

## Satellites Programme

Scott Rogers

### *Endling*

12.09.15 – 01.11.15

Incorporating sculpture and text, this exhibition is the culmination of research developed from Scott's interest in processes of decay, mutation and disappearance. The new works in *Endling* – a term used to describe the last remaining member of a species – point towards multiple instances of disappearance or extinction, exploring the impulse in humans to eradicate or preserve, and the different values implicit in these processes.

Central to the exhibition is a text work developed by the artist in conversation with cultural anthropologist Shirley Lindenbaum on the subject of 'kuru', a neurological disorder experienced by the South Fore people in Papua New Guinea. Similar to Mad Cow Disease and often referred to as 'Laughing Sickness', the disorder spread predominantly due to the consumption of human brain matter and was eventually eradicated through the introduction of western cultural practices. The text work compiles edited extracts from Shirley's book *Kuru Sorcery: Disease and Danger in the New Guinea Highlands* to provide a brief overview of the disease, its impacts on the South Fore people, and the implications on current medicine. Drawn from Shirley's fieldwork the text considers the link between the epidemic and cultural change, particularly in relation to colonialism.

This text reflects Scott's interest in ecological or biopolitical issues and his approach to artistic production as ingestion, or metabolizing of information, enabling him to utilise the exhibition as a site for the distribution of ideas. The font used in the exhibition is Doves Type, significant as it was assumed lost but has re-emerged, after fragments of the typeface were dredged from the River Thames and digitally replicated. There is also a sculpture of the now extinct

# COLLECTIVE

Passenger Pigeon – a 1:1 replica – produced from examples of nineteenth century hunting decoys. Previous to European colonization in North America, the Passenger Pigeon was the most numerous bird on the planet; its population estimated at around 6 billion individuals. By the early twentieth century the species was extinct. The pigeons nested in huge colonies called "cities" that contained upwards of 100 million birds. Decoys and blinded 'stool pigeons' were used by hunters to attract flocks of Passenger Pigeons. Once the birds had come to rest they could be trapped or killed en masse.

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Scott Rogers lives in Glasgow. He completed an MFA at the Glasgow School of Art. Recent solo exhibitions include: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge; YYZ, Toronto; Glasgow Sculpture Studios, Glasgow; One Night Only Gallery, Oslo; and PM Galerie, Berlin. Recent group exhibitions include: *The Alberta Biennial*, Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton; *Black Diamond Dust*, Nanaimo Art Gallery, Nanaimo; *Time After Time*, Market Gallery, Glasgow; *Seeing Things*, Glasgow International, Glasgow; and *Fight!*, Center, Berlin. Alongside Sarah Rose and Rebecca Wilcox he co-runs tenletters, a project space in Glasgow.



## Really Really Reductive Georgia Horgan

Scott Rogers' practice considers the possibilities, processes, and outcomes of disappearance. The tensions of entropy and disintegration play an integral role, as research is broken down, metabolized, and re-presented as something changed, fragmented and transitory. However, what becomes visible is the element of irony inherent in disappearance – whether it is the inevitability of degeneration despite our best efforts to preserve, or the futility of its completion, as 'nothing' is a paradoxical and inconceivable concept.<sup>1</sup>

The interplay between disappearance and contradiction draws a parallel to perhaps one of the most enigmatic and evasive artworks of the last fifty years, Lee Lozano's *Drop Out Piece*. In 1972 at the height of her career as a painter, having shown at multiple important galleries around New York, Lozano decided to sever all ties with the art world, and disappeared completely. She left the city, moved in with her parents in Texas, and nobody ever heard from her again.

Her gesture was part of a larger dialogue surrounding disappearance as a political strategy in contemporary art at the time. The 'dematerialization of the art object', a phrase coined by Lucy Lippard in her 1967 essay of the same title, described a refusal of the sacrosanct, masculine totems of modernism in favour of materials that were cheap, lightweight and ephemeral. 'Dematerialization' aimed to pry the artwork away from the slobbering jaws of the art market, and re-imagine its radical potential. In affect, it sought much of the same purity as late modernism, but in concept rather than form: the dematerialization of the art object manifested a canvas so blank, or a room so white and empty, that it represented 'modernism's nervous breakdown'<sup>2</sup> as opposed to its complete denial.

Of the multiple strategies that were employed by artists, Lozano's *Drop Out Piece* was perhaps the most uncompromising. 'Ultra-

conceptual'<sup>3</sup> artwork or 'life-as-art'<sup>4</sup> was becoming increasingly pervasive amongst the avant-garde New York scene. In spite of many artists' loyalty to the dematerialization project, they were "often pumping up their own art-world images in the process"<sup>5</sup> conveniently filling the shoes of the heroic modernist. Lozano, however, initiated the complete renunciation of her own ego: "I will not seek fame, publicity or *suckcess*."<sup>6</sup>

*Drop Out Piece* was indicative of Lozano's melancholy self-effacement up to her departure. Her painting practice, albeit frenetically prolific, was coarse, mocking and grey, with crudely scribbled penises, breasts, vaginas, religious symbols and tools. An archetypal untitled work by Lozano from 1962 depicts a roughly drawn, bright red, gaping, grinning face with a flat penis penetrating the eye socket; the image is naïve, abrupt, violent, dark and funny.

In the late sixties, Lozano became increasingly disenfranchised by painting. She devised works that she called her 'Life-Art' pieces, which followed the anarchic, aggressive humour of her earlier work. However, many of the later iterations of her 'Life-Art' pieces expressed her frustration and alienation from the art world. At a lecture at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 1971, she said, "If there's no love left in the art world, I don't want anything to do with it!"<sup>7</sup>

After she was evicted from her studio that year, she gradually began to ignore all invitations to art events and stopped speaking to her artist friends. One of her final gestures before her complete disappearance was her insistence to her gallerist Rolf Ricke that she was referred to as 'Lee Free'. Later she decided to shorten her name even further, to 'E' for energy.<sup>8</sup>

When physics dictates that energy is neither produced nor created, only transferred in a closed circuit, what is the nature of disappearance as a process or possibility? *Endling* considers this question across several references. The term 'endling' refers to the last surviving specimen of a species; the

carved sculpture in the gallery is a replica of decoys that were used to hunt Passenger Pigeons, an extinct breed of bird from North America. The world's last Passenger Pigeon, an endling called Martha, died in captivity in 1914. In the early nineteenth century, the Passenger Pigeon was the most numerous bird species on the planet.

The Passenger Pigeons' extinction was primarily caused by humans; they were hunted in their billions to feed slaves, pigs, and European settlers. The pigeons' implication in colonialism is what connects them to the other protagonists of Scott's research, the South Fore tribe of Papua New Guinea. The South Fore people became of particular interest to anthropologists and medics due to the tribe's protracted epidemic of 'kuru', or 'Laughing Sickness'. 'Kuru' was a degenerative neurological disorder that earned its name from the Fore people's word to quiver or shake, as tremors and spasms were a classic symptom. Its nickname, 'Laughing Sickness', refers to the pathological bursts of laughter also associated with the disorder.

The disease was contracted through the consumption of matter from the human brain and spinal column. The South Fore people practiced funerary cannibalism, literally imbibing the flesh of the dead, so their life force could be incorporated back into the community. It was an impulse for preservation that encouraged the tribe to consume their dead, but it was this act that led to their culture's near demise. European colonials eradicated many of The South Fore people's customs through the demonization of their cannibalism; ending the practice saved them from kuru, but also helped justify their domination and Christianisation. Their physical deaths themselves were a grotesque paradox, as they laughed hysterically whilst their neurological systems degenerated.

Laughing whilst you die is a contradiction in terms; being a whole lot of something then absolutely nothing holds an abrupt, cruel irony; to take absolutely everything away, even yourself, and become one of the most

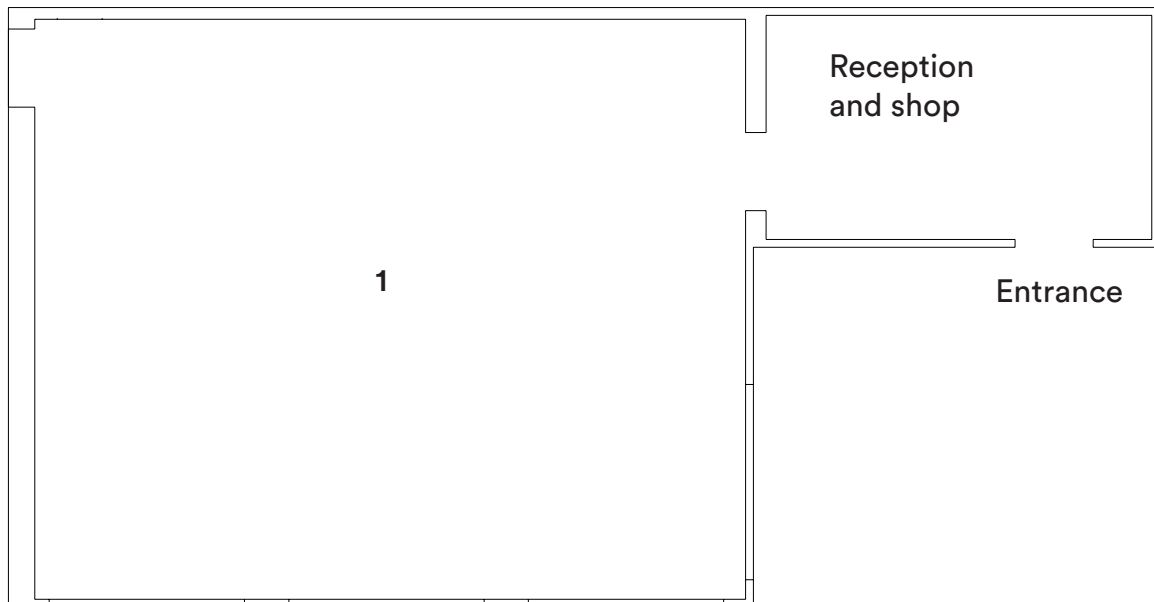
influential and mystical<sup>9</sup> artists ever, is a mind-fuck like that flat cock piercing the brow of Lee Lozano's crude picture. Is disappearance even possible? Art is eating itself. The face splits into a wide, red grin.

#### Endnotes

1. Francis McKee discusses the paradox of the idea of nothingness in his essay 'Zero to Nothing in No Time', URL: <http://francismckee.net/zero.htm> (04/09/2015)
2. This is a phrase that I have returned to several times whilst writing the series of texts for Satellites Programme. It is Mel Ramsden's description of Conceptual Art, in 'The Trouble with Writing' in *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art and Language*, ed. Charles Harrison (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), p.27
3. Lucy Lippard, 'Escape Attempts' in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, eds. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles, CA: MOCA, 1995), p.17
4. "The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct as possible" – Allan Kaprow, in reference to his *Happenings*. Kirstie Beavan, 'Performance Art 101: The Happening 101', URL: <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/performance-art-101-happening-allan-kaprow> (06/09/2015)
5. Lucy Lippard, 'Cerebellion and Cosmic Storms', in *Lee Lozano*, ed. Iris Müller-Westermann (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), p.195
6. Iris Müller-Westermann, 'Introduction', in *Lee Lozano*, ed. Iris Müller-Westermann (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), p.48
7. David Askevold, 'David Askevold on Lee Lozano', in *Lee Lozano: Win First Don't Last Win Last Don't Care*, ed. Adam Szymczyk (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 2006), p.178
8. Müller-Westermann, 'Introduction', pp.48—9
9. Sol LeWitt wrote, "Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach". This is was from 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', *Artforum* (Summer 1967), pp. 79—83

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**Georgia Horgan** lives and works in Glasgow and graduated from the Glasgow School of Art in 2013. Recent exhibitions include: *Machine Room*, Collective, Edinburgh, 2015 and *Early Modern Administrative Machine*, WASPS Studios, Dundee, 2014. Georgia was an Associate Producer at Collective and has been commissioned to develop texts for each of the solo presentations as part of Satellites Programme 2015.



## 1. *Endling*, 2015

Frosted vinyl windows; sculpture made with steel stand, lime wood, gesso, acrylic paint, false eyes (resin); the wall text uses quotations from the second edition of *Kuru Sorcery: Disease and Danger in the New Guinea Highlands* by Shirley Lindenbaum (1979/2013); vinyl lettering set in Doves Type.

The artist would like to thank Sarah Rose, Richard Frater, Daphne, Michael and Natalie Rogers, Isla Leaver-Yap, Rebecca Wilcox, Sam Forsythe, Billy Teasdale, Sue Déry, and especially Shirley Lindenbaum for her assistance and generosity with this project.

**Shirley Lindenbaum** is a cultural anthropologist and one of the key researchers on the disease 'kuru'. She is Professor Emerita of Anthropology, CUNY-Graduate Center in New York. From 1961 to 2018 she conducted research in Papua New Guinea. Her areas of research also include the study of cholera in Bangladesh, and AIDS in the United States.

*Endling* is part of Satellites Programme, Collective's development programme for emergent artists based in Scotland. Satellites Programme 2015 includes four solo-presentations by selected artists Thomas Aitchison, France-Lise McGurn, Scott Rogers and Hardeep Pandhal and one project by Associate Producer, Georgia Horgan. The programme has been developed to facilitate artists at this pivotal point in their career through peer review, professional development, mentoring, exhibitions and events.

**Collective** is a contemporary visual art organisation that delivers an exciting and ambitious programme of new exhibitions, commissions and off-site projects. Collective produces major new work by Scotland based and international artists who are at a pivotal stage in their development.

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