, and the Cruden Foundation.

Thanks to them, and as part of a wider programme of support for the participating artists, we are delighted to have been able to commission a special text from artist and writer Adam Benmakhlof, published in this exhibition booklet designed by James Brook.

Above all, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our participating artists, all of whom have risen to the challenges of 2020 with extraordinary commitment and good humour.

Sorcha Carey, Director

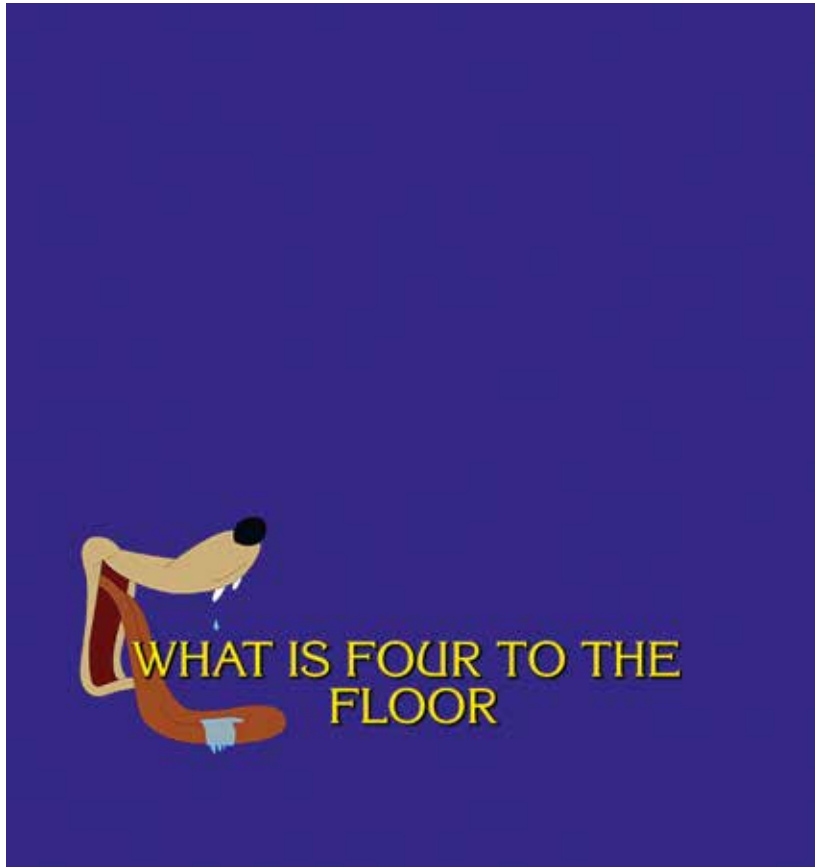
Within The Present Work, There Is The Next To Come

BELOW: Mark Bleakley, *Giving Weight*, (video still), 2020.
Performer Seamus Killick.

“That book has been important to how I've been thinking about this work”, artist Susannah Stark responds to an offhand reference to *The Dispossessed* (1974) by Ursula K Le Guin. It's a sci-fi story that begins on an anarchist moon Anarres where people live who left the capitalist state on the planet Urras. “This idea is interesting, that radical social movements can be birthed from capitalism” [that are opposed to it]. Stark mentions one quote in particular: “Nothing is yours. It is to use. It is to share. If you will not share it, you cannot use it”. This collective principle of sharing, recycling, free appropriation and equity forms one possible framework for understanding the relationships between the ideas and works of the four artists included in this year's *Platform* presentation.

For artist-choreographer Mark Bleakley, the body itself as a physical heft can be shared and loaned. The work here is informed in part by “the protest die-ins when you physically give weight to a cause, and the power of that”. His presentation forms the latest iteration of his sustained inquiry into “the spaces that create collectives, like the rave, or a mosh pit or religious ceremony”. Refining the experience of these contexts, he has specifically zeroed in on the idea of “weight”, which he divides into three aspects: “grounding, groundlessness and inertia”. These three concepts then form the centre of a workshop Bleakley facilitates in *Giving Weight*, “a simple document of fragments of what happened” as participants take part in movement exercises and “block printing, using the body weight to imprint”.





LEFT: Mark Bleakley, *Jeopardies?*, (detail from a video still), 2020.
RIGHT: Mark Bleakley, *How we handle Things*, 2019. Photo: Carmel Pia.

In the second part of the film, Bleakley brings to the surface some of the concepts visualised in the first part through “a corrupted gameshow format” based on *Jeopardy!* in which answers are given as clues and the contestants must guess the question. “What’s taking the ground from you?” is one question. The suggestions for answers include “the state, or bigger social structures that have a control over your body, your weight or how you exist”. Bleakley nevertheless cautions, “I’m not trying to make grand statements, but provoke the viewer to think about how your weight is active and passive... Throwing your body into a mosh pit is like a surrendering, or marching at a protest is a stamping and it’s an affirmation of your body in space and time”. He also refers to chain linking, used by protestors and police alike, “trying to think about this spectrum when you’re actively using [these body-based tactics], versus when somebody is actively using [them] against you”.





It's essential for Bleakley that politically charged elements feature in his work "in a way that's accessible and useable... [and can] enable someone to think through their body, that's why I wanted to run this workshop. That's what I want to emphasise, how you use your body and be aware of that a bit more ... Because I work with dance, I always come back to the principle that we are thinking with our bodies. Thought is not just [in the head], it's throughout us".

Similar to Bleakley's understanding of thinking with the body, Rhona Jack speaks about the importance of actively moving while she's making and forming new ideas. "A lot of the processes I'm using are repetitive so they leave a lot of time for thinking. It's a lot more difficult for me to try sitting cold and coming up with an idea". Between Bleakley and Jack, there's a sense of the importance of doing, moving and making, as a way of working and developing concepts. In this way, for Jack, it's in the making of one work, the idea for the next often comes. This connection within Jack's practice is also seen in the *Platform* works, specifically the "rugs woven on the loom that started out as an artwork made a few years before" by Jack who now uses it as equipment.

Jack's installation comes, in part, from being surrounded all her life by immediate family members' skilled textile practices, and plotting this

ABOVE AND RIGHT: Rhona Jack, *Trouble Maker Heart Breaker*, 2020. Photo: Rhona Jack.





LEFT: Rhona Jack, *Trouble Maker Heart Breaker*, 2020.
Photo: Rhona Jack.
BELOW: Susannah Stark, *Time to Divest!*, (video still), 2020.

personal experience within the history and the global economics of garment manufacturing. “The conditions in textile factories in most cases haven’t improved in 100 years. It’s just that they exist in other parts of the world”. While Jack is conscious of the exploitation of workers in factories making mass produced clothes, she juxtaposes this with what is produced, namely “clothes that become special to the person wearing them. They can be a really comforting thing, a way of expressing your personality. At the same time, they’re tossed away. I’m showing the textiles I’ve handmade alongside these mass-produced textiles, and I want to bring forward the sense that a person made these, as well”. It’s also important for Jack that “the clothes are coming from a cycle of ownership, that there’s a history of them passing through many different hands to get here”. By making the woven textiles herself, and displaying them alongside the found and donated clothes, Jack subtly invites appreciation of the skill and labour that goes into these items that may often go unappreciated.

This work also follows on from Jack’s commitment to working with recycled materials. She describes being known by people around Dundee for finding uses for materials that would otherwise be headed for landfill: “They’ll contact me about something they think I’ll be interested in, and ask me do you want

this? I’m starting to realise how easy it is to get anything you need, and it doesn’t have to be new. I’ve seen how art can be very wasteful so more and more, I’m trying to use what’s around me”.

Susannah Stark shares Jack’s interest in working with found materials, whether literally with objects that her mother finds on the shore, or more broadly by collaging together existing images and field recordings. For instance, within Stark’s audio piece, she combines musical elements and songs responding to histories of habitation in Scotland with field recordings, made while walking in and around pictish Brochs, in peat bogs, and around her home in Glasgow. The locations are often where there are very real present-day socio-political effects that stem from the oppressive expropriation of the Highland Clearances of the 18th and 19th centuries. The installation of this soundwork itself is inspired by brochs, an ancient form of dwelling found in Scotland, the archaeological remains of which show they were round in their structure, centred around a hearth. As well as creating this “sense of space”, for Stark this work is also about “the expressiveness of the voice. I’m really interested in softness, so I tend to utilise that a lot in the work. Something that seems soft and gentle, there can be lyrics that are more loaded or come from a really specific source. A strange combination of being lulled into something but then there’s also an intention within it”.

Alongside the sound work, Stark has also been developing collages of visual materials, which include as one of their elements, images of Scotland used in tourist advertising. She speaks of these as a “reckoning” of some of the





LEFT, ABOVE: Susannah Stark, *the dispossessed*, 2020. Photo: Susannah Stark.
 LEFT, BELOW: Susannah Stark and Hussein Mitha, *Correspondences*, 2019, Installation view, Hospitalfield. Photo: Adam Lewis Jacob.
 RIGHT: Susannah Stark, *Time on your side*, (video still), 2020.



stereotypical postcard fantasies of Scotland. “I use a lot of red [in these works]. It casts these promotional images in a different light. Some element of criticality comes with recolouring them, they’re not just washed out in this dreamy way. They become quite heavy images”. In this way, Stark problematises the misleading image of Scotland as sublime and untouched, as a place without history. “It is sold as idyllic, that it’s good for your holiday because it’s empty and there are unspoilt beaches and woodlands. It’s clean and pure. But people do live here, and they always have. A lot of people have been evicted so maybe that’s why it’s emptier than it used to be. People were put out [of] the way to make profit”. She refers to Andy Wightman’s book *The Poor Had No Lawyers* as a key text for understanding the development and persistence of an exploitative system of land ownership in Scotland.

With Stark referencing stone circles and ancient dwellings in her arrangement of her AV tech, a similar collision of ancestral, mystical and contemporary materials comes in Rabindranath A Bhowe’s large vinyl drawing installation of an elephant trunk and its reference to Ganesha. Made from arrows, and pointing limbs and other directional symbols, it moves from floor to ceiling, sliding between the rectilinear dimensions and divisions that may be expected, from a group show. Like Stark’s broch-inspired circle, it disrupts a gridded presentation. Alongside this large-scale drawing, Bhowe also includes a pamphlet of new writing.

Speaking of their themes and intentions, Bhowe notes: “I think in terms of methodology or what mood I want to go for, it’s just a feeling of perversion, as

form of disruption. The texts that I write are often quite perverted. That comes from a homosexual [and transmasculine] history, and also a history of bodily abjection. Perversion, humour, disruption, speculation... it does all come from a place of love as well, and hopefulness, wanting to call into being modes that can feel cathartic or have a possibility to build on, or just a little moment of redemption. By sharing the texts with people and having it resonate with them, or when they find it funny or strange, it really makes a difference from just having [images, words, stories] rattle around your own head”.

Within the work, Bhowe describes making a metaphorical “quilt” that incorporates symbols, myths, imagined and biographical elements. “For me the whole purpose of making this work, or to be honest of making any work, writing or engaging in any art practice or conversation with others, is really a seeking of a personal spirituality or trying to piece one together. And I’ve noticed other people doing that too. You might be culturally embedded in some religions or mythologies, but I definitely have to make my own piecemeal, like a quilt, to feel that I have some faith and motivation. I feel like in queer worlds, especially queer creative worlds, that’s where you find other people trying to do that... When the systems around you don’t make sense for you and the people you love, you inevitably seek out other systems of knowledge or of making sense”.

Returning to Le Guin, “Nothing is yours. It is to use. It is to share. If you will not share it, you cannot use it”. On the level of mythologies and religious practices, Bhowe’s work finds joyous new uses of fragments of iconography and biblical



BELOW: Rabindranath A Bhowe, *Work in Progress*, 2020.

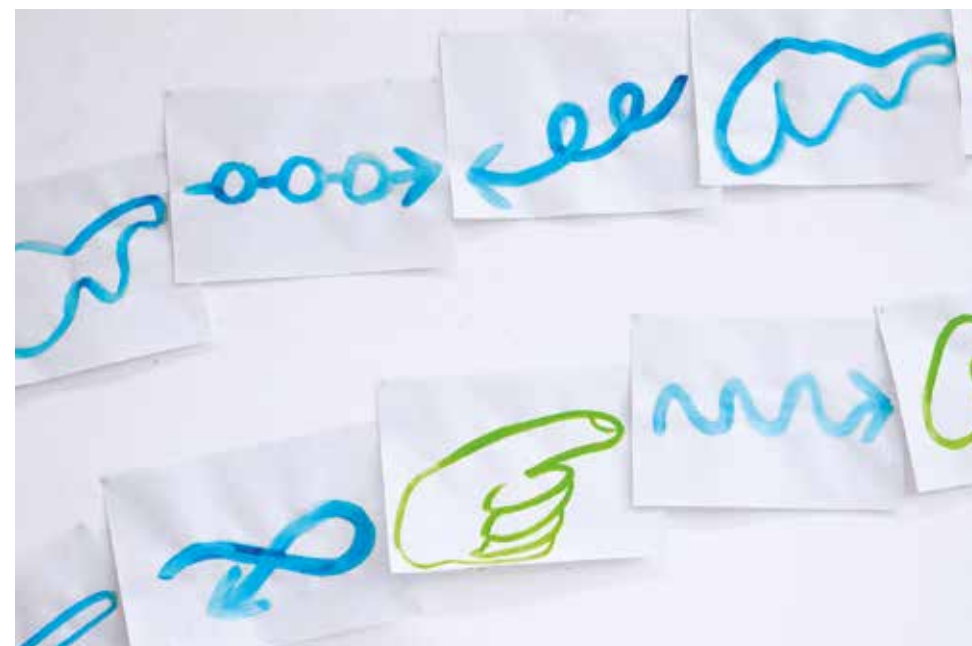
Photo: Rabindranath A Bhowe.

LEFT, ABOVE: Rabindranath A Bhowe, Sketch for *Trunc*, 2020.

Photo: Rabindranath A Bhowe.

LEFT, BELOW: Rabindranath A Bhowe, Sketch for *This Path Will Lead You to Hot Burning Desires! We Are Surviving This Together, Alone Together in the Most Hallowed Abjection.*

A Revelation, Irresistible to Imagine!, 2020. Photo: Rabindranath A Bhowe.





LEFT: Rabindranath A Bhowe, *Test for This Path Will Lead You to Hot Burning Desires! We Are Surviving This Together, Alone Together in the Most Hallowed Abjection. A Revelation, Irresistible to Imagine!*, 2020. Photo: Rabindranath A Bhowe.

symbolism, combining these with their own new poetic fragments, opening a space of possibility for people left out of conventional spiritual practice. Equally, in their careful repurposing and refiguring of found and donated materials, Jack and Stark practice an active scavenging and charged repurposing of seemingly innocuous materials (a high street garment, the sound of a landscape), as they each in their distinctive practices draw attention to international capitalist exploitation and Scottish histories of expropriation, respectively. For Bleakley, his emphasis on giving new ways of thinking with one's body and avoidance of blunt political statement also suggests a form of political discourse, that prioritises the circulation of resources and strategies for thinking through the body, rather than a final gift of a fixed expertise or stable insight. The four artists' delicate solidarity is enriched by their distinctiveness of methodologies and distance from one another. As they each tend to their respective fields of social, personal and political enquiry, there is the reminder of American poet and anarchist activist Diane di Prima's tender advice from her 1971 poetry collection *Revolutionary Letters*, that:

“NO ONE WAY WORKS, it will take all of us shoving at the thing from all sides to bring it down”.

Adam Benmakhlouf

Artists' Biographies

Rabindranath A Bhowe (born 1993) grew up in London and lives and works between Glasgow and Rotterdam. He graduated from the Ruskin School of Art in 2016 with a BFA in Fine Art, took part in the School of the Damned DIY art school programme in 2019, and served as a committee member at Market Gallery from 2018-2020. He is currently studying for an MFA in Fine Art at Piet Zwart Academy. Recent exhibitions and performances include: *Digital Slip*, Double Okay (2020); *All was vibrating fur*, Limbo (2019); *All vibrating fur*, Civic House (2019); *SINC*, Backlit (2019); *A Small Pause To Unfold*, Keir Street (2019); *Rock-a-bye Bivalve*, Delicious Clam (2019); *Artist Spread*, The Project Café (2018); *You're Too Kind*, David Dale Gallery (2017); *[sic]*, Glasgow Open House Art Festival (2017).

Mark Bleakley (born 1990, Edinburgh, Scotland) lives and works in Glasgow. He graduated from Newcastle University in 2013 with a BA in Fine Art. Bleakley's practice is informed by his long term practice in social dance (Bboying and House). Between 2015-2016 Bleakley took part in Dance Base's DEBS with mentor Luke Pell and Collective Gallery's *Satellites Programme*. Recent exhibitions and performances include: *UR-Prototyping*, CCA Glasgow (2019); Future Fictions Festival (2019); *How we handle Things*, Rhubaba (2019); *Schema chapters I-III*, research commission, Talbot Rice Gallery and associated venues (2018); *Fathoms*, in collaboration with Molly Mae Whawell, EMBASSY gallery (2018); *Collision. Colliding. We Were Arguing About Kenneth Koch's 'One Train May Hide Another'* Kingsgate workshop (2017).

Rhona Jack (born 1993, Edinburgh, Scotland) lives and works in Dundee. She graduated from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design in 2017 with a BA in Fine Art and currently serves as a committee member at GENERATORprojects. Recent exhibitions and performances include: *An Isolated Process and Inside Outside*, MERZ Gallery, Sanquhar (2020); *2020 Showcase*, Six Foot Gallery, Glasgow (2019/2020); *Artists at Glenfiddich*, The Glenfiddich Distillery, Dufftown (2018); *Satellite*, Summerhall, Edinburgh (2018); *New Scottish Artists*, The Cello Factory, London (2018); *New Contemporaries*, Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh (2018).

Susannah Stark (born 1988, Dundee, Scotland) lives in Glasgow. She graduated from the Royal College of Art in 2016 with an MA in Fine Art: Print, and from Gray's School of Art in 2011 with a BA in Printmaking. Recent exhibitions include: *Correspondences – a Sound and Light Installation* in collaboration with Hussein Mitha, Hospitalfield, Arbroath (2019); *Searchlights* bb15, Austria (2018); *Lilt, Twang, Tremor*, CCA, Glasgow (2017-2018); *The Minch* in collaboration with Suzanne Déry, Market Gallery, Glasgow (2017); *Film + Sound Programme*, Soundscape Park, Art Basel in Miami Beach (2016). In 2019 she was recipient of Creative Europe funding for a collaborative research project with Ukrainian artist Victoria Myronyuk.

Platform: 2020

City Art Centre
2 Market Street
Edinburgh EH1 1DE

31 October – 29 November 2020

Daily, 10am-5pm

ADMISSION FREE, TICKETED

Selected by: Sorcha Carey,
Ruth Ewan and Sophia Hao
Curated by: Abigail Webster

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Cover image: Mark Bleakley, *Giving Weight*, (video still), 2020. Performer Seamus Killick.

Designed by James Brook, www.jamesbrook.net

Edinburgh Art Festival

Founded in 2004, Edinburgh Art Festival is the platform for the visual arts at the heart of Edinburgh's August festivals, bringing together the capital's leading galleries, museums and production spaces in a city-wide celebration of the very best in visual art.

Each year, the festival features leading international and UK artists alongside the best emerging talent, major survey exhibitions of historic figures, and a special programme of newly commissioned artworks that respond to public and historic sites in the city. The vast majority of the festival is free to attend.

Alongside our main festival programme, we run a year-round series of learning and engagement activities including bespoke tours, workshops and projects for community groups and organisations inspired by the work of our participating artists

www.edinburghartfestival.com

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