

# GENERATION – 25 years of contemporary art in Scotland



It's been more than three years in the making, and this week all the work and wild imaginings have paid off: **GENERATION**, the National Galleries of Scotland's largest ever exhibition, opens to the public tomorrow Saturday 28 June 2014. Its focal points in Edinburgh include our three national galleries, but artists will also be showing in many other exhibition spaces across the capital and throughout the country.

GENERATION celebrates 25 years of contemporary art in Scotland: over 100 artists who have been a part of this exciting and internationally acclaimed period will participate, offering everything from fine art to installations, films, photography, sculpture, print-making and collage. Organised by NGS in partnership with Glasgow Life and Creative Scotland, GENERATION is part of the Glasgow 2014 Cultural Programme. It brings together work from private and public collections, together with new pieces commissioned especially for the exhibition. Artists have been involved in the preparations from the beginning, some choosing works from their back catalogues, others producing new pieces or restaging installations from previous shows. The NGS team was keen to make sure the artists all knew what the others were planning, and how their own work would fit in to their allotted space and to the work around it. Visitors will experience the varied, dynamic and fascinating story of contemporary Scottish art, a story that certainly gives the lie to the person who once asked if there could really be 'enough art in Scotland to justify a weekly column.'



In Edinburgh the largest part of the exhibition is staged at **Modern Art One**, where GENERATION fills the entire gallery. Upstairs **Ross Sinclair** installs *Real Life Rocky Road*, a representation of the Highlands featuring himself as his Real Life character, singing and playing guitar amongst the (stuffed) wildlife. Meanwhile, **Torsten Lausmann's** video of mechanical toys with a Vaudeville soundtrack *At the Heart of Everything a Row of Holes* compares the workings of the first computers to the punch cards once used in weaving technology. Lausmann, who is German but based in Glasgow, looks at the ways in which technology can overtake our lives to the extent that we no longer have to do anything – it is all done for us.

In the end we find ourselves having to work against it: workers started off benefiting from the help machines gave them, but now they have to go to the gym to deal with the effects of physical inertia at work.

**Julie Roberts** is exhibiting some of her iconic paintings of medical 'furniture', equipment and clothing. Selecting the pieces has been, she says 'a memory trip' – she enjoyed thinking about where and when each work was painted, who she worked with at the time, and what those works meant, and still mean, to her. One painting is of a gynaecological bed in an IVF clinic; when Julie saw it the sheet was still warm from the woman who had just left it, 'it was both emotional and life-giving.'

*Peek-a-Jobby*, the installation **Graham Fagen** has recreated from its first incarnation at Matt's gallery in London, seems at first to be a 'cussy student apartment' with many references to the 1980s. Fagen is interested in the interplay and disjuncture between art and life, expectation and surprise; he wants the viewer to pick up a script and become part of the room. The power of the work is in the viewers' imagination as they read the script and discover its unexpected denouement; a surreal event is conjured from a banal everyday scene.

**Claire Barclay's** installation *Trappings* was commissioned by NGS, who asked her to use her allotted space in an innovative way but with reference to her previous work. An enormous wooden frame acts as a kind of loom around which wool is strung or woven. Barclay uses natural materials and looks at how these function in our everyday world; she aims to discomfort the viewers, to ask them to consider the seemingly familiar and question their perceptions; how well do we know these things? how do we relate to them?

*Islanders*, **Charles Avery's** project, describes a fictional island in drawing, sculpture, painting and text. The figures in *Market Place* are mysterious, they have strange, often angry, faces and are sometimes emaciated. We try in vain to pin down a 'real' location – the buildings are modern, one labelled 'Bargain Village', but the scene is almost mediaeval. *Untitled: view of the port at Onomatopoeia* – which is over five metres wide – shows more of these enigmatic islanders alongside tourists arriving by boat. Avery improvises as he works, drawing entirely from his imagination; if a narrative starts to emerge he follows it. In *Dilettantes* he depicts some islanders hunting an enormous eel, watched by what appear to be visitors, one wearing startling yellow wellington boots. We are irresistibly drawn in to the story and start to imagine our own narratives.

Some of **Victoria Morton's** works are vast, exuberantly coloured canvases; Morton is an active musician as well as an artist and is interested in the relationship between tonality and colour, in the ways that music and paintings can resonate on psychological and emotional levels. Her portrait of the late composer and electronic musician *Daphne Oram*, is especially striking.

**Lucy McKenzie** meanwhile works on themes of identity and trompe l'oeil. Here she exhibits pieces from her project *Quodlibet*; pinboards and writing desks appear to be covered in everyday objects, but closer inspection reveals these to be paintings. She aims to blur the boundaries between art and life, to explore and question existing orthodoxies.

Film is not neglected in GENERATION: in *24 Hour Psycho*, **Douglas Gordon** slows down Hitchcock's film to make it run over twenty-four hours. He wants to show us the way that memory operates in the flow of our consciousness: in this work our knowledge of what is to come is frustrated as we anticipate the famous shower scene that never seems to arrive (although the NGS staff say they can calculate exactly when it will...) Gordon is interested in the complexities of the human mind and in schizophrenia. He has also added to the role call of names that we see as we climb the gallery stairs; it is a list of all the people Gordon has ever met, exploring memory and the idea that we are what we remember.



At the National Gallery of Scotland we climb the wide staircase to see **Karla Black's** beautiful *Story of Sensible Length*, an ephemeral pink and white hanging commissioned as a response to the gallery's neo-classical sculpture hall; the fabric seems almost to float in the still space. Black is interested in 'the raw creative moment when art comes into being' and in themes of childhood and play. We move from this to the stunning monochrome of David Shrigley's room full of woodcuts and ceramic black boots.

Entering the late **Steven Campbell's** *On Form and Fiction* (first shown at the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow) the visitor is immersed in colour, music and sepia drawings. The work creates 'a claustrophobic, fictional world of bizarre happenings' whilst by contrast **Martin Boyce's** *Our Love is Like the Flowers, the Rain, the Sea and the Hours* (an installation first shown at Glasgow's Tramway) is a sparse darkened area illuminated only by trees made from tubular lamps. In this ghostly unnamed setting Boyce merges the natural and the constructed, the real and the imagined, and perhaps asks how art in public urban places is experienced by those who see it.

These are just some of the many impressive and challenging

works in Edinburgh's contribution to GENERATION. In the city itself there will be more exhibits at the National Portrait Gallery, the City Art Centre, the Dovecot Studios and eight other venues. Glasgow is hosting 21 exhibitions and other shows can be seen in galleries, studios and spaces from North Uist to Peebles and Thurso to Kircudbright. Note that whilst some exhibitions are running simultaneously with those at NGS, others will continue to open throughout the summer. There is also a programme of talks and tours (most of them free) beginning in July. Full details of all exhibitions and events are on the [GENERATION website](#).

GENERATION aims to increase public engagement with contemporary art. In a year in which its political future is set to be decided, GENERATION also shows the world that Scotland's dynamic and inspiring art scene helps to place it at the heart of international culture.