

THE
PRINCE
OF
HOMBURG

PATRICK STAFF

Exhibition Notes | Sat 22 June — Sun 1 September 2019

DCA²⁰
Dundee Contemporary Arts

152 Nethergate
Dundee, DD1 4DY
01382 432444
Scottish Charity No. SCO26631

Open daily 10:00-18:00
Open late Thu 20:00
Admission free
www.dca.org.uk

INTRODUCTION

This exhibition by British artist Patrick Staff debuts a major video installation and series of sculptural and print works reinterpreting 19th century German writer Heinrich von Kleist's play *The Prince of Homburg*.

Opening with a disoriented Prince sleepwalking in royal gardens, the original play, written in 1810, develops by swift degrees into a personal nightmare that draws together questions about the limits of state control versus individual freedom.

While often interpreted as an assertion for the might of authority, many consider Kleist's work to be a passionate defence of free will. Kleist's death by joint suicide with his close friend Henriette Vogel in 1811 contributed to an ongoing fascination with this complex play that continues today. In Kleist's imagined world, reality is continually contested: it is a decidedly uncertain play, where one thing happens only to be immediately contradicted or countered by newly unfolding events.

In their new body of work, Staff reconfigures the play to focus on the symbol of the exhausted, sleepwalking figure as political dissident. Presented across the galleries as a video installation with accompanying sculptural and print works, the exhibition considers cycles of violence, desire and repression that are embedded in contemporary cultural and political crises. Through a range of mediums, Staff explores dream-like transgressions of law and order and the fraught spaces where queer desires manifest.

Using unconventional filmic structures and experimental techniques, Staff's video cuts together a narration of Kleist's play with interviews, conversation, found footage, hand-painted animation and song. In a series of fragmented 'daytime' sequences, a range of artists, writers and performers reflect on contemporary queer and trans identity and its proximity to desire and violence. Intercut with flashes of the sun and sky, city streets and text, subjects include Macy Rodman, Debra Soshoux, Che Gossett and Sarah Schulman.

We hear Rodman speak about her song *Lazy Girl* which details experiences of exhaustion as a trans woman transitioning and using hormone therapy; Soshoux recounts a memory of being asked to offer up a definition of 'the law' whilst serving in the US Navy, as well as talking through the power of feelings in relation to our bodies and conceptions of gender; Gossett calls for an intersectional abolishment of the prison system and contemporary modes of incarceration, speaking specifically about how ideas of guilt, shame and desire are weaponised by dominant power structures to enact violence on marginalised and often queer bodies; and Schulman speaks on the political power of death, especially in relation to how we might construct productive, political funerals to fight for the living whilst honouring the dead.

Each of these segments is punctuated by 'night-time' diversions, narrated by

genderqueer writer Johanna Hedva in the dual role of both narrator and Prince. Loosely following the structure of Kleist's play, the sleepwalking Prince struggles with his place within a highly politicised military regime whilst the unconscious invades his flesh and bone. In half-remembered dream images, the narrative unfolds through flashes of nocturnal gardens, high visibility reflective clothing, neon signs, roving livestock and a lugubrious ballad.

Much like Kleist's original play, Staff has crafted a space in this new work where nothing is stable or fixed: any sense of linear narrative or other grounding structural devices are punctured and collide throughout with abrupt flashes of psychedelic uncertainty and unease.

Flanking the film work and running throughout the spaces, Staff has installed a sculpture resembling the type of decorative, defensive architecture that surrounds many colonial and royal properties. Protruding from the walls of the gallery above head height; objects, lights, fabrics and furniture are impaled and discarded on its teeth.

Also on display are a series of new, large scale hand-processed photogram prints, capturing images, symbols and objects from *The Prince of Homburg* that have been developed in complete darkness. A photogram is an image made without a camera by placing objects directly onto the surface of a light-sensitive material. Then, through exposure to flashes of coloured light, items such as a lost glove, knives, blades, and chains reveal themselves.

Through their varied, interdisciplinary and often collaborative practice comprising video installation, performance, text and sculpture, Staff considers ideas of discipline, dissent, labour and the queer body. *The Prince of Homburg* is the product of several years' research and is the artist's most ambitious and large-scale project to date. Bringing together languages of film and live performance with sculptural and photographic works, Staff explores how history, technology, capitalism and the law have fundamentally transformed the social constitution of our bodies today.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Patrick Staff (b.1987, Bognor Regis) lives and works in London and Los Angeles. They have exhibited extensively, gaining significant recognition and awards for their work which is held in private and public collections internationally. Staff received their BA in Fine Art and Contemporary Critical Studies from Goldsmiths University of London in 2009. They completed the LUX Associate Artists Programme and studied Contemporary Dance at The Place in London, in 2011. Their work has been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2017); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2017); Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (2016); Serpentine Galleries (2015); Chisenhale Gallery (2015); Tate Liverpool (2014); Monte Vista Projects, Los Angeles (2012); Tate Modern (2012), and Whitstable Biennale (2012), among others.

GLOSSARY

Dissident: A person who opposes official policy, especially that of an authoritarian state.

Queer: A term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can also be a way of rejecting perceived norms within a LGBTQI community in relation to racism, misogyny, classism, and ableism.

Trans: An umbrella term to include people who identify as transgender, transexual, and other identities where a person does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. Used in contrast with cis or cisgender, which refers to someone whose self-identification aligns with their birth-assigned gender.

Intersectional: A term initially defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe the experiences of Black women in predominantly white spaces; intersectionality is a critical framework for analysing multiple overlapping identities, privileges and oppressions.

Dominant power: A culture's dominant narratives function as propaganda for the status quo. Changing or challenging dominant power structures means actively imagining, articulating and working towards alternative ways of relating to each other in order to create a more equitable future.

Capitalism: An economic system in which trade, industry, and profits are controlled by private companies, instead of by the people whose time and labour powers those companies.

Genderqueer: A term denoting or relating to a person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions. Genderqueer is included within the broader umbrella term Trans as defined above.

NEW PUBLICATION

A new chapbook had been published as part of the project. It features two newly commissioned experimental texts by writer and critical theorist Isabel Waidner, and artist, writer and performer Johanna Hedva.

Waidner's response to Staff's work takes the form of a new experimental essay-play that attempts to rethink resistance to power from a queer working class perspective. Hedva's text comprises an astrological reading given by Hedva to Staff on 7 May 2019 concerning the joint suicide of Heinrich von Kleist and Henriette Vogel on 21 November 1811.

These are available to read in the galleries and the Information Space as well as to purchase from DCA Shop, priced £4.00.

INFORMATION SPACE

Visit the Information Space next to the galleries to learn more about the exhibition. Here you will find a video interview with the artist, alongside a selection of books that relate to their practice. Below are further details of films and texts that have been influential to Staff.

WATCH LIST

Throw Away Your Books, Rally In The Streets

Dir. Shūji Terayama, 1971

For the Damaged Right Eye

Dir. Toshio Matsumoto, 1968

WR: Mysteries of the Organism

Dir. Dušan Makavejev, 1971

Soothing the Bruise

Dir. Betzy Bromberg, 1980

Café Müller

Dir. and choreographer: Pina Bausch, 1978. Original German television broadcast, 1985

L'homme atlantique

Dir: Marguerite Duras, 1981

Jubilee

Dir. Derek Jarman, 1978

READING LIST

The Prince of Homburg (Neil Bartlett edition), Heinrich von Kleist, 1810

Sleep Has His House, Anna Kavan, 1948

Proletarian Nights, Jacques Rancière, 1981

Cruel Optimism, Lauren Berlant, 2011

Oppression and Liberty, Simone Weil, 1955

On Being Human as Praxis, Sylvia Wynter, 2015

The Right to Maim, Jasbir Puar, 2017

On Hell, Johanna Hedva, 2018

I Can Make You Sleep, Paul McKenna, 2009

Empire of the Senseless, Kathy Acker, 1988

Queer Necropolitics, Jin Haritaworn (Ed.), Adi Kuntsman (Ed.) and Silvia Posocco (Ed.), 2014

We Are Made of Diamond Stuff, Isabel Waidner, 2019

Liberating the Canon: An Anthology of Innovative Literature, Isabel Waidner (Ed.), 2018

TALKS AND EVENTS

For more information visit
www.dca.org.uk

Meet the Artist

Fri 21 June, 18:30 – 19:00

Galleries

Free, but ticketed. Please book in advance

Join us to hear DCA's Head of Exhibitions Eoin Dara in conversation with Patrick Staff. They will be discussing the development of *The Prince of Homburg* and how this major new work relates to Staff's ongoing research and practice to date.

Exhibition Tours

Daily at 11:00 and 15:00

Free, drop-in

Meet at the gallery entrance

Interested in knowing more about the works on show? Then join our friendly Visitor Assistants for a guided tour of the works on display.

Senior Citizen Kane Gallery Tour and Workshop

Tue 9 July and Tue 13 August

10:30 – 12:30

Galleries and Create Space

Free, drop-in. Meet at DCA Box Office

Aged 60+? Join our Senior Citizen Kane Gallery Tour and Workshop. We will explore the exhibition with one of our friendly Visitor Assistants, then there's the chance to take part in a creative workshop making work inspired by *The Prince of Homburg*. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be on hand to fuel your creativity and chat.

Echo + Harry Josephine Giles

Thu 11 July, 18:00 – 20:00

Gallery 2

Free, but ticketed. Please book in advance

Echo is an evening of multidisciplinary presentations in response to *The Prince of Homburg*.

A longstanding part of the exhibitions programme at DCA, Echo is designed to throw new light on the works displayed in our galleries by inviting other artistic voices into the building to respond to each show.

As part of this instalment, we have invited Orcadian writer and performer Harry Josephine Giles to respond to Staff's exhibition. Harry Josephine's work is about what it feels like to live under capitalism, and how to survive and resist in a violent world. Their process is activist: making performance is a way to explore politics; performing a way to intervene. They combine participatory performance and public feeling – to feel with audiences and resist together. To Harry Josephine, feelings are not a soft form of politics: they are hard, edgy, scary and potent.

Prior to Harry Josephine's response, there will be opportunities for other voices to present ideas. If you would like to share your creative response to the work on show, please submit a short proposal (no more than 300 words) to exhibitions@dca.org.uk by **Mon 8 July 2019**.

**In the Evening There is Feeling:
Reading Johanna Hedva**

Mon 15 July, 18:00 – 19:30

Create Space

Free, but ticketed. Please book in advance

In the Evening There is Feeling is DCA's Exhibitions reading group. It takes its name from Gertrude Stein's 1914 book *Tender Buttons* and focuses, in an informal and welcoming way, on feminist and queer texts from the worlds of art and literature.

This session will introduce and discuss some of the ideas contained within two key texts by Johanna Hedva, an artist and writer with whom Staff has collaborated in their new work *The Prince of Homburg*.

In *Sick Woman Theory* Hedva describes their own chronic, confounding illness and the impersonality of the Western medical industry, and suggests that the greatest enemy to capitalism is taking care of yourself and of others. In thinking around the possibilities of direct political action, *Sick Woman Theory* poses the question, "How do you throw a brick through the window of a bank if you can't get out of bed?"

The second text, *In Defense of De-Persons*, focuses more specifically on the American Psychological Association's diagnosis of depersonalisation disorder, or depersonalisation/derealisation syndrome, characterised by "experiences of unreality or detachment from one's mind, self, or body," and implicates the state as an agent of depersonalisation.

Digital copies of the texts will be available and emailed to participants upon booking a place. If you do not receive these please email exhibitions@dca.org.uk

Curator's Tour

Thu 1 August, 18:00 – 19:00

Galleries

Free, but ticketed. Please book in advance

Join our Head of Exhibitions, Eoin Dara, for a guided tour through the gallery spaces where he'll be talking about working with Staff over the past 18 months to develop *The Prince of Homburg* for DCA's galleries.

**In the Evening There is Feeling:
Reading Isabel Waidner**

Mon 26 August

18:00 – 19:30

Create Space

Free, but ticketed. Please book in advance

This session will introduce and discuss some of the ideas contained within the new essay-play written by Isabel Waidner in response to Staff's new work in the galleries.

We will also be reading and discussing an excerpt from their latest novel *We Are Made Of Diamond Stuff*: an innovative and critically British novel, taking issue with the dream of national belonging. Set on the Isle of Wight, a small island off the south coast of England, it collides literary aesthetics with contemporary working class cultures and attitudes, works with themes of empire, embodiment and resistance, and interrogates autobiographical material

including the queer migrant experience.

“*We Are Made Of Diamond Stuff* evokes a topsy-turvy, highly animated world to explore a declining empire’s hopelessly fucked up inequities of class, race, queerness, and immigration status. At one point the narrator (who looks like Eleven from *Stranger Things* but who happens to be 36) blurts out, ‘Where’s reality, I want to change it.’ This is one of the saddest lines I’ve ever read, perfectly rearticulating the ‘no there there’ anxiety that Gertrude Stein attributed to modern life a century ago.” Dodie Bellamy

Digital copies of the texts will be available and emailed to participants upon booking a place. If you do not receive these please email exhibitions@dca.org.uk

Patrick Staff, Isabel Waidner and Eoin Dara in Conversation

Thu 29 August

18:00 – 19:00

Galleries

Free, but ticketed. Please book in advance

On the last week of the exhibition, join Staff, writer Isabel Waidner, and DCA’s Head of Exhibitions Eoin Dara in the galleries for an evening of readings and conversation. They will be talking about Staff’s exhibition *The Prince of Homburg* and the queerness and contemporary relevance of Heinrich von Kleist’s original 1821 play of the same name, as well as reading and discussing Waidner’s new text produced as part of the project.

ARTIST’S CHOICE SCREENING

Betzy Bromberg 16mm Shorts Programme

Tue 23 July, 19:00

Cinema

Standard Cinema pricing

Recommended age: 15 +

Petit Mal (18 mins, 1977), *Ciao Bella or Fuck Me Dead* (13 mins, 1978), *Soothing the Bruise* (21 mins, 1980).

One of the most important voices in contemporary avant-garde cinema, Betzy Bromberg has been making experimental film works since the 1970s, and we’re thrilled that Staff has selected three of her works for a special evening of 16mm screenings in our cinema as part of the public programme for *The Prince of Homburg*.

Bromberg’s work in the Hollywood industry of optical effects (working on such films as *The Terminator* and *Tron*) allowed her to carry over advanced technical skills to her experimental work without detriment to its avant-garde concerns. Her works have nearly all been shot on 16mm, an analogue medium which Bromberg says she will work with until “either I’m done or it’s done,” in reference to the dominance of digital filmmaking in Hollywood.

The style of Bromberg’s experimental films is described as slowly evolving into the abstract, consciously free of the special effects of her industry career.

“Shot in and around New York City, Bromberg’s first 16mm film, *Petit Mal*,

is an invigorating, pissed-off assessment of women's physical and social confinement. Ostensibly a portrait of an artist friend, the film is driven by a conversational first-person voiceover describing feelings of being trapped by the expectations of others." Vera Brunner-Sung, Millennium Film Journal Vol. No. 67

"*Ciao Bella or Fuck Me Dead* is a summer-in-the-city travelogue that mixes vérité of Lower East Side bikers, Times Square topless dancers, and Coney Island crowds to achieve a highly charged atmosphere of manic exhibitionism and sexual raunch." J. Hoberman, Art Forum

"A subjective assault, *Soothing the Bruise* is a kind of found cinema, in which the pieces of existence, the pablum pop of Top 40 radio, mix effortlessly with thermonuclear techno-jargon, and stoned-out kids camping around in the buff co-exist in a restless uneasy mix with Times Square strip shows, neon effluvia, lugubrious country-western ballads and Bromberg's own visceral polemics." Brian Lambert, Twin Cities Reader

FOR YOUNGER VISITORS AND FAMILIES

Family Art Lab

Sat 27 July and Sat 17 August, 13:00 – 15:00, Create Space
Suitable for ages 5+

An adult must accompany children at all times. Free, no need to book but please arrive for the start time

Join our artists to explore the exhibition and to create your own art together. There's time to chat about what you see and we have two artists on hand to support your making. You'll be thinking about sleep, dreaming, how we transform ourselves in our dreams and also about furniture! Each session lasts two hours but you don't have to stay the whole time.

Create Space

Open daily unless being used for a workshop – **do phone ahead to check if you are making a special trip.** Free, drop-in. An adult must accompany children at all times.

DCA Create space is a wee gem; a comfortable, imaginative space right next to the gallery designed with our younger visitors and family groups in mind. You can have a go at DIY art activities, browse our excellent children's art library and make connections with the exhibition. Our new activities will be about sleep, dreaming and different states of mind but it's most importantly about you and your imagination! Take your artwork home, leave it on display or photograph and share it online using **#hellodca** or **#dcamakes**.

SUPPORT DCA

DCA's vision is to enrich people's lives through art, culture and creativity.

As a charity, we rely on income from a range of sources to fulfil this vision, including one-off donations. With your support, we are able to:

- Bring an ambitious and exciting programme of exhibitions, cinema and printmaking to audiences in Dundee, Scotland and beyond
- Support artists to make new work to be shown in our galleries
- Offer young people the chance to make and programme films
- Bring foreign language films to schoolchildren across Tayside
- Programme a range of creative workshops in our Print Studio at the lowest possible price
- Work with people with long-term health problems on creative activities

You can support us by making a donation online via our website or when you visit; or by adding a donation at checkout when buying tickets.

JUST ASK

Our friendly Visitor Assistants are always happy to help with your questions.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Keep up to date with the very latest from DCA by visiting **www.dca.org.uk** or by following us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Tweet us your thoughts on the exhibition using **#helloDCA**.

Interested to know what's coming up in DCA Galleries? Pick up one of our Exhibitions brochures to find out what's happening in our future programme.

UPCOMING EXHIBITION

Alberta Whittle: *How Flexible Can We Make the Mouth*

Sat 14 September - Sun 24 November
2019

This exhibition will mark Barbadian-Scottish artist Alberta Whittle's first major solo exhibition in a UK institution, drawing together new and recent artworks in film, sculpture, print, installation and performance to reflect on memory, trauma, weather and tensions between the land and sea.

Whittle's interdisciplinary practice aims to develop a visual, oral and textual language that questions accepted Western constructs of history and society. This work is undertaken with an acute understanding of how formal historical records produced by privileged white men have always sought to replace more ancient and informal ways of comprehending the past. The artist's wider research questions the authority of postcolonial power, its implications and its legacy.

Whittle's work often considers conditions in the afterlife of slavery where the racialised black body can become suspended in a state of stress that directly impacts upon physical, mental and emotional health. Within her work, the artist connects these ideas of black oppression with meditations on survival; championing the idea of healing as self-liberation. The title, *How Flexible Can We Make the Mouth*, refers to Whittle's current preoccupation with healing, writing, breath and orality.

