

***DOWSER*, notes on  
artists' moving image  
in Scotland.**

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***10.***

**Roundtable:  
Working Nearby  
Mason Leaver-Yap,  
Margaret Salmon,  
Tako Taal**

Chaired and edited by Marcus Jack

DOWSER

Issue 10 (Autumn 2024)

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Frontispiece: production still from Margaret Salmon,  
*Icarus (after Amelia)*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.

Back Cover: Margaret Salmon, *Mm*, 2017.  
Courtesy of the artist.

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**DOWSER**



**DOWSER** is a series of newly commissioned essays, interview transcripts and archival materials which makes available, for the first time, a collated set of resources from which we might begin to plot a history of artists' moving image in Scotland. Conceived as the necessary groundwork for a critically underreported field, this series hopes to share fragments, positions and testimonies that articulate the development of a now ubiquitous artform with a vivid and unique history in Scotland.

*DOWSER* was planned as a finite project whose aim was twofold. It wanted to draw voices together in an irregular chorus, across registers and forms, to stretch the possibilities of a 'field' like *artists' moving image in Scotland*. It has attempted an equal footing across approaches, from systemic analysis to pure speculation, in parts poetic, polemic, academic, autofictive, or demanding. After all, as the materialist tradition reminds us, disciplinary boundaries are merely a bourgeois reification of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> And, who knows this better than those working in the peripheral, interstitial, and willfully slippery domain of experimental or avant-garde film, video art, artists' moving image, or any other not-quite-right denominator?

*DOWSER* has aggregated a partial history in free-floating fragments and interprets a present moment equally unreconcilable. It could long continue in these respects, never quite reaching a place called comprehensive but it was also born as a mitigation, mid-pandemic, when a mail-order and open access digital publication offered a useful proxy for in-person connection.

In this yearning, its second aim is exposed: a means to improvise excuses for conversation; to give myself reason to engage, interview, commission and republish a growing cast of remarkable artists, curators, writers, and researchers. Gratitude is therefore due to those who have indulged me: Helen Nisbet, Adam Lockhart, Jasleen Kaur, Alia Syed, Lesley Keen, Seán Elder, Malcolm Dickson, Chris Byrne, Alan Robertson, Ann Vance, Naomi Gessesse, Myriam Mouflih, Mandy McIntosh, Joey Simons, Mason Leaver-Yap, Margaret Salmon, Tako Taal—amongst many more enablers and matchmakers. Creating a small economy for these exchanges has been a huge honour and I am grateful also to the funders who have allowed this project to lurch forward in inelegant strides over four years: the British Art Network (*DOWSER* #1 & #2), Alchemy Film & Arts (#3), the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities (#4 to #7), and Creative Scotland (#8 to #10).

Since this project began in 2020, fora in Scotland for gathering to view and discuss moving image work which seeks to challenge, expose, reframe,

even emancipate, seem to be depleting in number. This contraction far exceeds screen-based art, of course. Cuts compound after fourteen years of Conservative-led austerity. Yet, sitting interminably between an impoverished gallery system and a non-functioning film industry, the outlook is grim.

The Belmont (Aberdeen) and Filmhouse (Edinburgh) shuttered in 2022, whilst tenancy within the programme inches of what few independent cinemas remain has been revoked (see the unceremonious disappearance of *Crossing the Line* at Glasgow Film Theatre). Smaller arts organisations sit in the arresting purgatory of repeatedly postponed multi-year funding decisions, whilst larger institutions continue to abnegate responsibility for the uncompliant practice: artists' film and video remain woefully underrepresented in civic and national collections of visual art and film history alike. No experimental film club nor in-person event series, to my knowledge, endures with any regularity; the Artists' Moving Image Festival at Tramway unspooled in 2021, switching to a bi-

monthly format that remains since unrepeatable; the Margaret Tait Award which once brokered new levels of critical interest for its recipients (Charlie Prodder, Rachel Maclean, Jamie Crewe amongst them) has been placed on indefinite hiatus since 2023—funding limitations cited.

It's difficult not to interpret these withdrawals as an implicit critique, an action that asserts vague consensus. *Video Art* reportedly competes with *Opera* as amongst the least attended cultural activities in England.<sup>2</sup> The most recent visual arts sector review in Scotland, meanwhile, found that over 40% of 680 artist respondents were working with film or video by 2015.<sup>3</sup> Assuming certain commonality across territories, how, then, has such a discrepancy emerged between production and exhibition? Are we conscript in our own marginalisation when we claim distinction? *Lukács might think so.*

This work, we know, does not belong to a social elite. Its lessons in close looking and attention are counter to the distractions of excess which might offer more illustrative possibilities for annual reports and tourism boards. Is it too

abstract, too boring, too *difficult*? Travelling along grapevines, these phrases have certainly been cast by detractors in key positions. As the late American filmmaker and incisive mind Barbara Hammer knew, however, 'the passive reception of non-challenging visual media—broadcast television, commercial film and the pulp press, static or moving—encourages passivity in other modes of living (on the job, at home, in the streets, in politics).' For her, 'audience members don't lose a sense of themselves while engaging in the physical sensations of abstract cinema, but feel more the possibility of being.'<sup>4</sup> Irreducibility, obliquity, *difficulty*, the solicitation of deeper engagement—aren't these all rather the point?

A market logic which aspires to a unitary culture, entertained and placated, is one which wants to centralise knowledge, fearing the challenge of difference. It is a great shame that certain cultural leaders, emboldened by an endemic of top-down governance, are too often blinkered by paternalistic belief in the authority of personal taste. *Another bums-on-seats auteur season, anyone?* Correctly, perhaps, they acknowledge the threat of unfamiliarity.

I won't say artists' moving image is in crisis. Recent works discussed in the pages ahead more than testify to the enduring power of the practice. Yet, the availability of (public) subsidy barely seems to limn that of much earlier decades, prior to video art's institutional acceptance: a moment when filmmakers in Scotland cried negligence as the late Scottish Film Production Fund focused on their Hollywood delusions and the Scottish Art Council withdrew its support for specialist festivals.<sup>5</sup> *Sounds familiar.*

So,  
*what now?*

In considering how to close a project whose design was committedly open-ended, I wanted to convene a group of trusted thinkers with whom I might disperse the unenviable task of thinking forward. Put simply, where do we go from here? How does a place like Scotland figure as a frame, a restraint, or an immutable context? What do artists, indeed all people, need to work and live in a way that's conducive to knowledge creation?

An illustrious finale, this last issue of *DOWSER* comprises a roundtable conversation with three erudite individuals for whom I have a deep and longstanding awe: artist-filmmakers Margaret Salmon, Tako Taal, and producer Mason Leaver-Yap. Based in Scotland yet working internationally, they share a political commitment to the moving image as a means to commune.

*Working Nearby*, borrowed from Salmon for the title of this discussion and invoked with knowing allusion to filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha's theory of subjectivity and representation—*speaking nearby*—hopes to conjure a sense of the proximity and interdependence that underwrites it all: the making, showing, seeing and thinking of moving image work. Bringing collaborators not limited to peers, friends, subjects and audiences together through socialised approaches to production and exhibition, Salmon, Taal and Leaver-Yap ask how we might model collectivity, for just one evening in a darkened room, or an entire lifetime.

Marcus Jack, Editor

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> György Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat (1923)," in *History and Class Consciousness*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 83–222.
- <sup>2</sup> Orian Brook, David O'Brien and Mark Taylor, "Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries" (Arts Emergency, 2019), fig. 8.
- <sup>3</sup> Creative Scotland, "Creative Scotland Visual Arts Sector Review" (Edinburgh, 2016), 17.
- <sup>4</sup> Barbara Hammer, "The Politics of Abstraction (1992)," in *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, edited by Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 74.
- <sup>5</sup> See Colin McArthur, "In Praise of a Poor Cinema," *Sight & Sound* 3, no. 8 (1993); Positive Solutions, "Strategic Development of Creative Video, Film & New Media" (Liverpool, 1997).

# Roundtable: Working Nearby

Mason Leaver-Yap,  
Margaret Salmon,  
Tako Taal

chaired by  
Marcus Jack

### **Marcus Jack**

I wanted to bring you all together to think about the future that we want to have—a tricky question now, in terms of recent funding developments and a hostile political climate. It feels, sometimes, a bit feckless or vain to be having a conversation like this in a moment of wider catastrophe, but I still believe in a transformative possibility for watching and making. To kick things off, I would like to know why each of you work with the moving image. Is there something about it that feels useful? Liberating?

### **Margaret Salmon**

Your questions are really quite intense, I was trying not to have like a midlife crisis reading them! I started writing and made quite a binary set of responses that are good-day, bad-day answers. The real answer to any of this would probably be: *it depends*. Everything's so changeable and unstable in the kind of work that we do, at least from my experience.

On a good day, I'd say working in moving image has been my life's devotion. It has been my life's work and maybe, right now, I'm working in moving image because it offers a discursive, charged space for expression, observation, and rumination. I make films to learn. On a bad day, I'd say I work in moving image because that's my career. Making films is a skill I've dedicated my life to, and it's the main source of economic value I can offer to support my family. At my age I'm quite committed on many levels and I have a family to support, so I have to use my skills as best I can. Part of that is just working in moving image because that's what my training is, that's what my background is.

**MJ** Pragmatic, but, thinking about the medium, why *that* and not something else?

**MS** I suppose it's just also circumstance. I came across the camera and used it when I was studying, took to it, and got hooked. I don't know that I've lived in a

way where I was questioning why I was doing things. I was just swept up into it and loved it. I continue working because that is how I survive, these are the tools of my trade, this is what I do. I've been given access to these tools, and I understand the methods of using them and I can use this knowledge to produce something that might shift how people see the world or might compel them to reflect upon life or their community, or humanity in a way that's positive, insightful or helpful.

When it comes to making an independent, artists' film, however, it's usually not an economic endeavour because for most of my life I've worked more on these projects than I've been paid for, if indeed I get paid. At times there's a kind of feminist hubris: *I'm going to show that I can do this (just as good as a man)*. This is what drove me early on. I have, you might say, fairly naïve, humanistic aims but also a sense of urgency that drives me, knowing that I can't do this work forever.

If I have a will to make something, I'm curious to see what's possible, I'm very bad at relaxing but if I'm someplace with the camera and I'm loading it, using it, I'm very happy. I'm very happy using the tools of cinema, and I love working with people and seeing what we make together.



Still from Margaret Salmon, *Mm*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

## Mason Leaver-Yap

It's really interesting hearing Margaret speak from the position of a maker—an artist and a filmmaker. For me, even to answer from the position of a singular subject or in the first person is difficult. Moving image is where the me-ness can be rerouted or dissolved, part of the background production. One of its draws, beyond this disinterest in singular authorship—I have none, I'm parasitic in that way, I need somebody else to produce it so that I can work with them—is that moving image is amongst the most networked media. It works across a field of specialisms and it's shareable. That is the network I'm interested in. There's an irony that I was never allowed a television growing up, so I had to occupy the space of cinema even as a child; I'm very aware now, even when previewing things on Vimeo—as a producer, an editor, a co-author or as a programmer—I'm always viewing in the anticipation of the act of being with other people. It's a social space in my mind's eye.

To the question of *why not something else, why not another medium*, we can think of exhibitions. Exhibitions are something I probably produce once every year or two. There's something about the disconnection with audience that I find very challenging; you work very intensely, put something in a room, then you leave the room. That's the opposite of what you do when you're making a film. You put something in a room to be with other people.

## **Tako Taal**

I also grew up without being allowed access to a television, but I haven't really thought about that in terms of how I now work. Why moving image? I think it originally comes from a love of cinema spaces. I had a desire when I was a child to make huge movies, then that didn't seem possible for me, I didn't understand how to access that in any way. I managed to find myself working with this rag-tag group of documentary filmmakers. All their work was based on piracy. It was the

time of BitTorrent and file sharing. Video was suddenly very available. Material that wasn't accessible outside of libraries and institutions suddenly became online. It was this moment of vast expansion in my learning.

I share with Mason in that space of community but for me it's more about that interaction as a maker rather than as a consumer, in terms editing. I think that's how I fell in love with the medium itself: the possibility of it to be this vessel-like thing that's really capacious and can be a conversation with so many. Some of my early works used a lot of found footage that I hadn't shot and so it was this way of being in community with things and people and sounds and objects that were from many different times and places.

**MJ** This idea of prohibition, I also empathise with that. I remember sneaking into my mum and dad's room when I was a kid in the 1990s. They had a tiny TV in their bedroom. I would sneak in after the

watershed and watch something weird on Channel 4. Perhaps there's something of the salacious that is recurrent.

Thinking about discursivity and the way that moving image is inherently collaborative or requires multiple inputs, I wonder if you could talk to the networks that you've really tapped into locally. What is it here in Scotland that you think is interesting?

**MLY** I don't think about the local as a geographic thing anymore; it's a question of access to technology. I'm in Glasgow right now but I've worked transnationally for years, often with the same people. These relationships are intimate, proximate in the sense of ideas and desires and passions, and technology makes the issue of physical locality irrelevant. I'm able to produce work in New York, in Berlin, in occupied territories. I can talk to that person in real-time and that production can unfold. It's the same with

anything around the globe. It feels like things are very possible. The one thing that I do draw upon is material support through community. For example, there's a film that I'm producing right now that engages local composers and we've borrowed high-end film equipment from an artist who lives around the corner. Those are the things that you can draw on from a regional perspective.

It's also to do with the distribution and diffusion of resources. There might be time resource like editing in one place and there might be material production support in another. All these things can be united through moving image. It's about capacity. I'm aware comparisons could be made with industrial generation farms, rendering globally around the clock. But there are also ways in which production happens fluidly, elastically, or *ad hoc*, and through trusted networks of makers and thinkers who are local in the sense of being intimate with you.

**TT** I've often gone elsewhere to make. I've made works about the place that I'm *not* in. I am also back in Glasgow now, I'm not in Buenos Aires. We're probably all just around the corner from one another! Resources are the thing. Borrowing equipment, spaces of production and editing, using people who have got bigger, faster computers. I think about the many people who have edited in the basement of Transmission. Locally, it's also a grey day. The weather: this is what I'm engaging with locally, but more like a climate or a feeling. There's something about that which feels local and imbues the work in some way or the way in which I practice.

**MS** For me, it's quite straightforward. I started out making films locally with people I knew very well. There have been periods where I've made work in other places, but I've always done that cautiously, probably because of the way that I work. I have to spend time there. There are practical reasons why I might work locally



Still from Tako TaaL, *DUMP\_outthroughthemouth\_*, 2020.  
Courtesy of the artist.



Still from Tako Taal, *DUMP\_outthroughthemouth\_*, 2020.  
Courtesy of the artist.

at this point. There are also ethical and conceptual reasons, like the next project I'm doing has been orchestrated just so I can sleep in my bed every night and make dinner for my kids while I'm filming. I think the pandemic did that. Even now, I have a show in Japan next year and going out there, making something, coming back, I've really started to think about how I spend my time and the impact of what I'm doing. The local is really important and enriching for me. It's practical, it's material. It's just working nearby.

**MJ** What might be the conditions that are conducive to your working? Could you identify them? Even in the sense of biological need, familial, the people around you, as well as resource—what is specific to an environment that enables you?

**MS** On a very basic level, it's the means for production: material costs, access to tech, equipment, and whatever human

resources are necessary, whether that's an assistant or someone to help drive me to a location or manage the budget. It's having a very basic crew or network. Then, the economic support. There's the money to pay for childcare. There are ways in which I have to stop my regular work in order to do this work: research time or annual leave is needed. There's all of that and then there's connection and/or reason to make the work. That needs to happen somehow and it might be a response to some condition, inspiration, but ultimately it's just a *reason* to make it. So, you need the reason, and you need the means. That could be something facilitated through an organisation, certainly in terms of technical support and facilities. If you're thinking about the future, those things could be enhanced and provided. I still need to work with people in different places because some skills and training aren't available in Scotland.

I've done my utmost, and probably foolishly so, to become as self-sufficient

as possible. If I got research funding, I would put that into equipment instead of buying a flat or whatever everyone else might do. I invested in gear, so I didn't have to keep renting equipment to make films in the way that I wanted to. Equipment's not as readily available and I still use labs that are in other places. I still work with a colourist and use analogue film loaders in London. The rest I've been able to source in Scotland: production crew, sound and sound mixing.

**TT** I was at a workshop earlier today about speculative fictions and dreaming, I started thinking about this question as *what would be the ideal?* I made some notes about time, a sort of luxury in time, the possibility of repetition or returns, the possibility of spaces for sharing tests and trials. Then I was thinking about an ease of travel: no restrictions on visas, borders, and cheap trains. But I'm also in the process of rethinking what it means to work. Having just been on a

residency that I returned from, I know I also require people to be in conversation with: I require criticality, I require feedback, I require others. I require external stimulation, a kind of friction that's necessary to making work. It could be a casual conversation or a more formal studio visit. I've found that writing alongside people is a valuable way to think through projects, before and during production, so that there are simultaneous forms of thinking happening.

Momentum is something difficult to sustain. I require moments of distance and removal. I don't know if I'm looking for momentum is what I'm trying to say. I've been thinking a lot about what a career is, so it was interesting to hear you talk, Margaret, about you being at this stage now where you've dedicated this time to this work. I may be at—not a crisis moment, but just a moment of wondering what would it look like to do that? I've been thinking through what it is that I'm trying to sustain, what questions

do I still have that I want to explore? The artists I admire are the ones who go away for ten years and then come back to say something, but that requires that you have something else to sustain you for those moments.

**MLY** I really resonate with what's been said thus far. I think it comes down to how you afford time, where time is not just one thing but diverse. Parameters can be motivating as well as limiting, but there always needs to be time and the question is who pays for that? This is the endless question. Time is also needed to take risks and to fail in order to learn. There also needs to be a generosity and a communality, a hosting of difference. It can never be boiled down to a single thing and I think it's better when it's not. It's also a question of space and borders. The right of movement of people, whether chosen or forced, is experienced very unevenly. If you could make creative environments then open borders—to many things, not least countries.

**MS** This poses a question: if you could provide this amazing support for artists in moving image in Scotland, would that be separate to building a more robust and fair society for everyone? I don't know that the two are divisible. The conditions that I need are the conditions that lots of people need to be happy and prosper: economic fairness; free housing; fresh, healthy food that's affordable; free childcare. I'll put that in my Creative Scotland application! We're constantly trying to put plasters on these scenarios which are far beyond the creative industries' remit—or so it seems. Maybe it shouldn't be beyond us to address the conditions that are needed for creative practitioners to flourish?

**MLY** We're getting to this neoliberal policy of the criteria through which things should be awarded. You already enter into a meritocratic system through the process of applications being awards. The desire for a more equitable relationship with work is one that I share. What Margaret is saying

is vital. I wouldn't want it to be dismissed as being beyond the remit of art practice, that's a failure of imagination to think in more bold ways than we exist in.

Tako used this useful phrase: a vessel. In art in general, but specifically in moving image, there's a promise of making within the narrative imagination: one thing follows another thing follows another thing. Time is passing and people are involved. That flow of images and people is important to bear in mind. I would never say moving image is better than sculpture—that's a boring debate—but I do think that something happens when a camera or a desire to make an image move is tied to a desire to participate in and look at society.

**MJ** It has a present tense sensibility for me which is enthralling. I'm also increasingly identifying myself away from the future as a historian and I wonder about this present-tenseness and what that means for old projects and old works, legacies

and histories that are often submerged and buried. I wonder about your own old projects and whether you think about those? Whether you worry about those and where they live?

**TT** I do think about the old hard drives that I have. I have one work which on 16mm and every so often I worry, *where is that canister?* It's in a box somewhere, I do know where it is. Beyond works, it's actually about having access to the timelines, to the editing. I've lost some of those when moving software. Those are the things I want to return to or feel the need to archive more: the ways in which I was thinking, that process of making, all the many iterations that a project went through, the different sequences and tests within that. Those are things that I would like to hold on to or record better. I don't worry about works themselves yet: a few people have them, they're dispersed. Maybe it's careless to entrust yourself, instead of a community of others. If there was a loss, it wouldn't be total.

**MJ** I love the idea of a networked memory. Having worked with a few artists recently to digitise works from the 1980s onwards—these remarkable tapes that are on obsolete formats now—I know how anxious I feel about those and where they live. The artists have a copy, I might have a copy, but for me that feels insufficient for this cultural artefact. For that to be *the infrastructure*, the be all and end all of it? It's nerve wracking. Margaret, what about you? How do you feel about old work? Do you feel it's cared for?

**MS** I don't even know where to start! I usually only have time to think about what I'm making next or the thing I'm making now instead of what I've just done. Often when I finish making something, I'm so shattered from the process—and I've worked way more than I was paid to—that I need to make money and concentrate on my 'paid' work. I don't have time to really care for the films and organise them. So, I do, I worry. And, then I don't, because

it's just a fucking film—we're all stardust, right! But yes, these are works that I really care about and put a lot of energy into, many people have, so I try to look after them. I've got cans of films stacked in my studio. Since 2017 I've been storing my rushes in a professional film facility in London, for a yearly fee. The cans are heavy and big. I have had to transport them myself, on the train, with suitcases full and my kids in tow, and that didn't work very well.

There are films in which I know the footage is gone: *Gibraltar* (2013) is one of them. After getting the rushes from the lab—the digital scans—the film itself would be housed there and some labs wouldn't chase you to have it sent back. It was a small job and I think *Gibraltar* has probably been thrown out. There's another film I made, produced with an arts organisation, that was never finished and I don't know where those rushes are, I've just got the digital files. Unless you are meticulous and have resources and time



Production still from Margaret Salmon, *Gibraltar*, 2013.  
Courtesy of the artist.

to follow up on claiming the materials back, footage can get lost. I don't always have the knowledge or power to find things and if I mess up and don't look after the analogue rushes or master hard drives, nobody else will. These days I'm much more mindful and I have a good relationship with Kodak Film Lab, who care about the work and know me. I've got a system in place that I pay for, but early on I didn't.

**MJ** Mason, that question has a very different flavour for you as a producer, playing a part in ensuring longevity and circulation. How do you feel about your old work or others' as a custodian?

**MLY** What's funny is that would make me a terrible producer because I really resonate with Margaret's phrase, *it's just a fucking film*. Composer Pauline Oliveros describes music as a 'by-product' of people being together: the work is a by-product of the social experience. I really relate to that. Old projects are more about timing for me. Instead of always being guided by this question of where is the audience, it's more like *when* is an audience. For me, as much as Margaret talked about the point of making the film, the audience is the immediate present. That's where the maker, the filmmaker or artist, has the most resonance because they're bound to the present tense, as is everybody else. What happens after that is a slightly different audience. The artist then becomes

that audience. There's a distancing that occurs. I always think that audiences will find what they need. If it's not there, it will be made, and if it is there, it will be found. Sometimes—certainly with film projects that I've been involved in—there are things people don't want to see. They are too unbearable to look at. If we think about colonial film archives, for example, there's a lot to be said about the refusal of these images or the inability to look at them.

I never feel particularly sentimental about old projects. The thing that I wonder about is how the importance of those things will be taken forward: the conversations that those films instigate on their release, or the conversations that come about through the period of production. Those are often the most animating, the most vital, the things that move me from one project to the next, encourage me to work with the same people, make me curious about other things. Those social connections must

house a lot of memory because they're not housed very well in archives. There's always something inadequate about the documentation of conversations that happen around the production of things. The energy is out there, you just have to tap into it. It belongs to other people and can be built as a social congregation.

I'm thinking about this idea of purpose, drive and functionality—what it is to make something with other people. During the lockdown, Em Hedditch was talking about how in New York, where they live, they were looking at all the nightclubs that had closed across the city as on-ramps to mutual aid collectives or care groups because the format of running a nightclub could deal with that type of social engagement. The way that things have unfolded recently, I definitely see a parallel in terms of moving image as an on-ramp to political organising. It's unpaid or badly paid and there is never much time, but I've had an experience of a capaciousness in energy that has

come about through organising with other people who are in my direct, working day-to-day relationships in moving image communities.

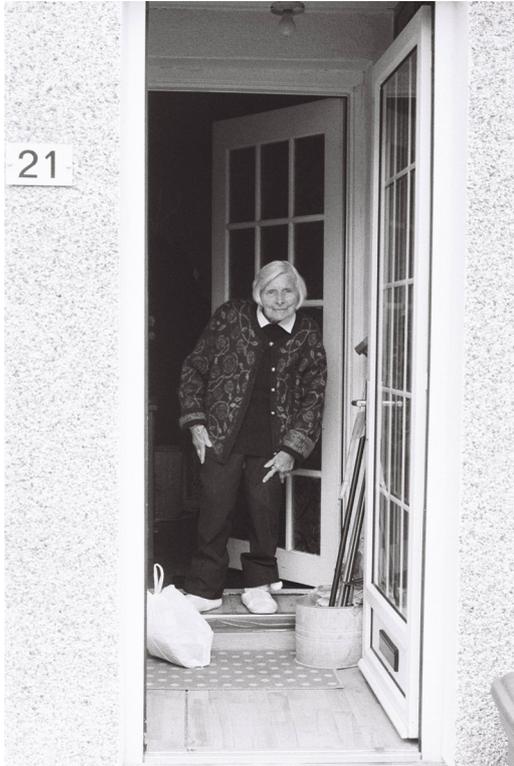
I find it inspiring that you can sit and go through hundreds of Vimeo previews for programming and then, in the evening, suddenly you're letter-writing or you're seeking out other people to collaborate or form coalitions. You're trying to wrestle out a language together that is not so dissimilar from putting on a film festival or setting up a shoot. These are all networked activities, and, under the right circumstances, the network can produce its own energy. The question of where you find the energy to produce networks then comes down to environment. What environments are these networks existing in and how do those environments oppress or elevate people? What are the inconsistencies or inefficiencies within environments that allow networks to flourish as an idea of positive growth? I think about these things a lot right now.

**MJ** I really identify with that idea in event-organising and convening. Margaret and Tako were part of this CINEMA DESPITE programme that I recently organised at Tramway in Glasgow. I drew so much energy from being able to match-make, to put people into contact and facilitate sharing intergenerationally. The very final screening of the programme included a Q&A with Ann Vance (*DOWSER #6*). I asked her how her work, *Intrusion* (1992), had been originally received. It was a made in the early 1990s when she was at the Rijksakademie. She said that nobody had seen it until now and I nearly cried. It took three decades to bring this work, as a discursive thing, to people who can talk about it. That's very energising for me.

I'm interested in the question of representation and how or whether you feel you are represented by institutions in Scotland? By *institutions* I mean organisations, yes, but also the procedures and processes we have available, the shape of the ways we share work—



CINEMA DESPITE, Tramway, Glasgow, 1–3 September 2023.  
Top (l-r): Marcus Jack, Alia Syed (*DOWSER #3*), Malcolm Dickson (*DOWSER #6*).  
Bottom: Ann Vance (*DOWSER #6*). Photography by Erika Stevenson.



Still from Margaret Salmon, *Lens Diary*, 2020.  
Courtesy of the artist.

collecting, archiving, exhibiting. Do you feel there are agents working with your best interests in mind?

**MS** I don't. Or not until very recently, have I felt any interest in housing my work in Scotland. The film *Lens Diary* (2020) is in the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive. That was a small purchase facilitated by LUX Scotland and some of that money went back to my collaborators, the G20 Youth Festival. Two years ago, the Hunterian bought a film from me, supported by the Contemporary Art Society, but beyond that none of the films are in any Scottish archive or collection. LUX in London represent and distribute the work. Maybe if I was represented by a Scottish gallery I would be in more collections in Scotland. I don't know that I've thought about it enough and that's probably because it never seemed like a possibility. My films are in public collections mostly and very few, mainly in France! Films are purchased, distributed,

and they are valued by collectors, but I don't really know much about that side of things. I don't know that I've ever been doing it for the money. Early on, I wasn't sure how I felt about the idea of private collectors buying work. I like being in public collections. That's lovely when it happens, but it doesn't happen often.

**MLY** This question of public and private collections is interesting. As somebody who worked only in the public sector or non-profit environments for the majority of my career, I now see production and acquisition funds increasingly coming through private trusts and foundations. The private money and the contracts that are provided have far fewer stipulations placed upon the work than those of non-profit institutions. They're much easier to work with because they're often very visible people. The process of placing moving image works within vast and bureaucratic public collections, along with what those collections ask for, what they'll

give artists, and then what artists have to give up in the process, is quite astonishing and has become increasingly onerous. I think the idea that national collections will equitably provide representation is always a double-edged sword. It's the image of representation, it's not actual representation.

In an environment like Scotland, I do feel the responsibility for more equitable representation on some level; what's my role in this? If I'm not happy then I have to do something about it. Yet at the same time I find myself working increasingly out of the country, and with private trusts and foundations that will offer the support in a timely fashion to the sum that the artist I'm working with is requesting. I feel incredibly grateful for that. Increasingly, too, artworks are being made available and the rights of artists are being honoured and understood in a different way. This isn't to say that it's a rosy picture at all, but I'm seeing almost diagonal movements between where we thought private

trusts and foundations were and where non-profit organisations are now. These positions are becoming increasingly mobile and interchangeable.

**MJ** Before we wrap up, I'd love to have an opportunity to point to inspiring models. Are there any practises of commissioning or producing or exhibiting that you think are really promising?

**MLY** I can only name a couple of recent films that I thought were absolutely incredible. This year I saw Bassem Saad's *Congress of Idling Persons* (2021) which was so exciting. Around the same time, I also saw Anna Zett's film *Es gibt keine Angst / Afraid doesn't exist* (2023). Bassem's film is staged material that she shot with non-actors revoicing their own dialogue in relation to political organising and uprisings proximate to the Beirut port explosion. Anna's film draws from archival footage contemporaneous to her childhood, which relates to why and



تجعل من  
أي منشق  
خائناً وعميلاً  
للإمبريالية

IT MAKES A TRAITOR  
AND AGENT OF  
IMPERIALISM  
OF ANY DISSENTER



Stills from Bassem Saad, *Congress of Idling Persons*, 2021.  
Courtesy of the artist.

how German Stasi files on citizens in the DDR were made transparent. The thing that strikes me about those two works is that they're full of revolutionary potential, but they also feel like communal acts of cinema at a moment where we are just beginning to feel like being together is something we can enjoy and expect again. I return to those films again and again, either as teaching models or motivating works to make me think harder about the work that I'm producing. The inspiration that those people give through the act of working is as important to me as much as the images that they end up refining and providing.

**MS** That's a tough question because I don't know that I want to be specific. The last four or five years have seen a lot of different things happening, I've welcomed the digital platforms really expanding during the pandemic and, for me, not always being able to attend night-time screenings, that was quite helpful. I like

the idea of festivals also offering this kind of online distribution. Glasgow itself is always changing. I have become a bit of a hermit since COVID, but there are innovative small spaces active in the art scene that are making their own programme, self-funded, self-fuelled, mainly showing contemporary sculpture, photography and painting. From my understanding of the city's history, there are cycles of spaces opening outside of the centre, galleries that are in people's homes or corners of the city that are less desirable. Of course, this happens everywhere—its ugly side is middle-class gentrification of poor urban communities.

**TT** I was just going say all my friends! I feel like all the people that I've known in Glasgow are doing great and keep me here. I'm going to say, Marcus, you're doing some pretty great things. It was a real privilege at CINEMA DESPITE, that space of a film festival is really enjoyable.

**MS** I would agree. I don't know if we can plug your event. I mean, that was the most films I've seen in ages. I'd like more of that.

**MJ** We can do nepotism, it's my publication as well. I'll draw this to close now. Thank you all so much. I feel a bit like I'm hosting an event and I have to thank an audience, but there's no one here—to our future readers, good night.

Abridged from a longer meeting transcript,  
29 October 2023.  
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**Mason Leaver-Yap** works with artists to produce texts, exhibitions, and events. Recent projects include work with Ingrid Pollard, Renée Green and Free Agent Media, Oreet Ashery, Emily Wardill, Stefanie Heinze, Onyeka Igwe, Winnie Herbstein, Ima-Abasi Okon, Beatrice Gibson, Laura Guy, Sunil Gupta and the Estate of Tessa Boffin, Andrea Büttner, Iman Issa, and Jimmy Robert. He lives in Glasgow.

**Margaret Salmon** was born in New York and lives in Glasgow. Concerned with a shifting constellation of relations, such as those between camera and subject, human and animal, or autobiography and ethnography, Salmon's work examines the gendered, emotive dynamics of social interactions and representational forms. Solo exhibitions of her work have been held at Secession, Vienna; Dundee Contemporary Arts; Tramway, Glasgow; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis; Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; and, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London. Salmon won the inaugural Max Mara Art Prize for Women (2006), and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Awards for Artists (Post-Pandemic 1-year Award, 2021).

**Tako Taal** is an artist and programmer who works alongside spectral, cited and physical beings to undermine history and destabilise images. Her exhibitions and video works are described at times as ambivalent and overbearing. In 2021 she co-programmed *GIVE BIRTH TO ME TOMORROW*, a year long artists' moving image festival, with Adam Benmakhoulou; curated *What happens to desire...*, six artist commissions for the 17<sup>th</sup> Edinburgh Art Festival; and was shortlisted for LUX Scotland's Margaret Tait Award. Recent exhibitions include Pace Gallery, London; Dundee Contemporary Arts; *Survey II*, touring; NADA House, New York; Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh; and Perth Museum and Art Gallery. She lives in Glasgow.

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