

# UNDER WORLD DAVID AUSTEN

Exhibition Notes | Sat 23 March — Sun 9 June 2019

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**DCA**

Dundee Contemporary Arts

152 Nethergate  
Dundee, DD1 4DY

01382 432444

Scottish Charity No. SC026631

Open daily 10:00-18:00  
Open late Thu 20:00

Admission free

[www.dca.org.uk](http://www.dca.org.uk)

## INTRODUCTION

This exhibition offers up a new constellation of work by British artist David Austen, bringing the breadth of his artistic practice to Scotland for the first time.

Since the 1980s Austen has worked as a painter, sculptor, printmaker and filmmaker. The stylistically diverse elements of his work come together to reveal an often dark yet endearing vision of the world. The artworks in this exhibition, from oil paintings on heavy flax canvas and delicate watercolour works on paper to suspended sculptural objects and cinematic film projects, create an otherworldly space inhabited by Austen's strange and lovelorn characters.

With sources as varied as 19th century literature, poetry, ancient myth and film noir, the impetus of Austen's work often derives from his immediate surroundings. There is a liveliness and generosity in his approach to art-making, a delicacy of touch, a delight in the unexpected, and a disarmingly nuanced understanding of complex human emotions. Each object and artwork in this exhibition stands alone and speaks for itself yet simultaneously connects with others in the spaces, forming multiple narratives across the galleries.

Austen is a world-maker: here at DCA he has installed a bright lemon sun in Gallery 1 rising above a crowd of world-weary figures on the back wall, etched in charcoal 48 times over. In Gallery 2 we find a new moon above our heads, floating beyond trees, stars and an abstracted crystal city of coloured glass.

Further drawing us in to his imagination, the artist invites us into a *Room for The Drowned*. Within this space we are surrounded by a host of naked figures, held within a limbo-like plane of nothingness, each skilfully brought into being by a few brief watercolour brushstrokes. This cast of an unknown drama unfolding just beyond our reach stand singularly or cling to one another in small groups and couplings: all alone, together.

Elsewhere a large oil painting boldly proclaims the title of the exhibition, *Underworld*, whilst a lost soul on a canvas close by seemingly tumbles forward and toward this allegorical afterlife. The cinematic feel of Austen's bold sans-serif typeface alongside his sceneographic approach to exhibition making in a wider sense then neatly folds into his practice as a filmmaker.

In the darkest part of the galleries is a series of four short experimental films shot on 16mm: *Eros*, *The Gorgon's Dream*, *Burn the Witch on the Stairs* and *The story of my death as told to me by another*. These enigmatic works borrow traditional illusion techniques from early 20th century cinema and stylistically play with certain classic tropes associated with film noir. In the newest work made for the exhibition, *The story of my death as told to me by another*, we see the artist in minimal clown make up and nautical attire, lying still and floating in blank space,

much like the watercolour figures in the next room. As the camera draws closer to him we hear a voice-over script written by Austen's friend, novelist Rupert Thomson, inspired by a dream the writer had of the artist's inexplicable death.

Like his painting, drawing, and sculptural works, the films craft surreal new realms for us to step into and linger a while, before emerging back into reality.

Austen has described the exhibition as "...a journey. There are lanterns to light our way. We see naked ghosts, violent twisted trees, scraped road-side words, a ships-crew of men who have seen better days, abstracts from a burnt out retina, an ocean of stars, a city of fractured coloured glass. My work explores love and yearning, loss and grief, memory and dream and the unreliability of these things. I make my work with exactitude and attention; it's what the world deserves."

*Underworld* seeks to create a mythical space for us to journey through, punctuated by the artist's poetic musings on the known world, the imagined world, the bright celestial heights above us and the shadowy, unknowable depths below.

## **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

David Austen (b.1960 Harlow) is an artist based in London. A graduate of the Royal College of Art (1985), he has exhibited widely over the past 30 years.

Solo exhibitions include: *The Drowned*, Matt's Gallery, London (2018); *The stars above the ocean... the ocean beneath the stars*, David Totah Gallery, New York (2018); *Black Heart*, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Cogliandrino, Basilicata; *End of Love*, Modern Art Oxford (2010); and *My love, I have been digging up my own bones in the garden again*, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh (2009). His work has been featured in major international group projects and is held in collections such as Tate, British Council, Arts Council England and the Government Art Collection.

He is represented by Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh.

## **NEW PUBLICATION & PRINT EDITION**

A new book will be published as part of the project, featuring commissioned texts from poet and writer Lavinia Greenlaw, and writer and curator George Vasey. The book will be available in June. Please keep an eye on our website and social media channels for further information.

In addition, Austen has been working with DCA Print Studio to develop a new limited edition screen print which can be viewed in our Editions Space and is available to buy in DCA Shop.

## **INFORMATION SPACE**

Visit the Information Space next to the galleries to learn more about the exhibition. Here you will find a video interview with Austen, alongside a selection of books about, and chosen by, the artist in relation to his practice. Below and on the following page you will find expanded lists of films and books that have been influential to Austen over the years.

## **WATCH LIST**

*2046*, dir. Wong Kar-Wai, 2004

*Orphée*, dir. Jean Cocteau, 1950

*Fahrenheit 451*, dir. François Truffaut, 1966

*Piccadilly*, dir. E. A. Dupont, 1929

*Stalker*, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979

*Trapeze*, dir. Carol Reed, 1956

*L'Eclisse*, dir. Michelangelo Antonioni, 1962

*Red Desert*, dir. Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964

*L'Atalante*, dir. Jean Vigo, 1934

Anything by Pasolini

## READING LIST

*Hamlet*, William Shakespeare, circa 1599–1602

*Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid, 2017

*Falconer*, John Cheever, 1975

*Wise Blood*, Flannery O'Connor, 1949

*The Book of Strange New Things*, Michel Faber, 2014

*The Plague*, Albert Camus, 1947

*Treasure Island*, Robert Louis Stevenson, 1883

*The Severed Head*, Julia Kristeva, 2011

*Outer Dark*, Cormac McCarthy, 1968

*Lincoln in the Bardo*, George Saunders, 2017

*Fiskadoro*, Denis Johnson, 1985

*Poems*, Harold Pinter, 1968

*Love, Poetry*, Paul Eluard, 1929

*The Tears of Eros*, Georges Bataille, 1961

*Green Eggs and Ham*, Dr. Seuss, 1960

*The Insult*, Rupert Thomson, 1996

*The Sheltering Sky*, Paul Bowles, 1949

*Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys, 1966

*Burning the Days*, James Salter, 1997

*The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot, 1922

*Sundog*, Scott Walker, 2018

*Not I*, Samuel Beckett, 1972

*Froth on the Daydream*, Boris Vian, 1947

*The Return*, Hisham Matar, 2016

*The Drowned World*, J.G. Ballard, 1962

*Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Italo Calvino, 1988

*Metamorphoses*, Ovid, 8 AD

*The Grey Cloth*, Paul Scheerbart, 2001

*The Coral Island: A Tale of the Pacific Ocean*, R.M. Ballantyne, 1858

*The Singing Knives*, Frank Stanford, 1972

*Dhalgren*, Samuel R. Delany, 1974

*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera, 1984

*Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad, 1899

*Blood's a Rover*, James Ellroy, 2009

*Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, Michael Baxandall, 1972

*Fat City*, Leonard Gardner, 1969

*Night*, David Harsent, 2011

## TALKS AND EVENTS

For more information visit  
[www.dca.org.uk](http://www.dca.org.uk)

### Meet the Artist

Fri 22 March, 18:30 – 19:00  
Gallery 2

Join us to hear Beth Bate, Director of DCA, in conversation with David Austen. They will be discussing Austen's practice and this major new exhibition in our galleries at DCA.

### Exhibition Tours

Daily at 11:00 and 15:00  
Meet at the gallery entrance  
Free, drop-in

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

### Senior Citizen Kane Gallery Tour and Workshop

Tue 23 April and Tue 28 May  
10:30 – 12:30  
Galleries and Create Space  
Free, no need to book, just meet us at DCA Box Office to start

Aged 60+? Join 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 *Underworld*. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be on hand to fuel your creativity and chat.

### Lavinia Greenlaw: Night Swallowed My Hand in Front of My Face

Thu 4 April, 18:00 – 19:30  
Gallery 2  
Free, but booking essential

Join us for readings and a conversation with poet and novelist Lavinia Greenlaw where she'll be discussing her wider practice as well as some of the ideas at play within her new text commissioned in response to Austen's work.

Greenlaw's most recent books are the novel *In the City of Love's Sleep* and her sixth poetry collection, *The Built Moment*. She was the first artist-in-residence at London's Science Museum, and is interested in the shared imperatives of artists and scientists. She has received NESTA and Wellcome fellowships, and her immersive soundwork, *Audio Obscura*, won the 2011 Ted Hughes Award. In 2016, she wrote and directed a short film, *The Sea is an Edge and an Ending*, a study of the impact of dementia on our sense of time and place. She is Professor of Creative Writing at Royal Holloway. Her other work includes *Questions of Travel: William Morris in Iceland* and *The Importance of Music to Girls*. She has written for, among others, London Review of Books, New Yorker and Frieze.

### **Curator's Tour**

Thu 16 May, 18:00 – 19:00

Galleries

Free, but 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 the process of bringing together and presenting this new constellation of work by Austen for DCA's galleries.

### **In the Evening There is Feeling: Hélène Cixous & Lavinia Greenlaw**

Mon 20 May, 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/or queer texts from the worlds of art and literature. This session, set alongside Austen's exhibition across the galleries, will introduce and discuss some of the ideas contained within Hélène Cixous's seminal feminist text from 1975, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, as well as considering a newly commissioned text by poet and novelist Lavinia Greenlaw written as part of the exhibition.

In *The Laugh of the Medusa* Cixous advocates for new ways of thinking and writing about women and literature. The essay has become a staple of feminist criticism because of its incisive critique of patriarchal politics. It is also a call to arms, urging

women to reclaim their bodies and, by extension, their desires and identities through writing.

As part of the spring season at DCA, renowned British poet and novelist Lavinia Greenlaw has written a new text in response to David Austen's work considering ideas of visibility and invisibility. We will be using some of Cixous's ideas from 1975 to think about how we might consider Greenlaw's new work in 2019.

Digital copies of selected texts will be sent out to all participants upon booking a place.

If you do not receive these please email [exhibitions@dca.org.uk](mailto:exhibitions@dca.org.uk)

## ARTIST'S CHOICE SCREENING

David Austen has selected François Truffaut's 1966 film *Fahrenheit 451* to accompany his exhibition.

### **Fahrenheit 451**

Sun 19 May, 15:30

François Truffaut's grossly underrated adaptation of Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451* suffered from a fraught production. The director didn't speak English and clashed badly with his leading man, Oscar Werner. Yet the end result is still remarkably compelling. Ironically, in his defence of the written word, Truffaut and his cinematographer, Nicolas Roeg, produced some of the most memorable visuals of the director's career. These combine with the slightly stilted line delivery and detached performances to create a terrifyingly sterile future, in which all books are destroyed and the imagination is fettered by a constant barrage of televised information.

François Truffaut

UK / 1966 / 1h42m / 12A

## FOR YOUNGER VISITORS AND FAMILIES

### **Family Art Labs**

Sat 27 April and Sat 18 May,  
13:00 – 15:00

Create Space

Suitable for ages 5+. An adult must accompany children at all times.

Free, drop in activity

Join our artists to explore *Underworld*. We'll explore the exhibition and then there's time to chat about the works before making your own art in our Create Space.

Each session lasts two hours but you don't have to stay the whole time.

### **Create Your Own Otherworld**

Sun 2 June, 13:00 – 17:00

Create Space

No experience necessary, suitable for ages 16+.

Price: £25

Be inspired by Austen's *Underworld*. Spend an afternoon exploring a range of materials and techniques from our current exhibition. We will explore the exhibition and have a chat about some of the things that inspires Austen's lovelorn characters.

We will be exploring poetry, text, figurative drawing and Gouache paints to create your own characters, living in their own 'underworld' as the artist does. All materials included.

## 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 and imaginative space right next to the gallery designed for younger visitors and family groups to pop in and enjoy on a visit. You can have a go at DIY art activities, browse our excellent children's art library and make connections with the artists in the exhibitions. New activities will be all about materials, past and present, and memories. Take your artwork home, leave it on display or photograph and share it online using #hellodca or #dcamakes.

## 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](http://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

**Patrick Staff**

***The Prince of Homburg***

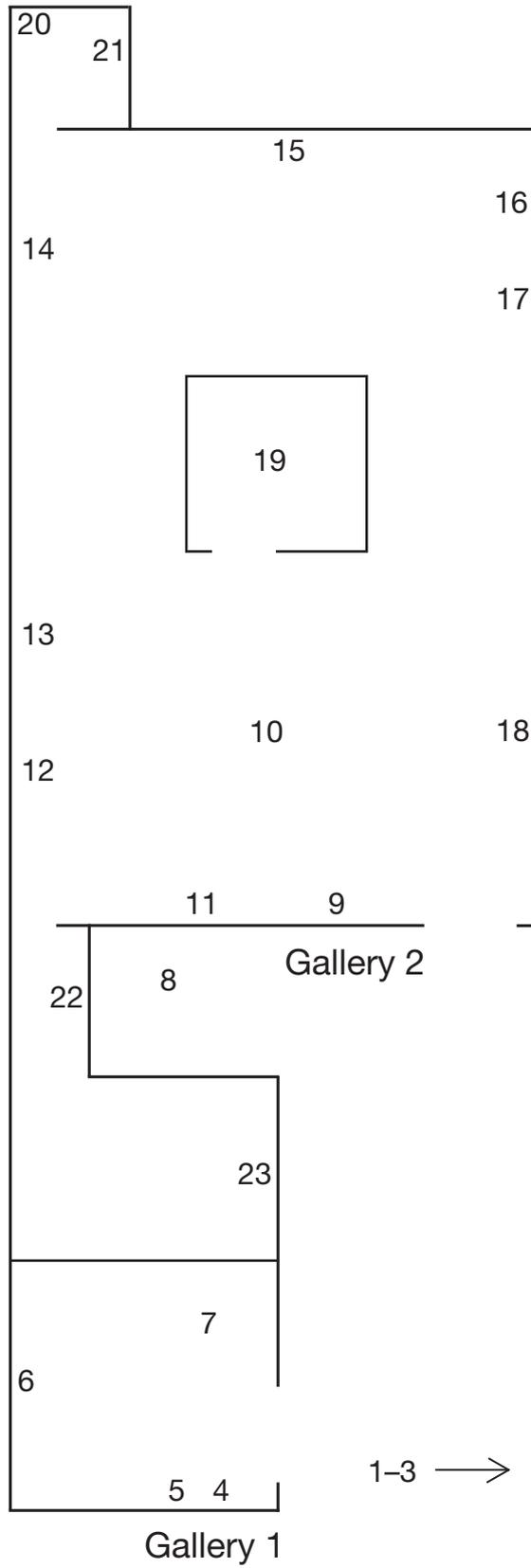
Sat 22 June – Sun 1 September

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

In their new work Staff will strip the play back to focus on the symbol of the exhausted, sleepwalking figure as a political dissident. Presented as film installation with accompanying sculptural and collage works across the galleries, the work will document cycles of exhaustion, desire and repression that are embedded in many contemporary cultural and political crises. In a collision of documentary and fictive filmmaking, Staff will consider ideas of alienation, labour and sickness in society whilst exploring fraught spaces where queer desire can elicit dream-like transgressions of law and order.

Staff's work has always tackled politically charged subject matter, blending both personal experiences with wider social issues. Their projects develop over a number of years, with influences and research developing from a broad range of disciplines to produce experimental film, video, installation and performance work.

# WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION



All works courtesy of the Artist and Ingleby Gallery unless otherwise stated.

1–3. *Light*, 2010

Steel mobiles, light bulbs

Courtesy the Artist, Ingleby Gallery and No Bad Collection, Fife

4. *Head*, 2015

Oil on flax canvas

5. *Clouds*, 2019

Oil on flax canvas

6. *The Heads*, 2016–19

Charcoal and oil on paper x 48

7. *Mobile (Yellow)*, 2019

Painted steel

8. *Mobile (Orange)*, 2016

Painted steel

9. *Black Heart*, 2015

Steel and enamel paint

10. *Mobile (White)*, 2017

Painted steel

11. *Ocean (black)*, 2019

Oil on flax canvas

Collection Jim and Susannah Adelson, Tulsa

12. *Medusa Tree*, 2019

Oil on flax canvas

13. *Flame Tree*, 2019

Oil on flax canvas

14. *Glass*, 2015

Oil on flax canvas

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

15. *The Light That Fell Upon Us Burned*, 2016

Gouache cut and pasted on paper x 32

16. *Underworld*, 2012

Oil on flax canvas

17. *The Swimmer*, 2012

Oil on flax canvas

18. *Crystal City*, 2016

Gouache on paper x 12

Private collection

19. *Room for The Drowned*

*The Drowned*, 2017–19

Watercolour on paper x 60

20. *The Voice*, 2016

Black pencil on paper

21. *Exit*, 1985

Pen and ink on paper

22. *Clown*, circa 1930s

Found photograph

23. *Film showreel*

All works 16mm transferred to video

Total running time 23 minutes 30 seconds

*Eros*, 2010–2019

6 minutes

*The Gorgon's Dream*, 2012

6 minutes

*Burn the Witch on the Stairs*, 2019

5 minutes 10 seconds

*The story of my death as told to me by another*, 2013–19

2 minutes 40 seconds

