

New Contemporaries: Catalogue Essay 2024 Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh

Our 2022 and 2023 Fine Art graduates of The Glasgow School of Art are part of a global cohort whose studies were impacted by the pandemic lockdowns. With the Art School studios, workshops, and lecture theatres dimmed, computer screens illuminated our virtual contact zones. Our social dynamics ‘pivoted’, (in the ubiquitous parlance of the day), as our sensorial exchanges became socially distanced. Connections could be as intermittent as the broadband we relied on. We persisted, so that together we could avoid feeling like another fungible face cascading from one Zoom meeting to another. This uniquely formative time for our graduates cannot be understated. Neither can the period of readjustment and reinsertion into the physical spaces of the Art School when our on-screen representations were gradually transposed to within touching distance once more.

The creative practices nurtured by each of these graduates is as diverse as their individual experiences of studying through those unprecedented times. Yet shared considerations of alternative possibilities experienced and imagined can be perceived across their works, affecting and informing us with their shared agency. A focus on the politics and intricacies of emotional connections is prevalent in the practices of Maria Vina Miller, Chiara van den Hoven, Niamh Mairead Cullen-Dunphy, Beattie MacColl, Samuel Temple, Theodore Wilkins Lang, Holly Tafe, Coire Simpson, Cyrus Adrian Doherty, and Amy Strzoda. Their reflections on the social-emotional touch upon aspects of care and joy, discomfort, and vulnerability, with some accentuating the more ludicrous moments of intimacy. The specific connection between place, time and people through ritual, memory and dreamscapes surfaces in the practices of Chloe Beddow Lily Garget, Finn Gibson / Santiago Del Pozo, Corrie Jennison, Lizzie Munro, and Khadija Moustafa. Ways of occupying space through community, immersion, embodiment and resonance are expressed.

Others, such as Martha Williams, Finn Robinson, Matilda Glancy, Alexandra Beteeva, Frankie Ashworth, Freddie Bubble, and Poppy Fraser, reroute our perceived realities through mechanisms including escapism and nostalgia. Myths, cultural memory and the fictioning of place and art are used to trouble and expand existing and dominant narratives. Contemplations of the craftsmanship and fabrication of works are signalled through the practices of Sasha Ballon, Lily Krempel, Finn Rosebaum, Chiara van den Hoven, Dora Padfield, Jemimah Vaughan, and Louis Baillie. They highlight aspects such as the effects of time and labour and of repetitive and ritualistic making on cultures and upon bodies. The use, potential and strain of creating artwork is evidenced by Sadie Mae Downing, Rebecca McCormack-Haigh, Jamie Scott and Jack Iredale through practices that sit at the intersection of reflection and speculation.

The experiential knowledge garnered during the remarkable time of their studies is demonstrable throughout their practices. They show a heightened awareness of how unpredictable and shifting the conditions that surround and mediate the processes of artmaking can be. These graduates have shown through their work to have emerged with the practices, knowledge, competencies, and confidence to operate, create and to navigate uncertain futures.

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