

Poet and performer Ellen Renton's debut photography exhibition opens

A new exhibition by Edinburgh artist Ellen Renton, inspired by the instamatic poetry of the influential Scottish poet Edwin Morgan, is opening in Scotland's capital this week.

IF YOU'VE SEEN IT, YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IT is a collection of poetry and photography created by poet, performer, and theatre maker Ellen Renton. This is her debut exhibition combining these two artforms and asks the question: how do you reconcile visually impaired identity with the act of photography?

The exhibition will be at Agitate Gallery from 17 to 31 May 2023. It is the culmination of a research project which Ellen has undertaken since late 2021, supported by an artist associateship from Disability Arts Online (DAO) and the Edwin Morgan Trust.

Ellen's experiences in arts galleries as a visually impaired person have shaped her thoughts about the gallery experience she wanted to create for this exhibition. Visitors to IF YOU'VE SEEN IT, YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IT will listen to an audio guide leading them through a series of images. A character in itself, the guide takes on the role of an unreliable narrator with a shifting tone – at times direct, at points abstractly poetic, and sometimes reflective. These inconsistencies and

fluctuations in approach conjure up questions around the ways in which our eyes and our minds often sit at odds with each other. How many ways can an image be read? Is seeing really believing?

The bringing together of photography and poetry in Ellen's exhibition was inspired by Edwin Morgan's instamatic poetry which he wrote about photographs taken in locations as varied as Chicago, Renfrewshire, Venice, Nigeria, and translunar space. The title of Ellen's exhibition, IF YOU'VE SEEN IT, YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IT, comes from another series of Morgan's work, the news-poems.

Ellen Renton said: "Photography is a way of seeing. If you are consistently told that you're not good at something, you will inevitably come to stop trying a little. Leave the work of that to other people. If people around you are always looking at something further away, smaller, more detailed and describing to you what you're missing then you will believe them. The associateship with Disability Arts Online and Edwin Morgan Trust has afforded me such a rare opportunity to thoroughly research a group of connected ideas that I kept brushing up against in previous work, but that I never had the time to fully explore my own relationship with. Photography is a relatively new medium for me and I've loved the process of incorporating it into my practice as a writer and learning more about both types of art along the way.

I feel like I've grown up with Edwin Morgan's work and as a poet living and writing in Scotland he's one of the most important and influential figures. Being able to combine my admiration of his poetry with furthering my work on visual impairment was really exciting for me."

Rachel Boyd, Content Assistant at Disability Arts Online, said: "It has been wonderful for Disability Arts Online to collaborate with the Edwin Morgan Trust and agitate in presenting IF YOU'VE SEEN IT YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IT by our DAO

Associate Artist Ellen Renton.

“Ellen’s work has long engaged with the hierarchy of the senses and has sought to question the ocular-centric world in which we live. This work emerges from her engagement with the Edwin Morgan Archive to produce a contemporary response to Morgan’s News-Poems, a visual vernacular adopted by the poet to describe his translation of photography and contemporary journalism into poetic form. These mediums are designed to register encounters both immediate and ephemeral but are themselves fragmented and distorted.

“DAO have supported Ellen to realise a dual practice as poet and photographer along with Edinburgh-based photography gallery Agitate who have been instrumental in curating the upcoming exhibition. The nuance and deep contemplation behind Ellen’s practice has been a joy to see at all stages of the process.”

David Kinloch, Chair of the Edwin Morgan Trust said: “Ellen Renton’s poetic exploration of photography from the standpoint of a visually impaired artist takes both art forms into uncharted territory in ways that would have fascinated and excited Edwin Morgan. The Edwin Morgan Trust is proud to have been able to help facilitate this memorable new work by an exciting talent.”

[More information here.](#)

IF YOU’VE SEEN IT, YOU HAVEN’T SEEN IT

An exhibition of poetry and photography by Ellen Renton, supported by Disability Arts Online (DAO) and the Edwin Morgan Trust.

- 17 May until 31 May 2023
- Venue: Agitate Gallery, 20 Haymarket Terrace, EH12 5JZ

Opening hours: Wednesday – Sunday from 12:00 – 18:00

- Admission: free

Access information: Agitate is located on Haymarket Terrace, situated across from the entrance to Haymarket Train Station. The gallery is accessible from street level but has no accessible toilet facilities. The exhibition is located within a space up three short steps.





Ellen Renton



IF YOU'VE SEEN IT YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IT

Poetry and
Photography by
Ellen Renton

AGITATE, 20 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh
17-31 May 2023



AGITATE

IF YOU'VE SEEN IT YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IT from Edwin Morgan's *Themes on a Variation* (1988) © Caranet Press.