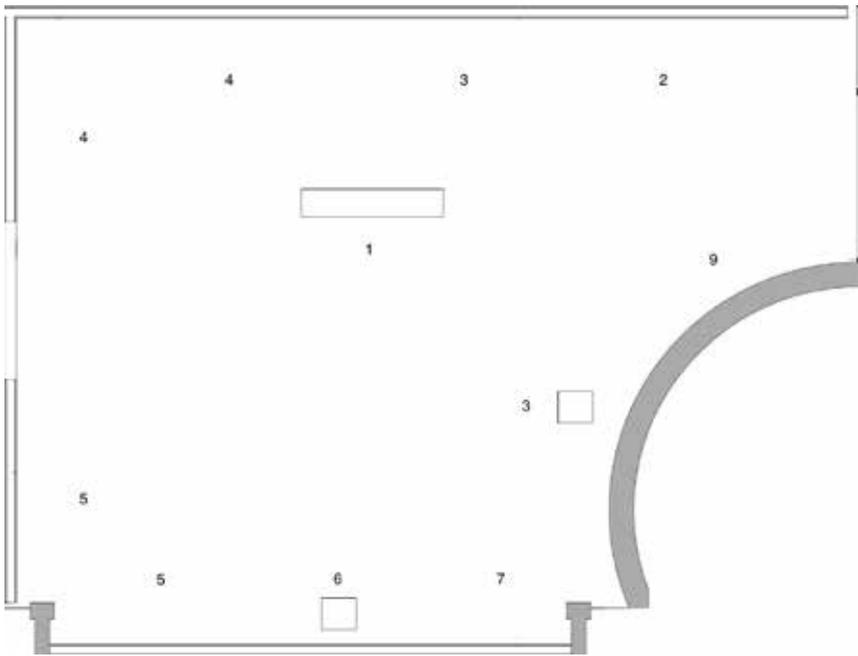


A SYNCHRONOLOGY:

the contemporary and other times

Hunterian Art Gallery | 27 October 2017 — 28 January 2018



1. Stephen Hawes, *Synchronology of the Principal Events in Sacred and Profane History from the Creation of Man to the Present Time*. New York and Boston: second printing, 1871
2. Ruth Ewan, *Unrecorded Future, Tell Us What Broods There*, 2008. Woodblock prints.
3. Robert Barry, *All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking — 1.36pm, June 15, 1969*, 1969, pencil.
4. Simon Starling, *Pictures for an Exhibition*, 2013-14. 10 of 36 silver gelatin photographs.
5. Gerard Byrne, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, 2005—ongoing. Silver gelatin photographs, wall text.
6. Phil Collins, *Hero*, 2002. Digital video with sound (40 mins).
7. Corin Sworn, *Temporal Arrangements*, 2010. Vases, mirrored shelves, projector, floral bouquet.
8. Sharon Hayes, *My Fellow Americans*, 2004. Curtain, video documentation of performance, digital video with sound (10 hours).
9. *The Guardian*, 20.02.2002. Part of *Palindrome*, 2002, a project conceived by Tacita Dean for five daily newspapers: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*; *The Guardian*; *Guardian Europe*; *Volkskrant*; *Limburgs Dagblad*.
10. (at the reception desk) Ruth Ewan, *We Could Have Been Anything We Wanted To Be*, 2011. Decimal clock.
11. Roman Ondák, *This Way, Please*, 2013. Performance: the gallery staff arranged through the building in ascending order of age. NB: this work will be performed intermittently during the exhibition.

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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Our contemporary moment is one in which time has become a particularly urgent preoccupation: fraught discussions of how best to save and to spend time are commonplace. So too are anxieties about how much we may now be subject to economic and technological imperatives that leave us with no time to reflect, no time to share. In his 2013 book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (Zone Books), Jonathan Crary offers a stark diagnosis of the contemporary era as 'a time without time, a time extracted from any material or identifiable demarcations, a time without sequences or recurrence.' The ways in which time is marked, the ways it is divided and is visually represented, might themselves be important facets of this change in how temporality is experienced. In *A Synchronology*, the rationalisation and administration of time is represented by an 1869 chart by Stephen Hawes that arranges biblical events and imperial histories on overlapping timelines. Timelines of this kind are distinctively modern, and privilege notions of progress and linear development that are connected to systems of power and knowledge deeply embedded in colonialism and a presumption of the pre-eminence of Western modernity. For all that, Hawes's timeline is also an eccentric blend of temporalities (religious and secular), and its overall effect might be to reveal how even attempts to set out a homogenous chronological sequence falter in the face of time's complexities.

The exhibition itself marks a particular period of time, in that it celebrates the 10th anniversary of Glasgow-based not-for-profit arts organisation The Common Guild. All the artists included here have worked with The Common Guild over the past decade: the exhibition brings together selected works by these artists that explore time in less didactic forms than the timeline, often proposing the existence of multiple temporalities at any one juncture.

Robert Barry

Robert Barry's *All the Things I Know but of which I am not at the moment thinking—1.36pm, June 15, 1969* is an important work by one of the pioneers of Conceptual Art, and is the earliest 'contemporary' piece in the show. Made a century after Hawes' *Synchronology*, it marks a specific, precisely detailed moment in time, but nominates an unknown (and unknowable) set of thoughts in relation to that moment. While conceptual art is often thought of as logical — perhaps even overly cerebral — Barry's work here suggests that he was equally interested in what eludes rational description or representation.

Simon Starling

In Simon Starling's *Pictures for an Exhibition* (2013-14), the artist used a modified vintage Deardorff plate camera to recreate documentation of an important 1927 exhibition of Constantin Brancusi's sculpture which was arranged by Marcel Duchamp. In order to bring those works back into a shared presence in his photographs, Starling had to travel extensively, conduct archival research (detailed in the 'titles and notes' which accompany the photographs and are an important part of the work), and occasionally to make multiple exposures within a single image. In the process, he traces not only the lives of these art objects over the past century, but also marks the temporal distance between 1927 and his own cultural and historical moment. Starling's work consists of 36 individual images, of which 10 are shown here.

Gerard Byrne

Similarly using photography and text to loop back to a formative moment in the history of modern art, Gerard Byrne's *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* (2005-ongoing) presents images of contemporary America that seem redolent of both mid-twentieth century style and mid-century street photography by which the artist has taken in the recent past. Four photographs from the much larger series are shown here alongside a wall text that cites Perry Miller's study of the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards. The wall text functions to relate the photographs to a key strand of American religious thought, but also alludes to a controversial 1967 polemic against minimalism by art critic Michael Fried, which used this quote as its epigraph and made a plea for art to exist in its own special, immediate temporality. 'Presentness is grace' Fried wrote, calling for a modernist art analogous to Edwards' vision of a world constantly created anew: Byrne complicates this notion, showing the present to itself be made up of different temporal textures and historical resonances.

Corin Sworn

Corin Sworn's *Temporal Arrangements* is likewise interested in how historical eras are demarcated and represented. A selection of 'period' vases are displayed on shelving, taking turns to hold a bouquet of flowers which has been selected and arranged to match the characteristic style of the particular epoch the vase represents. Sworn here takes a marker of temporal change — period style — that is itself constantly reinterpreted from within different presents, and is always in some sense a projection onto the past.

Sharon Hayes

Sharon Hayes' video work *My Fellow Americans* documents the artist's nearly-10-hour recitation of all of Ronald Reagan's addresses to the American people. As in the re-performances of iconic moments of popular protest for which Hayes is best known, here she puts a moment from the past back into the present tense. The effect is allow us to perceive the relationships between such moments in a new way, and to see also how political rituals and broadcast media construct a particular kind of shared time, political speech projecting its own meanings onto imagined pasts and futures.

Phil Collins

Phil Collins' *Hero* (2004) addresses the politics of a highly charged moment — the aftermath of September 11th 2001 – through a video in which a fashion reporter is interviewed about his experience in New York City on that date. The artist conspicuously plies him with alcohol and cigarettes throughout, and an instrumental version of Mariah Carey's song 'Hero' plays under his often drunken testimony. Collins' film is at once a portrait of media techniques for extracting candid statements from those who appear in its frames, and an intimate and deeply humane counter-memory to official versions of 9-11.

Ruth Ewan

Ruth Ewan's *Unrecorded Future, Tell Us What Broods There* (2008) was first made for the town of Frome in Somerset. Ewan took lines from a 1927 book of poetry, *Poems of Human Service* by Gustav Spiller, reproducing these texts in woodblock prints and having them proclaimed by a town crier. Spiller was a pacifist / humanitarian activist and published *Poems of Human Service* without copyright, requesting that the poems be 'freely reproduced.' As in much of her work, Ewan here explores the future-oriented, even utopian, potential embedded in historical moments that now seem far removed from us, but which might still be reactivated. At the gallery's reception desk is one of ten decimal clocks Ewan produced for the Folkestone Triennial in 2011. This disconcerting object revisits an experiment with reforming time during the French Revolution when a new calendar and decimalised hours were introduced. Ewan's Folkestone project, titled *We Could Have Been Anything We Wanted to Be*, registers a moment of radical change in the past perfect tense, and introduces an uncanny unfamiliarity into our most familiar way of orienting ourselves in time.

Tacita Dean

Like Ewan, Tacita Dean has sometimes addressed moments from the past which projected or imagined the future in a utopian key, but moreover she has made time perhaps *the* central subject of her art. If Im is the medium in which Dean's temporal preoccupations and their fullest expression, her work in other media is no less marked by them. In 2002, aware that the relatively rare phenomenon of a palindromic date was imminent, Dean worked with five mass-circulation newspapers to alter their mastheads and accentuate this quirk of the human recording of time. Viewed some fifteen years later, the newspaper – both a byword for instant obsolescence and a formative institution in the construction of modern daily-ness – appears doubly obsolete: *The Guardian's* broadsheet format is long since gone, and the front page news no longer has much currency.

Roman Ondák

Finally, Roman Ondák's *This Way, Please*, a 2013 performance work loaned from the collection of Glasgow Museums, will be presented occasionally during the run of 'A Synchronology'. Museums and art galleries are 'time machines' of sorts, allowing us access of a kind to other epochs. *This Way, Please* work draws attention to the often overlooked human labour that makes such access possible for visitors on a day-to-day basis. In *This Way, Please* museum attendants are arranged in order of age, from the youngest to the oldest, as the visitor passes through the building. Roman Ondák has suggested that he was mindful here of how a museum visit might only take half an hour of a visitor's time, but that attendants may spend much of their lives in such spaces. Human time and the museum's 'timelessness' come together in Ondák's simple gesture.

For Jonathan Crary, our '24/7' culture possesses an 'impossible temporality.' It is, he argues, 'always a reprimand and a deprecation of the weakness and inadequacy of human time, with its blurred, meandering textures. It effaces the relevance or value of any respite or variability. Its heralding of the convenience of perpetual access conceals its cancellation of the periodicity that shaped the life of most cultures for several millennia... [in a] switched-on universe for which no off-switch exists.' The works in 'A Synchronology' explore temporality in a variety of ways that suggest that blurred, variable, living, human time is the medium through which artworks best attend to the complicated contemporary moment we are living through.

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WITH THANKS TO

The artists:

Robert Barry
Gerard Byrne
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Tacita Dean
Ruth Ewan
Sharon Hayes
Roman Ondák
Simon Starling
Corin Sworn

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Rob Tufnell, London
Tanya Leighton, Berlin
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