

**SAT 13 AUGUST –
SUN 9 OCTOBER 2011**

**BRANK &
HECKLE
RUTH
EWAN**

DCA

Dundee Contemporary Arts

Brank & Heckle

Destroy these vessels yet our principles you can never extinguish. They will live forever, and enter into other bodies to live and speak and act.

Edward Burrough, 1660

Ruth Ewan (b. Aberdeen, 1980) grew up in Fife, studied at Edinburgh College of Art and has been based in London since 2003. Her work involves collaboration and participation, working with historians, activists, school children, musicians or composers she organises and creates diverse project-based works in the form of drawings, events, printed matter and installation. The artist describes her work as 'conceptually led but socially realised', referencing both recent and distant progressive histories. Ewan is interested in viewing history not as a remote past but as alive, connected to the present, and loaded with ideas for a possible future. Many of Ewan's projects channel music, or creative individuals who have used their creative voice to express their desire for a fairer society.

Developed specifically for DCA, the *Brank & Heckle* exhibition brings together both past and new projects, pulling threads of local and international histories together which can be seen to create an antagonistic pattern of 'branks' and 'heckles'. A brank (or scold's bridle) is an instrument of torture used against women throughout the middle ages and beyond, referenced here by the artist as a metaphor for an oppressive silencer or muting force. The word 'heckle' is used as a liberating force of free speech as a counter balance to brank. The term 'heckle' originates from Dundee where the job of the 'heckler' in the jute mills was to tease out the knots from the flax. As the workforce of Dundee became increasingly politicised, the hecklers became the most vocally radical group of the workforce, developing a reputation for shouting out and disagreeing with the news of the day as it was read by fellow mill workers.

Gallery I - List of Works

Get Off Your Knees! (Jamie), 2006 / 2011

Wall painting

This is an enlarged version of a child's drawing produced in 2006. The drawing is an interpretation of a cartoon from the 1920s by J.F. Horrabin originally published in *The Plebs*, the magazine of The Plebs League, a progressive educational association that attempted to create a new learning system, free from capitalist and imperialist ideology, funded exclusively by workers' organisations. Issue 1 of *The Plebs* (the magazine of the League which ran in various guises from 1908 - 1970) set out their agenda, the crux of which was 'to permeate the Labour Movement in all its ramifications with the desire for human liberation'.

A Jukebox of People Trying to Change the World 2003 - ongoing

Rowe CD jukebox, approx 1,500 tracks

A CD jukebox, sitting between digital and analogue technologies which contains a growing collection of songs addressing a spectrum of social issues, some directly political in motive, some vaguely utopian and some chronicling specific historic events. The full archive (a selection of which can be heard here) currently contains over 2,200 tracks, with no more than two by the same artist. The tracks are ordered into over seventy categories such as feminism, land ownership, poverty, civil rights and ecology, offering a glimpse into the past, present and possible future of human opposition and idealism.

The World We Live In (Fred), 2008

Giclee print

The artist invited Fred, aged 7, to draw his vision of the world in white marker pen over an old dust jacket. The book, published in 1954 by Life Magazine depicts a now obsolete scientific representation of the world.

Gallery II – Background information

The history of progress is written in the blood of men and women who have dared to espouse an unpopular cause, as, for instance, the black man's right to his body, or woman's right to her soul.

Emma Goldman, 1908

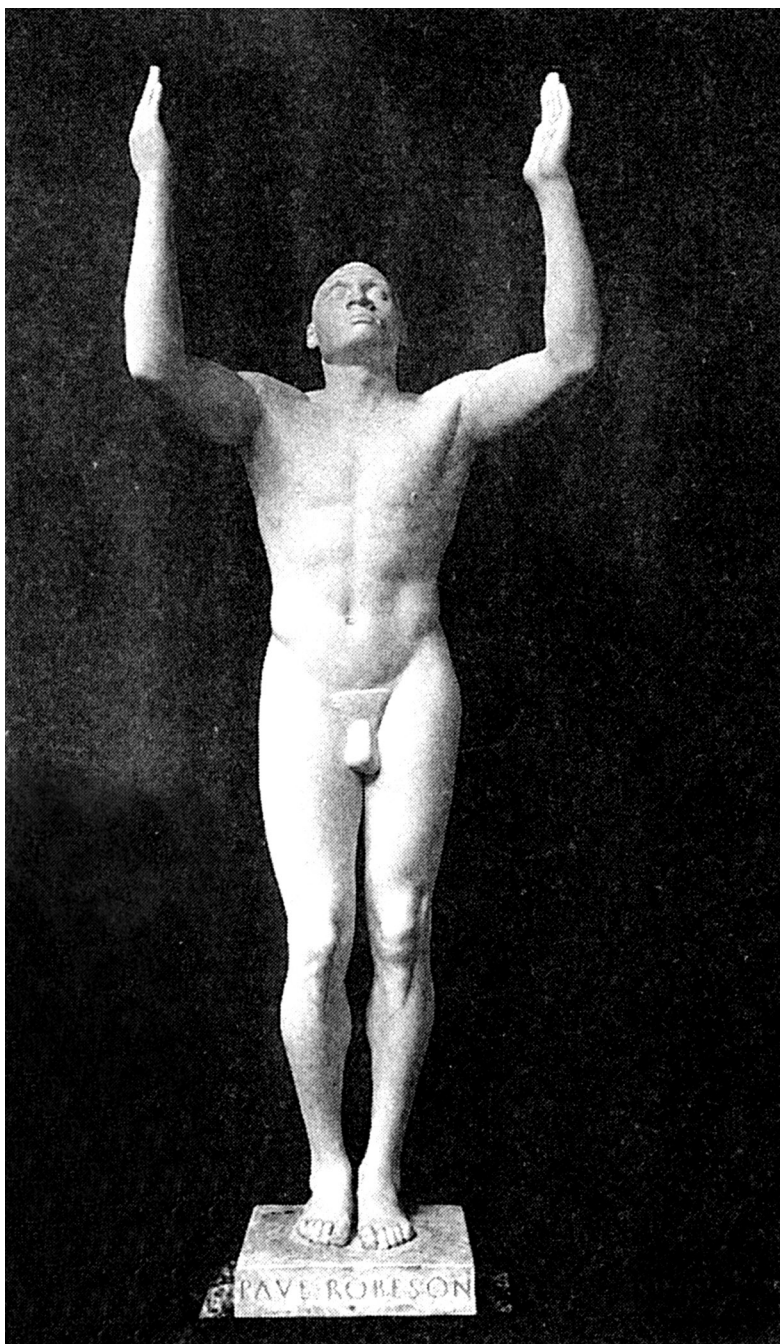
PAUL ROBESON (1898-1976)

Paul Robeson was a trained lawyer, actor, singer, athlete, writer, multi-linguist and activist. Having become one of the most renowned cultural figures of the early 20th century for his performances on stage and screen, he went on to challenge the cultural foundations of racism in America. At the height of his fame Robeson became a decidedly political artist, speaking out against fascism, racism and colonialism. During the 1940s Robeson's popularity grew in the Soviet Union, frequently travelling there to perform, he became a cultural bridge between the two countries. His relationship with the Soviet Union led to the removal of his passport by the US government and during the 1940s he went from being an all-American superstar to America's no. 1 dissident. His persecution by the US and UK governments led to an attempted erasure of Robeson from mainstream culture and history.

Throughout the Cold War, Robeson was black listed by popular entertainment channels such as NBC, whilst distribution companies dropped his films and recordings. He was also retrospectively struck off the roster of the successful American football team he had played for. During the 40s and 50s, Robeson and his family were prime targets of the Red Scare, and from then until close to his death in 1976 he was closely monitored by secret services on both sides of the Atlantic.

Following 30 years of investigation into Robeson's death, his son believes that his father was a target of the CIA's illegal post-war human research and mind control experiment known as MK-ULTRA. The programme included experiments on many unwitting subjects using LSD, radiological implants, hypnosis, subliminal persuasion, electroshock therapy and isolation techniques. It is unlikely that the true extent of the experiments will ever be known as the majority of files relating to MK-ULTRA were destroyed in 1973.

Opposite: *Negro Spiritual*, Antonio Salemme, 1924



Apotheosis (Paul), 2011

Plaster sculpture, archive material

A replica of 'Negro Spiritual', a life-size neo-classical style nude sculpture of Paul Robeson by Italian American artist Antonio Salemme which was created in 1924. In 1930, the Philadelphia Art Alliance asked Salemme to exhibit the sculpture, however they later censored the figure on the grounds of the subject's race and nudity. At the end of WWII the sculpture was later shipped to a foundry in France for casting in bronze, at which point it mysteriously disappeared. It has been suggested that the figure may have been purposefully destroyed as part of the political persecution of Robeson. The vitrines contain a selection of archive material relating to Robeson including extracts from the MI5 and CIA files held on the singer as well as various newspaper and magazine articles. Before the removal of his passport by US authorities, Robeson toured the UK extensively, performing in Dundee at the Caird Hall. A replica of Robeson's autograph from the performance in 1930 and a copy of the tour programme are enclosed.

Them That Plants Them is Soon Forgotten, 2010 / 2011

Crop of Paul Robeson heritage tomato plants

Originating from Siberia, 'Paul Robeson heirloom tomato seeds' were distributed internationally by Marina Danilenko who first brought them to the United States from Moscow in August 1992. It is not known who named the variety after Robeson, although it presumably stems from his popularity in the Soviet Union. The tomatoes will fruit and ripen over the course of the exhibition. Paul Robeson tomatoes are 'black' beefsteak tomatoes, dark red and green in colour, which grow up to 4-inches in diameter. They have been said to be 'very flavorful fruits.' The installation takes its title from the song Robeson became most famous for performing and recording; 'Ol' Man River' from the Broadway production and film *Showboat*.

The New Idealism, 2010

Collection of inner record sleeves

The work takes its title from a speech given by a young and optimistic Robeson whilst he was a law student at Rutgers College in 1918. The white record sleeves hint at the expunging of Robeson from cultural memory. The indentations of his recordings and the wear and tear on the sleeves have left a ghostly residue of the objects they once held.

Cone of Power (Margaret), 2010

Green baize fabric

The gigantic witch's hat, made by the artist in collaboration with her mother, is an attempt to reclaim the hat, turning it into a friendly object to be ingrained in the memory. The hat is made from green baize, traditionally a mimic of lawn used for games. The phrase 'the green baize door' refers to a dividing line in social class as green baize was often used as a covering on doors between servants and masters quarters. The origin of the typical witch's hat is unclear. One theory is that it was devised by the church who, throughout the European witchhunts, placed traditional 'steeple-crowned' hats on the heads of woman and men accused of witchcraft before they were burnt at the stake. Another theory says that pointed hats became fashionable in London but by the time the trend transferred to the country, they had gone out of favour, something only country folk would wear, making them an object of derision. As most of the women wearing the hats were herbalists or farmers they became associated with ways of nature, growing and harvesting herbs; the wise woman or witch.

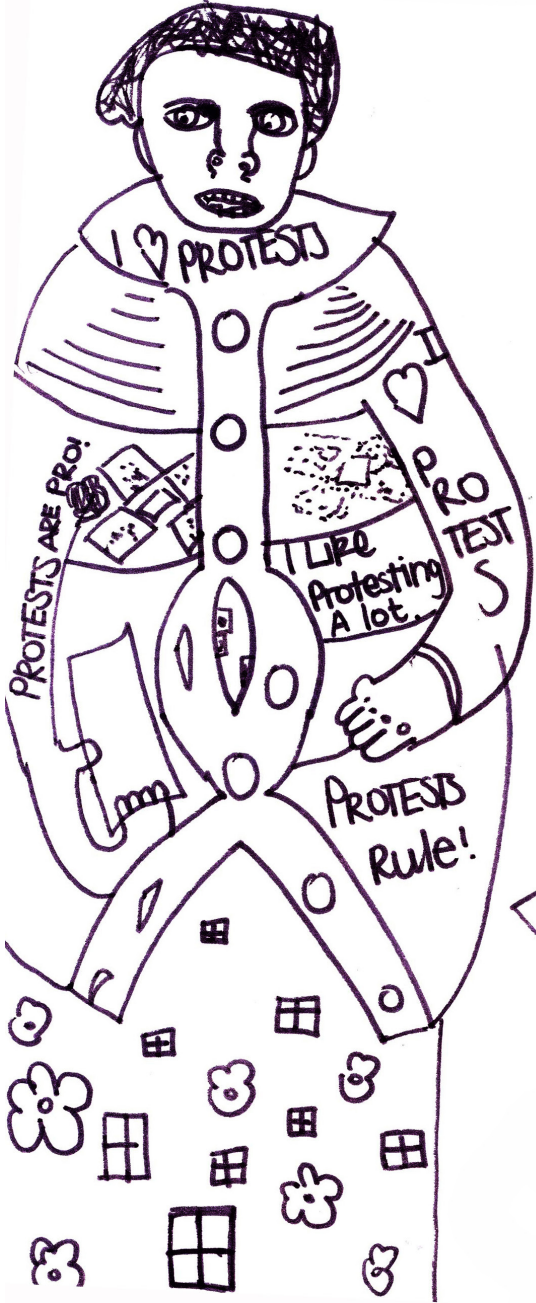
MARY BROOKSBANK (1897-1978)

I have never had any personal ambitions. I have but one: to make my contribution to helping destroy the Capitalist system... That is why I don't hold my tongue.

No Sae Lang Syne A Tale of This City, Mary Brooksbank, 1968

Poet, songwriter, musician and revolutionary Mary Brooksbank was born in Aberdeen and raised in Dundee. From the age of 12 she worked as a shifter in Dundee's Jute Mills, taking part in the 1912 Jute strike. Living in poverty, she lost her youngest brother to diphtheria and went on to see the deaths of many friends and family members in both world wars. From 1920 – 1933 Mary was an active member of the Communist Party, and as a consequence of her political actions on the streets of Dundee she received three prison sentences for sedition.

Following WWII Mary channelled much of her time towards creative work, writing songs, singing, poetry and playing the fiddle. Recording folk songs with Hamish Henderson passed onto her by fellow mill workers and family members she held an array of folk songs in her repertoire, some dating as far back as the Napoleonic wars. Her most famous and enduring song 'Oh, Dear Me' also known as 'The Jute Mill Song' has been recorded by a number of artists including Ewan MacColl and Karan Casey. Her own poetry and prose deals with the brutal reality of working class life in early 20th century Dundee and carries with it a love of literature, nature and a stark, unabashed desire for social justice, peace and equality.



← MARI!

Jist Ae Wee Woman (Ciaran), 2011

Giclee print

This print shows a double page from historian Siobhan Tolland's Ph.D. thesis on Mary Brooksbank. Siobhan's bound Ph.D., which was embellished by her young son, echoed the artist's previous work with defaced book jackets and images. A replica of the page was made which offers a glimpse into Siobhan's academic research in the social history of playground gender roles in Dundee, as well as bearing the marks of everyday life, a child's scribble and a coffee stain.

Mary (Lewis), 2011

Wall painting

The artist worked with first and second year pupils at Menzieshill High School in Dundee with DCA's Education Department and Siobhan Tolland to create a day of art projects referencing Dundee's radical history. A series of portraits of Mary Brooksbank were made, one of which was enlarged as a wall painting by the artist.

Half-loaf Necklace, 2011

Jute, bread, child mannequin

Many of the striking pupils of 1911 were involved in Dundee's jute mill strikes of 1912. The 1912 strike was started by young women and was reported to have had a distinctly playful and carnivalesque nature. One of the strike leaders, a young girl, wore a 'half-loaf' of bread around her neck and a green felt hat. As a young mill-worker, Mary Brooksbank also took part in the strike. Bread has a history as a metaphor for basic living necessities. The Russian Revolution of 1917 brought with it the ill-fated promise of 'peace, land and bread' while the people of Syria have waved bread during this year's demonstrations.

The Tree of Liberty (Stunted), 2011

Bonsai (common ash), ribbons

I could have been a giant said the bonsai tree, but someone bound my roots and held me down

lyrics from the song 'What's the Use of Wings?', Brian Bedford, 1997

In the late 18th Century, 'Friends of the People' societies which supported parliamentary reform and the French Revolution were formed across the UK. Across Scotland, people showed support for the Revolution by planting Liberty Trees at market crosses. A ritualistic and celebratory act was reported to have taken place in Dundee in 1793 upon the planting of a common ash at the market cross. A report appeared in a local newspaper:

They decorated the branches with ribbons, oranges, rolls and biscuits and christened it the "Tree of Liberty". The mob, wildly delirious, shouted "liberty, equality and fraternity", and danced around the tree like demons.

We Could Have Been Anything That We Wanted to Be, 2011

Decimal clock

This clock displays decimal time. The day is divided into ten periods rather than twenty-four. Midnight becomes ten o'clock, midday becomes five o'clock, each new hour contains one hundred minutes and each new minute contains one-hundred seconds.

On 5 October, 1793 the recently formed Republic of France abandoned the widely used Gregorian Calendar in favour of an entirely new model - The French Republican Calendar, carrying the ideals of the new republic directly into lives of every citizen. Decimal time was used in France for over two years. As the *ancien regime* was ripped up and reordered, time itself was dismantled.

Nae Sums 1911 – 2011

Plywood

A work utilising large letters made from reclaimed Dundee school desks. In 1911 young people across the UK went on strike from school, provoked by the caning of a pupil in Wales. Striking pupils in Dundee made clear demands, such as the need for a half day holiday and less homework. School windows were smashed across the city. Many children in Dundee were forced to work in the jute mills as well as go to school.

The Cutty Wren (Fred) 2011

Animation

The Cutty Wren is a song thought to date back to the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381. The song's narrative, which has innumerable variations on its lyrics, tells of four men on their way to hunt for the wren, also known as the 'king of birds.' It has become known as the first English protest song. In a pamphlet published in 1944, A.L. Lloyd, wrote:

The outbreak of lawlessness which followed the dislocation of town and country life, with its consequent labour troubles, filled the green woods with outlaws and rebels. It was about this time that people began singing a song called The Cutty Wren... Pretty certainly this was originally a magic song, a totem song, which about this time took a strong revolutionary meaning.

Ewan recorded a simple whistled version of the tune with musician David Coulter. She then explored the song's content with Fred, aged 10 who devised his own simple white board animated video in response, telling the story of Milder, Moulder, Festel and Fose, who hunt the wren, the symbol of absolute tyranny and power.

The artist and DCA would like to thank the following individuals and organisations

Siobhan Tolland

Fred Woodley Evans and Caroline Woodley

Dan Griffiths

Cove Park

Local History Centre, Dundee Central Library (Deirdre Sweeney, Eileen Moran, Kerrin Evans)

Fiona Sinclair, Nicole Stahl, McManus Art Gallery and Museum, Dundee

Iain Flett, Dundee City Archives

Susan Gillan, The Caird Hall, Dundee

Timothy Neat

Menzieshill High School

Pillars of Hercules

Meltdowns

The Cumbria Clock Company

All works courtesy the artist and Rob Tufnell, London

DCA

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Exhibition open

Tue - Sat 11:00 - 18:00

Sun 12:00 - 18:00, Thu until 20:00

Admission free. Charity No. SC026631

