Craig Coulthard  
The Drummer & the Drone

Commissioned by Edinburgh Art Festival  
Film installation; 33m 32s  
Installed in Trinity Apse, Claires Close  
42 High Street, EH1 1SS  
Mon–Sun, 10am–6pm

Biography
Craig Coulthard was born in Rinteln, West Germany in 1981 and completed his BA (Hons) (2002) and MFA (2006) at Edinburgh College of Art. He took part in Bloomberg New Contemporaries in 2005 and the Athens Biennale in 2006. His major public work Forest Pitch was the Scottish commission for Artists taking the lead, part of the London 2012 Festival & Cultural Olympiad. Recent solo shows include Know Yr Grammar, Billboard for Edinburgh, at the Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh in 2012, Selected Works 2004–2010, Outbye Gallery, Pittenweem (2010) and Der Die Das, Alfter Hicherweg, Düsseldorf, Germany. He was a founder member of The Embassy gallery in 2003. He also performs and records music as Randan Discotheque.

With thanks to  
Jim Tall, Royal Scots Association Pipe Band  
Cameron Foster, Slanj Kilts, Edinburgh  
Forestry Commission Scotland

31 July – 31 August 2014  
www.edinburghartfestival.com
The Drummer & the Drone, a new film installation by Craig Coulthard, imagines a commemoration ceremony of the future, where the heroic deeds of machines instead of humans are publicly acknowledged and commemorated. The drone of the title refers to that most quintessentially Scottish of instruments, the bagpipe, but also to the unmanned robotic aircraft deployed in contemporary military campaigns and humanitarian rescue operations.

Installed in a former church, the work establishes a tone of ceremony and reverence. The figures of a piper and drummer in ceremonial dress appear in the darkness to perform a repertory of songs, while a voice off screen invokes the actions that are being formally commemorated. Praising the ‘safe and careful planning’ and ‘resourceful deterrence techniques’ of ‘non-human military personnel’, the commentator focuses almost exclusively on the role of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in controlling environmental disasters. There is no mention of conventional warfare, or indeed the covert missions (and concomitant civilian casualties) that the word drone more usually evokes in the popular imagination.

The music performed by the drummer and drone, by contrast, brings to mind a long tradition of pipers and drummers on the battlefield. Taken from the Royal Regiment of Scotland (Scots) Regimental Music Handbook, songs with titles such as Battle’s O’er; Barren Rocks of Aden and The Heights of Dargai reference specific battles, as well as their later retelling by generations of soldiers.

The visual landscape of The Drummer & the Drone, too, is both familiar and strange. Isolated against a black backdrop, the piper and drummer establish the scene, and at the same time seem strangely dislocated and vulnerable. The imaginary monument which appears and progressively evolves between each song is based on the formal display of drums which forms the centrepiece of the Royal British Legion’s Festival of Remembrance. Yet rendered in CGI, with all colour bled out, it becomes abstract and anaesthetised. We recognise the form, but it feels profoundly remote.

As the musicians embark on a performance of Flowers of the Forest, there is a sudden and unexpected interruption to the ceremonial, and the film cuts abruptly to a remote Highland landscape, with a ruined dwelling in the foreground. The music shifts register too, from the regimental tunes which have punctuated the ceremony, to the lyrical and highly personal Lament for the Children, a 17th century piobaireachd (piobroch/lament) composed by Patrick Mòr MacCrimmon, following the loss of seven of his eight children to smallpox.

The piobaireachd Lament for the Children (traditional) is performed by William M. MacDowall. From the album Piobaireachd Volume 5, released by Highlander Music.
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