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Festival

Sean Lynch





Tak'

Tent

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**Lesley Young:** The proposition at the start of this project was to connect you and your practice with the mysterious material Coade stone. The story of Coade stone, which is actually a malleable ceramic resembling stone when it's fired, felt like a story that might appeal to you. Coade stone was developed by Eleanor Coade (1733-1821) and used until the 1840s when her factory closed and the recipe was then forgotten.

**Sean Lynch:** I had vague knowledge of Coade before we began working on 'Tak' Tent O' Time Ere Time Be Tint' – a decade ago I was living in London, in Lambeth, south of the Thames where the original Coade factory was. The area was once a hive of artisan activity, something akin to Henry Mayhew's writings on London, I imagine. I had unrealised plans at the time to make a video about nineteenth century craftsmanship and how it offered potential opportunity to hijack the growth of society's segmented and institutional growth. Eleanor Coade's enterprise aimed to supply a readily available, mass-produced architectural ornamentation throughout the British Isles and beyond. Swags, arabesques, classical statuary could be got at cheaper prices, made out of a long-lasting material. It was a tough scene – child labour is evidenced by kids fingerprints still seen on the surfaces of Coade examples today, kiln firings went on for days, with stories of heavy drinking for everyone to stay cool. While there is still Coade to be seen on today's streets, it appears so similar to stone that it is often unrecognised and passed over in the life of the city.

There's a romantic story that Eleanor took the finely tuned recipe for the Coade mix to her grave, rather than hand it over to competitors – I remember we once compared this tale to Werner Herzog's 1976 film 'Heart of Glass', where the factory owner dies and with him the formula for Ruby Glass, the town's only industry – in Herzog's film disastrous experiments ensue in attempts to figure out the lost mix. Over the last year, Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop (ESW) technician Stephen Murray has corralled together a team at ESW to research and develop a recipe for Coade. Any formulas used today lie with architectural conservation companies and their vested commercial interest in the medium means that there is little public knowledge of the ingredients and what forms of kiln firing give optimal results. Out of all of this, a series of sculptures are on show at ESW, along





with the various early tests and experiments completed by Stephen and the team.

I've done a few stone-related projects over the last decade, around flint knapping, display of monuments in museums and stonecarving, and some of the mischief had in those disciplines. The interesting thing in terms of Coade has been to continue to mine it for allegorical potential – an aggregate rather than a stone per se, a synthetic material made of ingredients from different places, with different potentials! This has led on to thinking of ESW as a base to discover the tangential relationships Coade might have.

LY: Yes, it felt like ESW contained both the skill and curiosity to undertake practical research around the material of Coade stone, thus providing a key ingredient of allegorical potential. Can you talk about the other references and characters within the project that you have pursued and what kind of allegorical image you think might be beginning to form?

SL: Like anyone else, I can't define what an allegorical image is. Yet, chasing such a phantom vision is one of the modes of thought that contemporary art is well equipped to do, I think. We all spend our lives trying to understand the shape of the world around us, and draw out stories and scenarios that we can dwell on and form belief systems that might give us some kind of partial understanding of how complex and diverse life is. Trying to discover, compare and contrast situations that seem subtly or idiosyncratically linked, with relationships that are often far from explicit, have been a mainstay of my activities over the last years – looking not for a singular vision, but a kind of atmosphere or environmental viewpoint, if you like. A key moment in this trajectory was searching through scrapyards in Ireland to eventually uncover remnants of the defunct DeLorean DMC-12 motorcar, famous for its appearance as a makeshift time machine in the movie 'Back to the Future'. I eventually located leftovers of the DeLorean car factory at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean in 2009, where large metal presses once used to form the DeLorean's famous shape were inhabited and surrounded by crabs, lobsters and starfish. Encountering this, it helped me understand how to see through one object or situation into another, from sea creatures to automobile design, from Thatcher's cancellation of the car factory in Belfast to









John DeLorean's cocaine bust near LAX airport. One object, attitude or decision touches another that touches another, that touches everything else on the planet, with no boundaries – it's Merleau Ponty's flesh of the world.

In Edinburgh, after our encounters with Coade stone and examining locations it can be seen in, we both began to drift into the architectural history of the city and the culture of monuments that are so plentiful there. You also began to organise and develop relationships with Museums & Galleries Edinburgh and The National Museum of Scotland for us to encounter artifacts such as Scotland's collection of Neolithic carved stone balls and miniature models of Edinburgh. We found out about the purpose of the shadows cast underneath the statue of Alexander The Great and his horse. Our research concurrently began to acknowledge what an issue the Melville Monument poses. The pages of the Aberdeen Bestiary became a device to see how certain forms of Christian morality create hierarchies of thought still prevalent today. With the show's postponement last summer, we had ample time to develop purposeful relationships with a community across Edinburgh, to listen to stories about the existence of the city, to hear what's said out loud and what is murmured underneath the breath. We are two weeks away from the exhibition launch now and at a stage where all these encounters are about to materialise at ESW.

LY: The video you've made as part of the exhibition at ESW features a number of sculptures and carvings that viewers might recognize from Edinburgh's streets and buildings, but some discussion offered by the narrator is mischievous and surprising. Can you tell us more about your relationship to sculpture and how it operates in the public sphere?

SL: Maybe those descriptives and that attitude you are mentioning come as a fairly direct and blunt reaction to the subject matter itself. There's a particular austerity in much of the bricks, mortar and monuments of Edinburgh, structures from another time still stubbornly with us today, often only discussed in the formal language and overtures of a heritage industry that attempts to stringently formalise and frame the city. As a counterpoint, I thought it might be useful to push away from this, to look for the vernacular and the everyday around the city –

casual conversations, jokes, accidents, fleeting encounters and the likelihood of my misunderstandings as an outsider to the city are all relevant in this regard. The title of the show is an example of this - a motto written in wet concrete we came by at a builders yard up the road from ESW, a reminder to make the most of the time we have here together.

I propose the idea that as a society we've misaligned what our communal drive to monumentality and cultural achievement is. Scratches in concrete might be more aspirational than the egotistical grandeur of the Melville Monument and Henry Dundas. We live in a time with so much information available to us - the least we can do is try to use it to recontextualise the vicious binary aggression that is linear history. Taking that canon apart and finding ways for the incidental existence of the city to take its place is something the exhibition at ESW points to. Our spirituality is not to be found anymore in singular visions or doctrine of the past. Let's spill all that baggage out on the ground and begin to improvise and make do with what we have, rather than use it to reinforce our identities. It might be the case that we find ourselves anew in the one thousand and one tasks we all have to do every day to get by. That might be where a revised form of monumentality and kinship is to be found. I think that's worth a try.





Sean Lynch lives and works in Askeaton, Ireland. He represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale in 2015. Solo exhibitions include Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (2019); Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2017); Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver (2016); Rose Art Museum, Boston (2016) and Modern Art Oxford (2014). More recent presentations of his work have occurred at Tenerife Espacio de las Artes (2020); CentroCentro, Madrid (2019), and CRAC Alsace (2019), while a major public commission for the City of Melbourne, Australia will be realised later this year. Lynch is represented by Ronchini Gallery in London and Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin. Alongside Michele Horrigan, he works at Askeaton Contemporary Arts, an artist-led residency, exhibition and publication initiative situated in the west of Ireland since 2006.

Lesley Young is a curator and producer based in Glasgow. Between 2006-10 she initiated and ran The Salford Restoration Office with James N. Hutchinson to explore and critique the visual arts infrastructure of Manchester, curating exhibitions with Jeremy Deller, Dan Shiplesides and Artur Zmijewski, and developing projects with Imogen Stidworthy and Katya Sander. She is a founding member of Chapter Thirteen, a curatorial co-operative established in Glasgow in 2017, she was Programme Coordinator at Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop 2018 -19 and is the Director of Bothy Project.

Devised by Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop with curator Lesley Young.

Coade stone development and fabrication: Méabh Breathnach, Stephen Burke, Ray Griffin, Emma Hislop, Ash Lim, Paul McAuley, Stephen Murray and Alison Robinson.

Video production: Emily Horrigan Lynch, Rachel McBrinn and Gina Moxley

Animation: Dave Phelan.

Stone balls carved by Hugo Anderson-Whymark.

Exhibition installation: Matt Zurowski.

Exhibition hosting: Lynn Cowan, Gillian Ingram, Luke Kelman and Mira Knoche

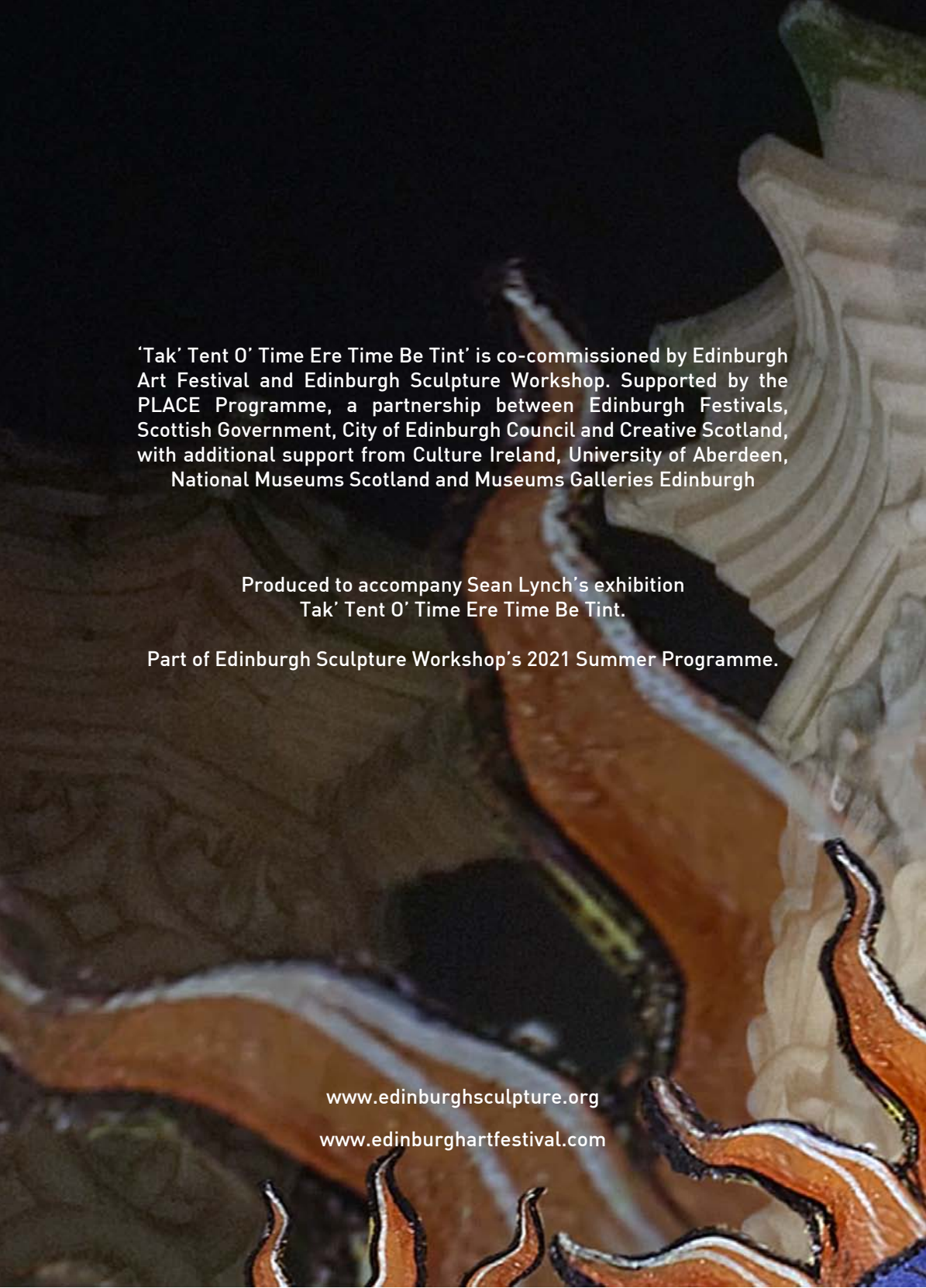
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Tak' Tent O' Time Ere Time Be Tint.

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