

Ross Sinclair

# COLLECTIVE

## ***20 Years of Real Life***

**27.06.14 – 31.08.14**

Collective is pleased to present a major new exhibition by Ross Sinclair as part of GENERATION, a landmark series of exhibitions celebrating 25 years of contemporary art in Scotland.

2014 marks the 20th anniversary of Glasgow-born Ross having *Real Life* tattooed on his back, since then his work has taken the form of a simultaneous celebration and commiseration of the paradigm of *The Real*. Throughout the last 20 years of work, Ross has sought to re-imagine the relationships in our society through an on-going investigation of the many institutions and constructs to which we all are inextricably linked, as individuals and collectively.

As a leading figure in the collaboration between art and music in Scotland over the last 25 years, Ross's work, presented in the City Dome space, focuses on both of these aspects of his practice.

The exhibition includes; a new film reflecting on the last 20 years of Ross' art; a wall painting and space in which the audience is invited to contribute to 'Paint what you think', text works, placards, banners, posters and musical instruments, some of which you are invited to try out and others that will be given away to five new bands, made up of teenagers, at the end of the exhibition.

This exhibition provides a timely opportunity to reflect on the last twenty years of Ross' work, while also firmly positioning it in the present and imagining possible futures.

### *Free Instruments for Teenagers Real Life 20 x 20 x 20*

The *20 Years of Real Life* exhibition launches a major, new, yearlong engagement project by Ross and Collective. *Free Instruments for Teenagers Real Life 20 x 20 x 20* is a project based on a ripple effect in which 20 teenagers will be recruited through the course of the exhibition to create 5 new bands. These 20 young people will be provided with the instruments to form a band and will work with Ross and a team of mentors to write and perform new music. Through this gesture Ross hopes to enable and give the necessary tools to a new generation of people to embark on a creative life.

The instruments form an integral part of Ross's installation at Collective and there are drop in sessions each Saturday afternoon for teenagers to try them out. 'Paint what you think' is from 2-4pm daily.

From one teenage bedroom to another – notes from a conversation with Ross Sinclair

Claire Biddles

Records, bought and rushed home, opened from their bags, over the bedroom floor – sleeves, inner sleeves, pictures, posters, lyrics, quotations, badges – everything tactile and bright and exhilarating. Lyrics read, sleeves poured over. A teenager buys a record, puts it on, gets a pass to a world of creative possibility.

Ross Sinclair's work comes from the excitement of that teenage moment. *20 Years of Real Life* harnesses that feeling of connecting with music and art. The energy. The possibility. Everything all of the time. The OVERWHELMING MULTITUDE of teenage emotion. The walls and walls of t-shirts, the maximal installations and multiple editions that make up 'REAL LIFE', the last 20 years of Ross' practice that this exhibition represents.

A casual glance at the exhibition title suggests a traditional retrospective – a look at 20 years that have already happened – but it's not. This show is about creating another teenage moment for someone else. A moment of creative possibility for 20 other people under 20 years of age. From the instruments in the show, five bands made up of teenagers, will be formed, mentored, and recorded. The '20 years' of the title is as much the NEXT 20 years as it is the past 20 years. Making this exhibition an opportunity for a kind of inverse retrospective.

The guitars, drums, basses and PAs in the exhibition all symbolise artworks that Ross has already made – one for each year since he got REAL LIFE tattooed on his back in 1994. Each instrument contains the energy and the ideas and the creativity from the original artwork, magically (or symbolically) distilled. I like to think magically, in the same way that I think Tina Weymouth's basslines for *Talking Heads* are magic, rather than a sequence of notes. Ross commented:

*'We're offering the musical instruments because it's more instant. You can do it with art as well, but it takes a bit longer. For me it doesn't really matter, as long as we're encouraging a creative energy in somebody – the effect of that is inestimable. It doesn't matter whether it's music or art, painting or writing poetry – even reading books. I think having a skill or a passion, a creative way of thinking about your life, is so important.'*

If the musical instruments represent the creative possibilities instilled in objects, then the gallery itself represents the creative possibilities held in certain spaces – teenage bedrooms, of course, classrooms, art studios, band rehearsal rooms, venues and recording studios. The way that certain spaces or things give you the permission and encouragement that you need to do something.

Being a parent and a tutor at The Glasgow School of Art is important to Ross. Teaching and parenting are both, in essence, the practice of distilling experiences and knowledge and paying them forward. Ross spoke about teaching, and its links to the project:

*'Maybe seeing students coming through the GSA over the years makes me realise the value of a creative life. So many people who've come through the art school end up doing loads of different things, not just being artists. Maybe for me that articulates that idea of a creative life having value, whatever that may be. Also seeing that there's lots of kids out there who don't have the possibility to go to art school for whatever reason, who don't have that door open. It's about showing them that you don't have to have much money to have a creative life, and that it doesn't have to be your job – it can be something you do at the weekend or the evenings, and then maybe it can even become the main thing, the most important thing in your life.'*

I wondered about the democratic nature of the project, and the possibilities that opens up. Everyone is coming to the bands at the same time, meaning that the teenagers are allowed to choose their place in the band, instead of slotting into the space that nobody else wants to fill. Feeling empowered and in control of their own thing. Ross spoke about this:

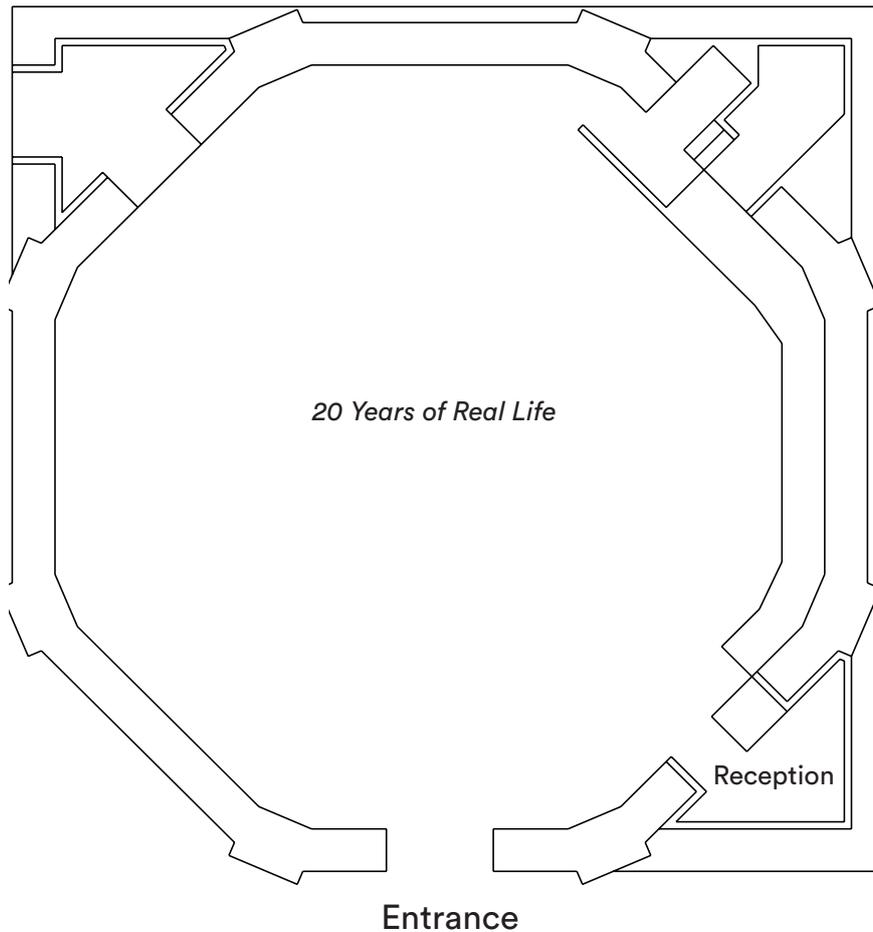
*'My daughter has been playing guitar for a couple of years, and she's good but she isn't very confident – it would be great if she could get together with*

*a couple of folk at the same level as her and play. That's why I thought of the idea of putting together bands, rather than giving away individual instruments by themselves. Seeing the energy, the love of music in her, made me want to have some way of channelling that, of activating that, turning it outward.'*

Once the guitars and drums and basses and PAs have left the exhibition, they become someone else's work, someone else's teenage moment, someone else's pass to a creative world. Rushed home, opened from their bags, over the bedroom floor, poured over, played technically wrongly at first but with an unstoppable will. Some will learn to play drums like Janet Weiss or Patty Schemel. Some will learn 3 chords and spend more time collaging their guitars with PVA glue and pictures printed off Tumblr. It doesn't matter which.

Claire Biddles is an artist and writer based in Glasgow, and is a graduate of The Glasgow School of Art's Environmental Art programme. Claire has played the guitar since she was 14, and is currently a member of femme rock, two-piece *Female Disease*.

## Floor Plan



### *20 Years of Real Life*

Installation with various media: wall painting, placards, banners, posters, musical instruments, paint, and film; *The Ballad of 20 Years of Real Life*, 21 mins.

Ross has exhibited widely nationally and internationally, selected solo exhibitions include: *Real Life Top Ten Songs of Wales*, *Locws International*, Swansea (2014), *I Tried to Give Up Drinking with Guitars instead of God*, *The Duchy*, Glasgow (2013), *Real Civic Life*, Angelika Knäpper Gallery, Stockholm (2010); *I Love Real Life*, Art Metropole, Toronto (2004); And survey exhibitions at: *Badischer Kunstverein*, Karlsruhe (2002); and *South London Gallery* (2001). Sinclair is a Reader in Contemporary Art Practice and a lecturer in Sculpture and Environmental Art at The Glasgow School of Art and regularly publishes texts on art.

Future projects include: *Himalayas Art Museum*, *Shanghai* and *Over the Counter Culture* at An Talla Solais.

[www.rossandtherealifers.com](http://www.rossandtherealifers.com)

Thanks to: Kate Burton and Ruth Clark.

Collective is a contemporary visual arts organisation that delivers an exciting and ambitious programme of new exhibitions, commissions and projects.

Collective was established in 1984 to support new and emergent artists and exhibit their work in Edinburgh. Now Collective commissions new work by artists who are at a pivotal stage in their development.

Over the next two years, Collective will be making the City Observatory complex its new home, opening the whole site to the public for the first time, placing contemporary art in the heart of Edinburgh.