

Edinburgh Art Festival 2024: 20th Birthday!

The 20th Edinburgh Art Festival opened on Friday, and it's taking as its theme 'persistence.'



EAF Director Kim McAleese

Launching the Festival at the City Art Centre, which will be the festival's hub for the coming weeks, director **Kim McAleese** explained that the festival will celebrate the ways in which people, as individuals and in communities, organise to upend iniquity and challenge the forces that seek to silence them.

In developing the 2024 programme, she considered particularly what has changed, and what hasn't, since the festival's inception in 2004. In the UK alone, fourteen years of Conservative governments, the Scottish Independence Referendum, Brexit, Covid and many other events have all reshaped society. And in recent weeks we have seen fascism – and counterprotests – on the streets.

This year, throughout Edinburgh's several festivals, a strong sense of solidarity is emerging, a realisation that, together, we do have the power to resist and to bring about the changes society needs. EAF focuses on artists, activists and groups who are fighting – or who have historically fought – isolation, persecution, destruction and despair, and who seek to replace these with community, positivity, supportive caring and hope.

Over 200 artists from across the UK, mainland Europe, Latin America, and the SWANA region have been invited to participate in the festival, which includes exhibitions, performances,

discussions and events at more than thirty venues.



Renee Helena Browne: Sanctus!



Renee Helena Browne: Sanctus!

The City Art Centre itself will be home to several commissioned works. In their engaging new film ***Sanctus!*** Glasgow-based artist **Renee Helena Browne** uses Northern Ireland's car rally culture to reconnect with their mother. *Sanctus!* gives us a glimpse of a very specific form of social interaction, entertainment and competition, but more importantly explores the relationship between Renee and Helen. They talk not only about the rallies, in which Renee's uncle and cousins have been heavily involved, but also about religion, the Catholic Church, and concepts of death. Introducing her work, Renee explained,

'There is a petrolhead mentality in my family...I started off thinking of her (Helen) as a survivor of her life, but the conversations I had with her on film helped me to see things from her perspective and not just mine.'



Karol Radziszewski



Edition of *Filo*



Karol Radziszewski and EAF curator Eleanor Edmundson

Filo was one of the first underground queer magazines in Central-Eastern Europe; Polish artist **Karol Radziszewski's** exhibition collects rare photos and ephemera to trace its history. These are accompanied by the artist's striking paintings of queer, Central-Eastern European historical figures. At the launch, Radziszewski spoke about the subjects of his paintings, and of exploring the unknown histories of LGBTQ+ communities beyond the West. He himself was the first

openly queer official artist in Poland, but when he returned to the country of his birth he discovered many amateur artists working in similar areas.



Tamara MacArthur

EAF supports early career artists through its **PLATFORM** initiative. This year **Alaya Ang, Edward Gwyn Jones, Tamara MacArthur** and **Kialy Tihngang** respond to the themes of the 2024 programme in a variety of media, including video, animation, sound, sculpture, performance, textiles and painting. They variously address issues around colonialism, Blackness, queerness, Britishness, capitalism, intimacy, longing, memory, protest and persecution.



Alaya Ang



Kialy Tihngang

Rosie's Disobedient Press is a collaborative project by artists **Lisette May Monroe** and **Adrien Howard**. EAF has invited them to reflect on the framework for the festival's anniversary, and also on the landscape of the city over the past 20 years. The artists have worked with local archives and organisations to look at language and words as historical forms of resistance; their research has led to the creation of words of textual intervention, which will be seen around the city, on posters, windows, banners and flags (including some outside the City Art Centre.) They have also designed a range of clothing and 'wearables.' While prices are suggested for these, Rosie's is committed to making them accessible to all, and you are encouraged to pay what you can (including nothing) – or, if you can, to pay more. You can also pick up a copy of ***Remnants: How you Re-assemble a city***, a free newspaper created by feminist architecture collective **Voices of Enterprise**.



Shirt by Rosie's Disobedient Press

Speaking at the EAF launch, Monroe and Howard noted that one result of the advent of the internet is that people don't archive any more. The wearables they have created are intended to move language around the city,

'Political action doesn't start in a vacuum...we wanted to have more than just static works.'

Rosie's Edinburgh archive now contains more than 200 items, many generously shared by city residents; the preserving and sharing of information as a form of resistance is fundamental to the collective's practice. On 18th August at Leith Library, Monroe and Howard will talk about their work, and what they found – and found to be missing – during their research in the Scottish archives. (This is a free but ticketed event: book [here.](#))



Rosie's Disobedient Press wearables

EAF annually partners with other exhibitions across Edinburgh and beyond. From **Ibrahim Mahama's** impressive large scale installation ***Songs about Roses*** at Fruitmarket to activist **Matthew Hyndman's** inaugural exhibition ***Upended*** at Bard on Customs Wharf in Leith, **Ade Adesina's** stunning ***Intersection*** at Edinburgh Printmakers at Castle Mills in Dundee Street and ***Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970-1990*** at Modern Two in Bedford Road. Meanwhile, **Laura Aldridge** and **Andrew Sim's *Lawnmower and two rainbows and a forest of plants and trees*** will transform Jupiter Artland in West Lothian. Audiences are encouraged to explore beyond the city centre; to this end EAF's programme (available online [here](#) or in paper form at various locations) is arranged by area.

A full schedule of events, including talks, discussions, performances and even parties, accompanies the festival. On 16th August, in a car park on Castle Terrace, **Prem Sahib** will

premiere a performance work **Alleus** (Suella spelled backwards) which will re-order, re-direct and disrupt one of the former Home Secretary's anti-immigration speeches. Meanwhile the **Travelling Gallery** will be visiting Leith Library, Restalrig's Ripple Project and Pilton's North Edinburgh Arts with its new exhibition, **Where We Stand**, telling the story of the pioneers of community ownership in Scotland.

EAF is also collaborating with **Edinburgh Deaf Festival** on BSL tours, workshops and events at City Art Centre and the Royal Botanic Garden.

Partner sessions will take place at **Edinburgh International Book Festival**, where on 23rd August biologist and environmentalist **Brigitte Baptiste** will look at nature through a Queer lens. On 13th August, **Remnants: How to Re-assemble a City**, will facilitate a discussion with members of **Voices of Experience**, focusing on imagining future spaces that put people first and encourage equality of access.

'Whether you're someone whose passion lies in visual art or you are wandering into one of the many partnered venues for the first time, you will find plenty from the 200 artists to draw you in.'

Emma Nicolson. Head of Visual Arts, Creative Scotland

Edinburgh Art Festival runs from 9th to 25th August although some partner exhibitions will continue after that date.