

Edinburgh Art Festival 2015: Courage, creativity... attitude



'To me, Edinburgh is a city equally at home in the worlds of fiction and of reality'



Director **Sorcha Carey** is launching her fifth – and the city's twelfth – **Edinburgh Art Festival** at **Dovecot Studios**; it may be Edinburgh's youngest, but it's also now the largest annual festival of visual arts in the UK.

Over one hundred artists are involved, with exhibitions, events and commissions occupying over thirty city-wide venues; from **Picasso** and **Escher** to **Dennis and Debbie Club**, the Festival seeks to support artists at all stages of their careers – artists working in all sorts of media, from traditional painting to improvised vocal acoustics and street interventions. Sorcha said: "We may be entering into our adult years, but we still have that bit of attitude and teenage energy that all good festivals should have."





So where do fiction and reality come in? One of the Festival's main themes is *The Improbable City*, which takes its inspiration from **Italo Calvino's** 1972 novel, *Invisible Cities*. Calvino describes a fictional conversation between **Kublai Khan**, emperor of 13th century Mongolia, and **Marco Polo** – an exploration of the nature of cities, how they are formed and how they work. For *The Improbable City*, the Festival has commissioned seven artists, each of whom conjure up imaginary worlds, 'worlds or spaces at the limits of the probable...Worlds which are distinctly 'other', yet sit in close relation to our own..'



Artist **Charles Avery** unveiled the first of these encounters

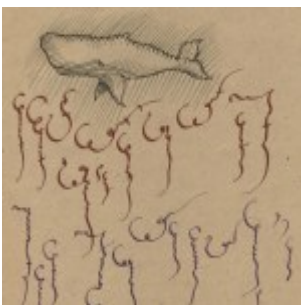
this morning at **Waverley Station**; it's a bronze sculpture of a rather unusual tree. Avery is best known for his project ***The Islanders***, works from which were seen in the **National Galleries of Scotland's** recent ***GENERATION*** exhibition – the project is dedicated to describing the inhabitants, flora and fauna of a fictional island, and that island's park is filled with artificial trees and shrubs, an expression of the islanders' refutation of nature. So Avery's new tree, (which can be seen next to Platform 2) with its colourful dangling 'branches' reminiscent of a weeping willow, is part plant, part sculpture, part temple. New works in the ***Onomatopoeia*** project will also be on view at the **Ingleby Gallery**.



Image courtesy Julie Favreau & Battat Contemporary

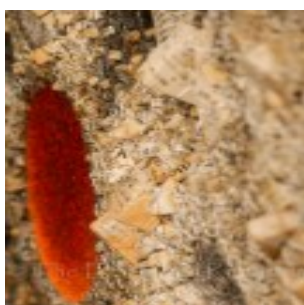


Image: Rob Gillanders



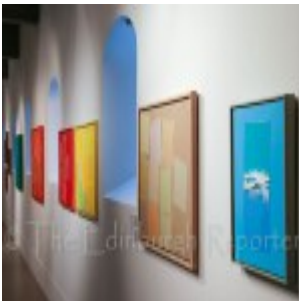
Other *Improbable City* participants include Quebecois video and installation artist **Julie Favreau**, Mexican illustrator and inventor **Ariel Guzik**, and vocal artist **Hanna Tuulikki**, whose ***SING SIGN: a close duet*** is a 'vocal and gestural suite', which

she will perform in **Gladstone's Land** and other closes of the Old Town.



Dovecot Studios themselves are hosting the work of two outstanding artists. In **Kwang Young Chun's** fascinating **AGGREGATIONS** we see beautiful large scale sculptures constructed from tiny interlocking packages – these little

parcels are made from traditional mulberry paper or *Hanji* and tied with mulberry string. In melding such a traditional Korean symbol with the Abstract Expressionism he studied in the US, Chun seeks to reconcile the divide between the ideals and the reality of the American dream. (The artist was represented at the launch by his son).



A Life in Colour, meanwhile, offers a retrospective of the career of the celebrated textile designer **Bernat Klein**; Klein's fabrics were used by **Chanel** and **Dior**, but painting was always the driving process behind his designs, and in the 1970s he commissioned Dovecot to make ten tapestries based on his *impasto* technique. The pieces exhibited today exemplify Klein's sumptuous and – for the 1950s – almost revolutionary use of bright colours and texture.



In the Car by Roy Lichtenstein 1963, copyright The Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/DACS 2004

Historic art features just as much as the contemporary stuff in this festival – it's not all installations and performances, wonderful though these may be. At **The Queen's Gallery Scottish Artists 1750-1900: From Caledonia to the Continent** will bring together paintings, drawings and

miniatures collected by monarchs from **George III** to **Queen Victoria**, whilst the **City Art Centre's *Scottish Art: People, Places, Ideas*** showcases important pieces from its huge collection – which includes works by the **Scottish Colourists**, the **Glasgow Boys**, **Joan Eardley** and **Alan Davie**. Other partner exhibitions feature **Roy Lichtenstein** (Modern One), **Lee Miller and Picasso** (Portrait Gallery) and **MS Escher** (Modern Two) – and as Sorcha points out, the ups and the downs, the closes and the pends of the Old Town can feel very like an Escher print at times.



From **Philippa Barlow's** major solo exhibition *set* at **The Fruitmarket Gallery** to **Toby Paterson's *Thresholds*** at **Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop** and **John Chamberlain's** stunning metallic sculptures at the **Botanics**, the Festival spreads far and wide throughout the city – and beyond, to **Jupiter Artland's** sculpture park in West Lothian, which will provide the backdrop to works by **Tara Donovan** and **Samara Scott**. Whilst some venues are well-known Edinburgh establishments – modern photography in the shape of **Bailey's *Stardust*** is at the **Scottish National Gallery**, ***Photography: A Victorian Sensation*** at the **National Museum of Scotland** – many smaller galleries and pop-up spaces will be taking part too.



Edinburgh is an eminently walkable city, and to help you get around the Festival invites you to join a free walking tour; just turn up at its new central hub, **The Kiosk** in Blair Street, at 2pm any day Saturday to Thursday and off you go. On Fridays there are special **Walking Lunch Tours** – for £4 you get a brown bag lunch to snaffle as you see the sights (these tours must be booked 24 hours in advance). They've also got **Explorers** maps and guides specially for families with children.



Whisper it low, but there are a few other festivals going on in the city this summer... and Edinburgh Art Festival is keen to build conversations with them. The **Festival Detours** programme

is a series of live performances in galleries by people like **Carol Ann Duffy**, **Phill Jupitus** and **Man of Moon** (who? only Edinburgh's latest uber cool band, that's who..). Meanwhile on 13th and 20th August, **Art Late** will see evening openings with live music, artist talks, tours and performances at venues such as **Talbot Rice Gallery**, **Collective** and **Dovecot Studios**. I'm slightly relieved to see that this festival's idea of late closing is 10.30pm... you young things can party the night away in the Grassmarket all you like, I need to be home for *Book at Bedtime*.



But before I go, I'm sure you're agog to know one thing... just what is the **Dennis and Debbie Club** – can anyone join? All I can tell you is, it involves 'despair, personal torment...and the absurd'. To find out more, you'll need to get down to **CodeBase** in Lady Lawson Street. As **Henri Matisse** apparently said, 'Creativity takes courage'.

The Edinburgh Art Festival starts today 30th July and ends 30th August 2015.

Most venues should have brochures, and you can also see the programme online [here](#). For daily news, events and updates, visit **The Kiosk**, 9-11 Blair Street.

