

Edinburgh Art Festival Commissions Programme 2018

Alongside a rich programme of exhibitions and events curated by partners across the city, each year we invite Scottish and international artists to make new projects specifically for the Festival.

With a focus on bringing art out of formal gallery settings and into conversation with the city, our Commissions Programme invites artists to develop new work for public spaces and historic buildings, often providing access to spaces that are not generally open to the public.

Our 2018 Commissions Programme presents new work by four artists at sites across the city, ranging from the street performance sites of the Royal Mile, to a 15th century kirk, a Victorian Fire Station, and Scotland’s smallest wildlife reserve.

Touching on current political and social concerns, several of the 2018 commissions have been developed in dialogue with other artforms – including poetry, music and magic. Strategies of orchestration and the act of close listening inform a number of the works, while freedom of expression and a questioning of economic models feature prominently as themes within the programme.

The 2018 Commissions Programme also includes:

**Ruth Ewan: *Sympathetic Magick***  
Various venues – see [www.edinburghartfestival.com](http://www.edinburghartfestival.com) for details

**Shilpa Gupta: *For, in your tongue, I cannot hide***  
The Fire Station at Edinburgh College of Art, 76-78 Lauriston Place, Edinburgh, EH3 9DE

**Adam Lewis Jacob: *No Easy Answers***  
Institut Français d’Écosse, West Parliament Square, Edinburgh, EH1 1RF

26 July – 26 August | Monday – Sunday, 10am-6pm

**Core Funders**  
Creative Scotland  
City of Edinburgh Council

**Project Funders and Supporters**  
Scottish Government’s Festivals Expo Fund  
EventScotland  
Museums and Galleries Edinburgh



Design: James Brook, [www.jamesbrook.net](http://www.jamesbrook.net)

EDINBURGH ART FESTIVAL 2018

Cover: Ross Birrell & David Harding, *Lento*, 2017. Film still: Soprano Rasha Rizk. Cinematography: Samuel Devereux, Hugh Watt and Ross Birrell.

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Ross Birrell & David Harding: *Triptych*



Ross Birrell & David Harding: *Triptych*

Since 2005, Ross Birrell and David Harding have collaborated on several films and installations which increasingly explore the poetic and political dynamic of music.

*Triptych*, their new work for Edinburgh Art Festival in the historic context of Trinity Apse, is, as the title suggests, tripartite in structure, producing a space where moving image, colour and music correspond and resonate with historical and contemporary architectural, poetic and political contexts.

At the heart of *Triptych* is a three-channel film documenting a performance of Henryk Gorecki's *Symphony No. 3: Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* (1976) in the Megaron Concert Hall, Athens. Conceived for documenta 14, the concert was performed by the Athens State Orchestra with the Syrian Expat Philharmonic Orchestra (founded in 2015 by Raed Jazbeh) and featuring Syrian soprano, Rasha Rizk.

Gorecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* is a moving lament, reflecting the experience of loss as a result of war. A sense of separation and absence pervades the film installation. A central screen documents a wide view of the orchestra and conductor, Daniel Raiskin, while two side panels appear to focus upon an empty space – a space which awaits the solo performance of Rizk.

Rizk recites a 15th century lament from the *Songs of Lysagora*. Sited in the remnants of a 15th church, this is one of several contexts that permeate Birrell and Harding's *Triptych*. In its formal presentation, the film references another triptych – Hugo Van der Goes' *Trinity Altarpiece* (1478-79), painted for the original Trinity Church and now housed in the National Gallery of Scotland.

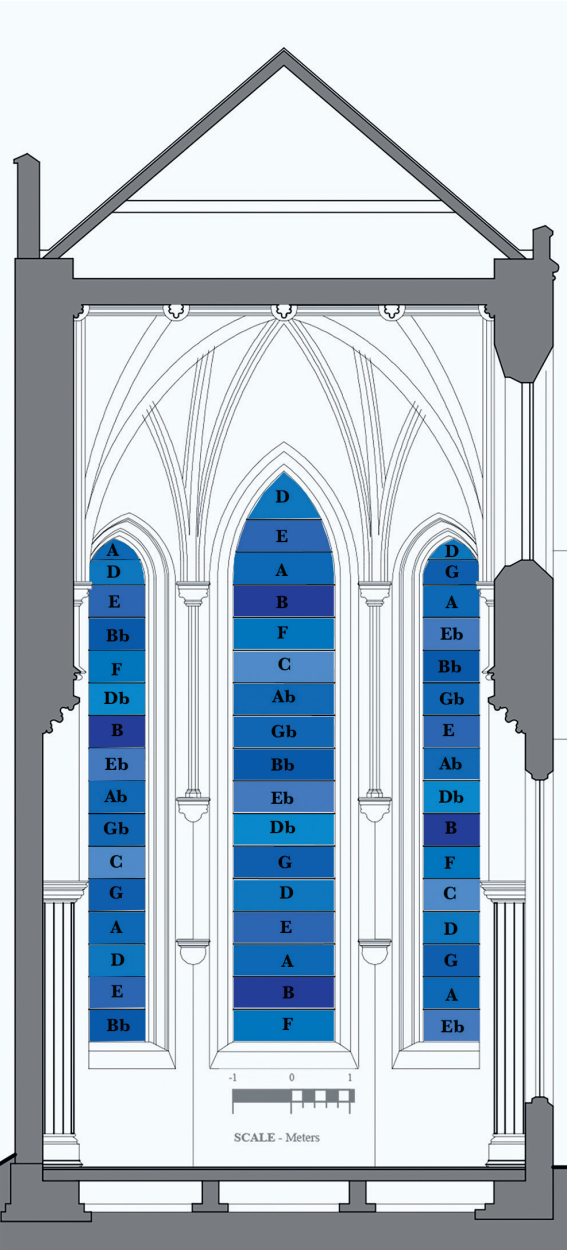
Alongside Gorecki, the Athens concert also included a performance of *Fugue*, a project developed by Ross Birrell in collaboration with the Syrian composer and violinist, Ali Moraly. *Fugue* shares the same etymology

as refugee, and in an echo of the subject and countersubject which characterizes contrapuntal fugal form, an initial theme was sent by Birrell to Moraly inviting a response which ultimately took the form of Moraly's *Quatrain for Solo Violin after Paul Celan's Death Fugue*. The scores which combine to form *Fugue* are exhibited as part of *Triptych*.

Visitors to Trinity Apse will be met by an infusion of colour emanating from new compositions created in reds and blues for windows long devoid of their original stained glass. These chromatic mosaics are based on fragments of a further music score which has its origins in lines by the Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, whose words are transposed into a twelve-tone musical notation and corresponding numerical grid, and subsequently translated into fields of red and blue colour tones.

The complex transposition of forms enacted in *Triptych* – live recital into film, poetry into music, music into colour – corresponds to wider cultural conditions of exile, migration, displacement and fragmentation; and finds echoes in the architectural fabric of Trinity Apse itself.

Trinity Apse is all that remains of the original Trinity Collegiate Church, taken down in 1848 to make way for Waverley Train Station. In an early example of heritage conservation, the stones were numbered with a view to rebuilding the church on an alternative site. Some 30 years later, fragments of the choir and a transept were re-erected on the current site to form Trinity Apse. Still bearing evidence of their painted numbers, a visible testament to their displacement and re-siting, the stones of Trinity Apse provide a fitting context for a work reflecting on loss, trauma and exile.



Artists' Biographies

Ross Birrell (b. 1969, Paisley)

Ross Birrell's work revolves around poetry, philosophy, politics, and place and has been exhibited in Glasgow International; documenta 14, Athens and Kassel; Westminster Hall, London; MAXXI: National Museum of the 21st Century Arts, Rome; Cobra Museum of Modern Art, Amsterdam; Dundee Contemporary Arts; Kunsthalle Nürnberg; BAWAG Foundation, Vienna; Fries Museum, Leeuwarden; Apex Art, New York; Tramway, Glasgow; and the 4th Gwangju Biennale. His ongoing *Envoy* series consists of site-specific actions and interventions at various locations across the globe, responds to traditions of radical politics and utopian literature, and is published in *An Envoy Reader* (LemonMelon, London, 2014).

Birrell is Professor in the School of Fine Art at The Glasgow School of Art. He is represented by Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam.

David Harding (b. 1937, Edinburgh)

David Harding studied at Edinburgh College of Art leaving in 1959. He was Town Artist of Glenrothes in Fife from 1968 to 1978 where he developed the concept of the artist as planner. From 1978 to 1985 he was senior lecturer in Art & Social Contexts at Dartington College of Art. In 1985 he was appointed head of a new department, Environmental Art, at Glasgow School of Art that has been credited with contributing to Glasgow's highly regarded contemporary art scene. He left GSA in 2001. Since 2005 David Harding has collaborated with Ross Birrell making films and associated art works travelling to Spain, Mexico and Cuba among others.

Birrell and Harding's collaborative projects have been included in group exhibitions in Kunsthalle Basel, the Swiss Institute in Rome and Museo Tamayo, Mexico City. Recent projects have included have included *Winter Line*, Kunsthalle Basel (2014), *You Like This Garden?* Ross Birrell/David Harding, and Douglas Gordon, Portikus (2014), *Where Language Ends*, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh (2015), and documenta 14.

Left: Sketch for *Mosaic for Mahmoud Darwish (Blue)* for Trinity Apse, 2018.

Right, top: Excerpt from score for Ali Moraly's *Quatrain for Solo Violin after Paul Celan's Death Fugue*, 2017.

Right, below: Ross Birrell, *Theme for Fugue for Ali Moraly*, 2016.