

Edinburgh Art Festival 2017: The Making of the Future: Now

What is art's primary function?

Is it to please, to edify, to create beautiful things? Or is it to make statements, to encourage people to think differently – or at least more deeply – about the issues of our day, maybe even to change things? Can it be both?

Scottish town planner, conservationist, social activist and polymath **Patrick Geddes** believed that 'Art and Industry, Education and Health, Morals and Business must...advance in unison'. Published in 1917, Geddes' pamphlet ***The Making of the Future*** looked forward to the end of the war and laid out his vision for a new society, one in which there was real dialogue between nations. In Edinburgh, as part of his improvements to the slums of the Old Town, he transformed gap sites into community gardens for all, famously writing 'By leaves we live...not by the jingling of our coins.'

✘ In 1947, two years after another war, the founders of the **Edinburgh International Festival** aimed to provide 'a platform for the flowering of the human spirit'; they saw art and artists as critical in fostering new and essential dialogue across Europe.


This year the **Edinburgh Art Festival** (EAF) will take as one of its themes ***The Making of the Future: Now***; it will look back to the ideals of Geddes and the optimism of 1947, and also forward to the need for – and growing popularity of – such principles in 2017. As people become increasingly disenchanted with ruthless profiteering and the destruction of the natural world, artists focus on the need for co-operation, social spaces, communication, respect for others, and respect for nature. Geddes saw beauty as part and parcel of social

activism. *The Making of the Future: Now* pays homage to Geddes' legacy and to that of the festival founders, and looks at how these ideas can once again shape our lives.



You don't often see a dragon in Edinburgh these days, but when sculptors **Zoe Walker** and **Neil Bromwich** considered how we might create conditions for a fairer society they came up with this proposition: **How do we slay the Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership?**

Drawing on radical ideas and imagery from visionary thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries, Walker and Bromwich sought to combine Geddes' ecological activism with the collective action of the Socialist movements of the same period. They found the 'dragon of profit and greed', a recurring motif in 19th century anarchist pamphlets, on a 1924 Northumberland Miners' Association banner – but their contemporary call to action comes in 3D; it's an impressive inflatable monster, a green dragon that will sit at the centre of a Geddesian-style public pageant. (Image: 'Dragon' – Day 21 of filming for Walker and Bromwich project 'Work and Play' in Hirst, Ashington, 20/3 2017. Photo©: Mark Pinder [pinder.photo@gmail.com])

 Walker and Bromwich have worked with children and families from **Canal View Primary School, Wester Hailes** to create a special performance in which the dragon will take to the streets, inviting people to question the current distribution of capital – and to conjure up alternative ideas. The walk will start from Trinity Apse, Chalmers Close, High Street at 2pm on 27 July 2017, but you can see the dragon at Trinity Apse from 10am to 6pm every day during the festival (except when she's out, of course...). (Image: Walker and Bromwich, *The Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership*, 2017, Photo by Mark Pinder.)

And as part of EAF's **A Summer Meeting** programme, at 4pm on 12

August there will be a discussion event at which speakers from the fields of ecology, economy and the arts are invited to pitch their solutions in a bid to slay that greedy dragon. (Booking required – see EAF website [here](#).)

Bobby Niven and **Iain MacLeod** started **The Bothy Project** in 2011; you can read our article about it (and the bothy at Modern One) [here](#). For *The Making of the Future: Now* Niven will create a temporary studio workshop within the Johnston Terrace urban wildlife garden (below) in the shadow of Edinburgh Castle.

✘ The garden was first established as one of Patrick Geddes' green spaces; Niven will combine Geddes's ideas with the results of his own research into the history of the Botanic Gardens' Palm Houses to make a timber framed transparent structure incorporating hand-carved anthropomorphic sculptural elements and a mud oven. In *The Palm House* Niven seeks to create a social space for sharing, production and discussion, activities that collectively invite exploration of this oasis in the city.

The Palm House will host a programme of artists' residencies and **Explorers Outdoors**, free family workshops inspired by the Forest School ethos. Booking is essential and may be made via Eventbrite [here](#). At 12 noon on 26 August, at The Saltire Society, Bobby Niven and Neil Bromwich will take part in an **Artists' Panel** event with EAF Director **Sorcha Carey, Kenny Hunter, Toby Paterson** and **Zoe Walker**. (Image above: *Pig Rock Bothy*, part of The Bothy Project sited at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, designed by Bobby Niven with Iain MacLeod. Photo: Johnny Barrington)

Whilst it's great to seek new ways of working towards a better society, we also need to examine what's going on in the world right now. In EAF's keynote lecture, renowned Mumbai artist **Shilpa Gupta** (whose *where do you end and I begin* light installation [right] formed part of EAF in 2014) will talk

about her practice, which has become increasingly concerned with the politics of borders, militarism, nation states and life in an age of 'securitization' and surveillance.

Gupta's media range from manipulated found objects to video, interactive computer-based installation and performance. Gupta creates situations that actively involve the viewer.

Her 2007 work ***There is no explosive here***, a communal experiment in fear, encouraged people to leave the gallery carrying a bag imprinted with the statement 'there is no explosive here.' The dynamic between object, carrier, and public aimed to challenge stereotypical anxieties about safety in a public context. The EAF keynote lecture is at 4pm, 28 July at the Scottish National Gallery. Buy tickets [here](#).

☒ People may seek connection, community and social engagement – but do they always find them? **Shannon Te Ao**, a New Zealand artist and writer of Ngāti Tūwharetoa descent, creates works that depict a fraught attempt to connect with places, people, plants and even animals; his protagonists long for the clarity and optimistic aspirations found in Geddes' vision of society, but all they see are uncertainty and complications.

With the sun aglow, I have my pensive moods is a multimedia installation in a former 19th century Magdalene Asylum for 'fallen women'; video footage of different locations throughout New Zealand explores the physical and emotional depths of grief, sickness and healing – and the potential for empathetic reach across distant histories. *With the sun aglow, I have my pensive moods* will be at Gladstone Court, 179 Canongate, 27 July-27 August. (Image: *With the sun aglow, I have my pensive moods*, 2017, two channel video, colour and sound. Cinematography Iain Frengley.)

Te Ao's themes are perhaps echoed in **Graham Fagen's** iconic ☒ video interpretation of Robert Burns' poem ***The Slave's Lament*** (Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Queen Street,

until 29 October). Fagen will give a free talk about the context of his work at 12.45pm on 9 August at NPG. (Image: Graham Fagen, still from *The Slave's Lament*, 2015 © Graham Fagen)

☒ Local communities lie at the heart of Patrick Geddes' philosophy, and EFA features events in many Edinburgh neighbourhoods. **North Edinburgh Arts** is Muirhouse's wonderful social space and a beacon of local creativity – it even has its own 'magic garden'.

The path to its door is inscribed: '**Art is: Breaking down barriers; transformation, growth; freedom of thought..**' and on 11 August, as part of *The Making of the Future: Now's A Summer Meeting* programme, NEA will host an afternoon of talks, walks and activities looking at the continuing importance of Geddes' ideas and the potential role of artists in making the future for both cities and communities. Several EFA artists, including Alice Betts, Jude Barber and Frances Whitehead, will participate in this event. Book [here](#).

Meanwhile ***Rolls and Shutters***, an exhibition at **Craigmillar Library**, Niddrie Mains Road, will look at the work of two ☒ photographers, **Angela Caitlin** and **John Brown**, active members of Craigmillar's own Festival Society which, in the 1970s, used the arts as a tool for social empowerment in an area that was – and continues to be – one of the most deprived communities in Scotland. Alongside their work the library will show a new film *Rolls and Shutters* by **Stina Wirfelt**, made during a residency in Craigmillar last year.

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And if you'd like to see where Patrick Geddes himself lived and worked in Edinburgh, you can pay a visit to his former home in **Ramsay Garden** or take a tour of the Old Town to

explore sites associated with his legacy, visiting EFA Commissions along the way.

Bob Dylan said that 'the highest purpose of art is to inspire.' Whether you're moved to change the world, change yourself, or simply to dance with a dragon, the 2017 Edinburgh Art Festival will provide the inspiration you need.



The Edinburgh Art Festival, 27 July-27 August 2017. For details of all events, and to book tickets where applicable, visit the [EFA website](#).

Brochures are available from the Fruitmarket Gallery, Market Street, and other venues throughout the city.