Talbot Rice Gallery
Old College, South Bridge, Edinburgh EH8 9YL
www.trg.ed.ac.uk | info.talbotrice@ed.ac.uk
Open | Tues – Fri 10am – 5pm | Sat 12 – 5pm.


EVENTS

ARTIST TALK | Saturday 14 March, 11am
Ross Birrell and David Harding in conversation with Pat Fisher, Principal Curator, Talbot Rice Gallery.

SCREENING | Thursday 23 April, 7pm
A Beautiful Living Thing (2015), A film by Ross Birrell.

A Beautiful Living Thing features a composition for solo violin devised from Mackintosh’s description of a work of art, performed inside the ruined library by Bill Chandler (RSNO). Camera: Hugh Watt. Producer: Jo Grotch.

Admission Free, booking essential | abeautifullivingthing.eventbrite.co.uk

TOURS
Curator Tours
Join a member of Talbot Rice Gallery’s curatorial team for a special exhibition tour at 6pm on the last Thursday of every month.

Thursday 26 March, 6pm | curatortourmarch.eventbrite.co.uk
Thursday 30 April, 6pm | curatortourapril.eventbrite.co.uk

In the loop tour | In the frame
During the course of where language ends, artist Juliana Capes will lead tours tailored for visitors with sight and hearing impairments.

Admission Free | Full information and booking details to follow.

Language tours
In association with Gather Festival (gatheruoe.wordpress.com) we are delighted to invite you to the latest in our new series of language tours. The tours are a great opportunity to find out more about the history of the Gallery, learn about the current exhibition, practice your language skills and meet fellow speakers.

Admission Free | Mandarin 17 March, 11am | Spanish 19 March, 1.30pm | German 20 March, 2.30pm

WORKSHOPS
Talbot Rice Gallery look forward to welcoming the pupils of Abbeyhill & Royal Mile Primary Schools to take part in educational workshops during where language ends. Curatorial Intern Clare McAllister will lead a programme of activity inspired by the work of Ross Birrell and David Harding.

TALBOT RICE LATE | Thursday 26 March & 30 April, Until 7pm
Talbot Rice Gallery will stay open til 7pm on the last Thursday of every month allowing for an after-hours view of the exhibition. Feel free to take in the show at your own leisure, or join up for one of our Curator Tours (details above).

OTHER PROJECTS
Rediscover: The Torrie Collection
Rediscover is a new initiative that allows postgraduate students of History of Art to put their original research and knowledge into practice. Following a new taught-course working directly from the University’s Torrie collection three groups of students have explored the history of these artworks to uncover the social and political circumstances in which they were made or acquired, creating displays on the mezzanine of Gallery 2.

Living With Art | 14 – 28 March
Powers of a Flag | 31 March – 11 April
Athens of the North | 14 April – 2 May

For full details visit: www.eca.ed.ac.uk/history-of-art/news-events/rediscover-the-torrie-collection

A large print version of this guide is available from the Reception Desk in Gallery 1. Volunteer Information Assistants are on hand to answer any questions you may have.
Imprisoned in a Nazi detention centre in Nice, Rev. Donald Caskie heard a fellow prisoner being tortured. Once the torture had ceased the man, a member of the French Resistance, made an effort to sing. Slowly, Caskie was able to recognise Bach’s Passion Chorale, sung by the man in its original language, the language of his captors. As Caskie described it, “the chorale of the gentle Bach was giving heart to a victim of the ssian’s own race ... in a garden on the most beautiful coast that God has created for the joy of man.”

This story is a small but indicative part of Ross Birrell and David Harding’s where language ends. It is one of many references carefully woven into the spectacular coloured window installations, sculptural objects, prints and video works. During their 10-year collaboration, Birrell and Harding’s body of works have explored the thresholds between music and politics, poetry and place, composition and colour. Through video and installations they weave complex layers of history into poetic acts of translation and transposition. In where language ends music emerges as a redemptive force, though one never far from brutality and violence.

In many video works the virtuality of a musical performance is captured in a single-take, whilst allusion to the musicians’ background highlights dangerous, underlying social and political circumstances. In Quartet (2012) four female members of the Esperanza Azteca Orquesta de Ciudad Juarez, dressed in blue, singing Mexican, la de los primeros (first among Mothers). This is the only existing musical work by the celebrated 17th century poet Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz. Four male members of the orchestra, dressed in red, play Haydn’s ‘Il Terremoto’ (The Earthquake). The film was shot in Juarez, one of the most dangerous cities in the world with a terrifying culture of violence against women. The piece strikes a fraught balance between themes of survival and destruction, the music formed by and forming the musicians who play together in time and in harmony. The capacity of people to hope for resolution against the complexity of real life situations is similarly captured by Duet (Rothko Chapel, 2013) in which overlaid performances by a Palestinian and an Israeli musician, of the same musical pieces, approach coalescence but remain just out of time and dissonant. Birrell’s composition for Duet was derived from the last-spoken words of Keats, “Lift me up for I am dying”, an ode to the loss of young life. Encountered in the stairwell leading up to the Gallery the work Guantanamera (2013) reveals the political appropriation of specific pieces of music. The words of Cuba’s most famous song, “Guantanamera”, are derived from the verses of the country’s national poet and revolutionary martyr, Jose Marti, a figure claimed by socialists in Cuba and right wing exiles in the USA. In an echo of the political divisions that surround Marti, Birrell and Harding’s audio installation in the stairwell features two ‘a capella’ versions recorded separately in Guantanarno and Miami.

A series of colour installations transform the Gallery’s windows and skylights, infusing the exhibition spaces with variations of blue, red and gold. These works reference composers — often living in exile themselves — who used modern techniques such as ‘serialisation’ and abstract systems of transposition. Birrell’s method of composition, where letters from lines of text are transposed into notational systems, draws from this tradition. The blue windows in Gallery 1 allude to Conlon Nancarrow, a pioneer of works for the pianola or pianola. Nancarrow had to leave his native United States to live in Mexico following his involvement in the Spanish Civil War. His archive is now in the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel and includes the composer’s collection of Little Blue Books, a series of pamphlets produced by the socialist publisher E. Haldeman-Julius and which provide inspiration for Nancarrow Sky (2015) and Winter Ice (2015). The music played by the pianola in the exhibition (at noon and 4pm each day), Olinka Variations (2013), is derived from the name Carmen Mondragon, a revolutionary Mexican poet who composed pieces of music that were never recorded. Mondragon was given the Nahualt name ‘Nahui Olín’, the Aztec symbol of renewal and earthquakes, by the Mexican writer and painter Dr Atl. Dr Atl’s ‘Olinka’: Notes towards a film (2012) are David Harding’s notes for an unmade film about ‘Olín’, a mythical place imagined by Atl. The notes conclude with the suggestion of Olinka as a ‘pueblo magico’ which could be found in the city of Juarez, where the young people perform in the film Quartet.

The red coloured panels in the Georgian interior of Gallery 2 – once known as ‘the Red Gallery’ — are entitled Mural (Louange pour Messiaen et Mahmood Darwinsh) (2015). They refer to the influential French composer Olivier Messiaen, whose work Quartet at the End of Time was first performed in Stalin Hall, a Nazi prison camp; and the Palestinian poet Mahmood Darwinsh, whose poetry describes the experience of expropriation from his country at the age of seven (stealing back in to become — in the words used by those in power — a ‘present-absent alien’). Messiaen was synaesthesia and therefore saw music as a series of colours and described his compositions as producing a ‘stained-glass window effect’. Gallery 2 also features the video Sonata (2013) a three-channel installation featuring a composition developed by Birrell over 3 years and based upon Iannis by poets John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Gregory Corso and filmed in the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome, where the three poets are buried. Like Quartet, the video is housed within a structure referred to by the artists as The Field and bears resemblance to the Rothko Chapel, whilst also alluding to the partitioning of music (the French word for score is ‘partition’). Arvo Pärt and Iannis Xenakis, composers caught in similar fraught political struggles, are referenced through gold and black coloured window installations: Arrangement for Arvo Pärt 1, Mural for Xenakis 2 (2015) respectively.

Two sculptures, Ursus Arcros Syriacus 1 & 2 (2014) in ghostly white, derive from archival images of the Syrian Brown bear known as Wojtek. The name means ‘he who loves battles’, or ‘the smiling warrior’. In 1942 Stalin released the Polish Army from captivity in Siberia and, making their way to the Middle East to join the Allied forces, a polar bear cub. To enable Wojtek to join them in the Allied invasion of Italy he was formally enlisted in the Polish Army and ‘fought’ with his companions at the Battle of Monte Cassino. After the war Wojtek came to the Scottish Borders and, with the demobilisation of the Polish soldiers, he ended up in Edinburgh Zoo, dying there in 1963. In 1973 Harding was commissioned to make a sculpture of Wojtek.

The prints Winter in Marseilles (Omnium Isolation) and Villa Linwood (both c. 1950) refer to Rev. Donald Caskie. The former shows the former British and American Seaman’s Mission in Marseilles where Caskie established a secret refuge in 1940 for escaping servicemen; the latter the villa in Nice where Caskie was later imprisoned by the Gestapo. You Like This Garden?... Portikus, Garden Wall (2012) shows a work made by Birrell and Harding at the Portikus exhibition hall which references Malcolm Lowry’s novel Under the Volcano (Birrell and Harding had followed in Lowry’s footsteps, travelling to Mexico). In this novel the central protagonist is an alcoholic and his wild overgrown garden is a reflection of his life as well as being symbolic of the Garden of Eden. While drinking he mistranslates a sign, “You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!”

The Hand of Paulo Virno (2011) suggests a potential theoretical link between the works in the exhibition. The philosopher argued that society has moved away from the Fordist model of production based on material goods, to one of immaterial labour: labour that seeks to affect changes in subjectivities and even to propagate new worlds. Musicians, poets or philosophers are the producers of this kind of labour and the cast hand is therefore a paradoxical, solid object alluding to the symbolic transformation brought about through writing or performing.

The exhibition title comes from Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem ‘To Music’ and forms the basis of the installation in Gallery 3. In this poem Rilke described music simply as a threshold space, the place where language ends (2015).