

Following a successful return, the 17th Edinburgh Art Festival draws to a close

Edinburgh Art Festival 2021 closed on Sunday 29 August, following a successful return which saw the month-long programme of 35+ exhibitions programmed in partnership with the city's visual art community secure hugely enthusiastic responses from audiences and critics alike.

Following cancellation of the 2020 edition as a result of the global pandemic, the 2021 edition returned to showcase Edinburgh's vibrant year-round visual arts scene, with a programme which included major new commissions and premieres by leading Scottish, UK and international artists alongside support for early career artists. Taking place at over 25 venues across the city, the programme also included a special programme of online events and presentations.



Edinburgh Art Festival. © 2021 J.L. Preece

While the 17th edition of the festival has now drawn to a close, a selection of participating exhibitions across the capital continue their run into September and beyond, including the acclaimed Lessons of the Hour, from artist Isaac Julien, presented by the festival in partnership with National

Galleries of Scotland – with its UK premiere continuing at Modern One until 10 October.

Sorcha Carey, Director of Edinburgh Art Festival said: “It felt so important to return this year, to play our part in supporting Scotland’s creative ecosystem after an exceptionally challenging time, as well as to offer a vital space for reflection, following the upheavals of the past year. The drive to make and enjoy art is something which, to paraphrase Frederick Douglass, is uniquely human – and as we come back together following long periods of isolation, separation, and uncertainty, it has been wonderful to cast a spotlight on this most human of activities.

“Throughout, our focus has been to find ways to safely reunite art with audiences, and while this has meant that festival venues have, of necessity, been welcoming smaller numbers of visitors, we know audiences have really valued the chance to return to galleries, to celebrate the extraordinary community of artists and freelancers on whom our creative ecosystem depends.”



Women in STEM, North Edinburgh Arts, 22nd June 2021

Festival highlights included:

The festival-led programming featured major new commissions and presentations by leading international artists, including the UK & European premiere of Lessons of the Hour by Isaac Julien, a film celebrating the 19th century self-liberated freedom fighter Frederick Douglass, in partnership with National Galleries of Scotland; and two new festival co-commissions, with work by Sean Lynch casting a spotlight on Edinburgh’s public monuments and sculptures, in collaboration with Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop; and a sound installation by Emeka Ogboh with Talbot Rice Gallery at the Burns Monument, responding to the UK’s departure from the European Union.

This year the festival took a new approach, collaborating with Glasgow based artist, film-maker and programmer Tako Taal as Associate Artist who formed a response to the festival's invitation to reflect on themes and ideas emerging from Isaac Julien's work by in turn commissioning work by a new generation of artists living and working in Scotland: Chizu Anucha, Sequoia Barnes, Francis Dosoo, Thulani Rachia, Camara Taylor and Matthew Arthur Williams.

The festival's annual showcase supporting artists in the early stages of their careers to make and present new work returned – with Jessica Higgins, Danny Pagarani, Kirsty Russell and Isabella Widger invited to create new work for Platform: 2021 at Institut français d'Ecosse.



Edinburgh Art Festival. © 2021 J.L. Preece

Partner galleries across Edinburgh offered the chance to discover a new generation of artists, including the work of Satellite participant Alison Scott at Collective, Sekai Machache at Stills, Andrew Gannon at Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop and gobscore at Edinburgh Printmakers.

Solo presentations across the capital included Christine Borland at Inverleith House, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Alberta Whittle and Rachel Maclean at Jupiter Artland, Frank Walter at Ingleby Gallery, Ian Hamilton Finlay at The City Art Centre, Sonia Mehra Chawla at Edinburgh Printmakers, Jock McFadyen at Dovecot Studios, a major exhibition by the artist Karla Black for the newly developed and reopened Fruitmarket and Alison Watt at Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

This year's edition also featured important retrospectives and major survey shows including The Galloway Hoard: Viking-age Treasure at National Museum of Scotland, Victoria & Albert: Our Lives in Watercolour at The Queen's Gallery and Archie Brennan at Dovecot Studios.



Edinburgh Art Festival press launch, Scottish Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, 28th July 2021

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Edinburgh's commercial galleries presented a richly diverse offering including a new group show from Arusha Gallery and Ella Walker, Shaun Fraser and Will Maclean at The Fine Art Society, Leon Morrocco at Open Eye Gallery and the centenary of the birth of Joan Eardley, marked with an extensive new show at The Scottish Gallery.

Alongside exhibitions across the capital, this year saw the return of Art Late, the festival's celebrated evening culture-crawls across the programme featuring exhibition tours, artist talks, workshops and unique performances, now digitally reimaged to allow wider audiences to engage with the festival. The online programme also presented a series of Artist in-conversation events, with Isaac Julien, Sean Lynch, Emeka Ogboh and Associate Artist Tako Taal and the project's invited artists, each discussing their work – all of which can still be watched on our website through our Event Archive.

For more information, please visit www.edinburghartfestival.com or follow the festival on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @EdArtFest #EdArtFest.