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Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

# CONTROLLED EXPLOSION REANIMATING WWI CULTURAL HERITAGE





Type of output: Collection of Exhibitions DOUBLE WEIGHTED

*by* Christine Borland

Front cover image: Detail *The China Harvest* 2018, Mount Stuart (MS) *Photo credit: Keith Hunter* 

Left: Research Image, Invalid Feeder Cups MS collection

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### SUMMARY

*Controlled Explosion* was a combined body of practice-based research generated in two Scottish collections: Glasgow Museums and Mount Stuart, Bute where Borland focused on the intangible heritage of World War 1 (WW1) to investigate institutional care narratives.

#### The research aimed to:

- Test practice-based methods of public engagement in WW1 cultural heritage that challenged established institutional and professional traditions.
- Open up and activate invisible museum practices, particularly the conservation of WW1 artifacts.
- Use innovative sculptural methods to reinterpret WW1 narratives around institutional care and memorialisation to avoid the homogenisation of remembrance.

Borland's on-going research is situated in the field of cross-disciplinary artworks, which engage with institutional critique and use participatory methods, particularly in relation to museum collections (Lacy 2010, Dion 2005, Haacke 1971). Her career-long body of practice focuses on imaginative interrogation of institutional care and heritage narratives. Between 2016 and 2018 extended periods were spent as Artist in Residence in stores across both sites as a method to:

- Build meaningful relationships with collections staff, and WW1 objects in storage
- Engender nuanced site-specific sculptural responses

A series of participatory workshops, public events and visits to retrace provenance were subsequently developed. These sought to test out the resonance of objects and their associated procedures through experimental exchanges with experts and audiences. A range of traditional and non-traditional, archaic and contemporary methods/materials were employed during studio-based research.

The project culminated in two large-scale exhibitions: *to The Power of Twelve*, Bute and *I Say Nothing*, Glasgow. The latter was commissioned by 14/18 NOW – a programme of nationwide cultural projects, which included a book, conference and events engaged with by 35 million people. The research findings from both projects have been shared further through publications, documentary films, conference papers and lectures delivered by Borland and project partners.



Left: *The China Harvest* 2018, MS *Photo credit: Keith Hunter* 

### INTRODUCTION

*Controlled Explosion*: a combined body of practice-based research generated in Glasgow Museums [GM] and Mount Stuart [MS] collections. The title of the overall research project is taken from one of the key sculptural methodologies employed; working with the Belgian Bomb Disposal Squad, Dovo-Seedee in Flanders, in 'making safe' a mass collection of historical, ceramic objects through controlled explosion. The fragments were subsequently developed into sculptural works.

#### **Glasgow Museums**

Glasgow Museums comprises venues on 11 sites, several of these museums (Kelvingrove Museum & Art Galleries [KG] Riverside Museum, St Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art) exhibit limited WW1 artefacts. However, the majority of holdings - over two thousand objects designated with a WW1 provenance - are based at Glasgow Museums Resource Centre (GMRC), a purpose-built museum storage facility where the research and several public events took place. The site for the exhibited outcome of the research, the West Balcony at KG, was designated early in the project and the work developed with a site-specific focus. The title of the large-scale, sculptural outcome, *I Say Nothing*, came from an inventoried work which was found to be missing from the stores.

After exhibition from November 2018 – April 2019, the work became a permanent part of Glasgow Museums Collection.

*I Say Nothing* is a layered and nuanced response to Glasgow Museums historic collection. It is the result of an intense period of research, during which Borland made unexpected and thought-provoking connections between apparently unrelated objects, bringing out the human stories and surprising object biographies, and sometimes creating object narratives where they did not already exist.

Dr Jo Meacock, Curator of British Art at Glasgow Museums, extract from 'Making Connections: An introduction to *I Say Nothing*' catalogue.

Right: Detail *I Say Nothing* 2018, GM *Photo credit: Keith Hunter* 

Below: Exterior, Kelvingrove Museum & Art Galleries, Glasgow





#### **Mount Stuart**

Mount Stuart is a stately home on the Isle of Bute built in the Gothic Revival style in the late 19th Century. It is the seat of the Crichton-Stuart family - direct descendants of Scottish Monarchy dating to 1157. The Bute Collection of artworks, artefacts and a library of 2500 books is of national significance. The house is managed by the Mount Stuart Charitable Trust and has been open to the public since 1989, with a Contemporary Visual Arts Programme presenting work by Scottish and international artists running each year since 2001. Borland was invited to explore the House and collections to develop an artistic response to the use of the house as a Naval Hospital during WW1. Works were developed with a focus around 7 rooms, which functioned directly in the care of patients during this period e.g. the conservatory as Operating Theatre, dining room as Surgical Ward etc. The title of the exhibition to The Power of Twelve reflects the symbolic recurrence of the number 12 in major world religions and across traditions, mythology and superstition echoed in the eclectic architecture and décor of Mount Stuart.

"This body of work, interwoven with the Arts & Crafts splendor and historical collections of Mount Stuart, is a significant contribution to the art made to reflect on the war centenary.

Resolutely contemporary in its approach, it recalls elements of the past, of a near-forgotten history, evoking the men who were cared for here, who returned, alive but not unscathed, from the most terrible of wars."

Review of *to The Power of Twelve*, Jan Patience, The Scotsman, 24 July 2018.



Above: Exterior MS Bute

Right: *Moss Repository* 2018, MS *Photo credit: Keith Hunter* 



# TIMELINE

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50	20

October 2016 – October 2017 Research residency at GM & GMRC Photo credit: Glasgow Museums October 2016 – November 2017 3 artists tours of WW1 Collections at GMRC Photo credit: Glasgow Museums

2016 -2017





*April 2017 – April 2018* Research residency at MS *Photo credit: Christine Borland* 

2017 -2018



5 October 2017 GMRC Symposium Doubtful Occasion (in collaboration with MS) Speakers; Christine Borland, Cat Auburn, Dr Bettina Bildhauer, Tamsin Dillon, Prof Chris Dorsett, Lyn Hagan, Birthe Jorgensen, Daisy Lafarge, Rachel Lowther, Dr Francis McKee, Dr Jo Meacock, Stephanie de Roemer Photo credit: Glasgow Museums

2017



2017 - 2018	2018	2018	2019 - 2020
<b>December 2017 – March 2018</b> Research trips to WW1 sites and museum collections in Germany, Flanders & Western Front Photo credit: Christine Borland	<b>23 April 2018</b> Photosculpture Event, KG Photo credit: Glasgow Museums	<b>23 June - 16 November 2018</b> Exhibition to The Power of Twelve, MS Photo credit: Keith Hunter	<b>25 October 2019 – 29 March 2020</b> <i>Common Care</i> programme of seminars, with Conservator Steph de Roemer KG & GMRC
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<b>19 March 2018</b> Exploding Feeder-cups with Dovo-Seedee, The Belgian Bomb disposal squad Flanders <i>Photo credit: Cat Auburn</i>	<i>11 October 2018</i> Opening Launch and artist-led tour <i>I Say Nothing</i> , KG <i>Photo credit: Keith Hunter</i>	<i>15-16 November 2018</i> Presentation with Conservator Steph de Roemer The Dutch Foundation for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (SBMK) summit, Amsterdam	

# **RESEARCH CHALLENGE**

The overarching research challenge was to build emotional and intellectual connection with the commemoration of WW1 through the reinterpretation and representation of the cultural heritage of two institutions. A framework was developed to work between Glasgow Museums and Mount Stuart, Bute using the model of an Artist in Residence. This structure enabled time for nuanced site-specific response and to build meaningful relationships between artist/researcher, collections staff, and objects in storage.

#### Aims

- To develop a body of work, which uncovers hidden and personal narratives of selected collection objects in storage, avoiding the homogenisation of remembrance and memorialisation.
- To open up invisible institutional practices (e.g. museum conservation) as well as objects, for imaginative engagement.
- To test innovative artistic methods of public engagement in WW1 cultural heritage, which go beyond established institutional, academic and professional traditions.

#### Objectives

- To develop relationships with both collections teams and the public, to enable critical and imaginative engagement with stored artefacts, particularly those revealed to be damaged, lost or missing from their inventoried positions.
- To devise artistic practice and public events around the activation and re-enactment of items retrieved from storage and the museum procedures surrounding this process.
- To engage unconventional artistic methods and experimental exchange to explore duality in notions of institutional care and conservation of both bodies and objects.

# CONTEXT

The research based in collections and archives, is situated in the field of cross-disciplinary artworks engaging in general institutional critique (Asher 1977, Haacke 1971, Young 2002) and utilising participatory methods (Lacy 2010, Dion 2005, Wilson 1992). Borland has been active in this field of artistic research for 30 years with major works including *The Dead Teach the Living*, 1997 for the Munster Sculpture Project, Germany and *The Monster's Monologue*, 1997; a 35mm slide show of images taken covertly using a 'spy camera' while pretending to draw the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century specimens in Montpellier's Musée et Conservatoire d'anatomie.

Consistent with Borland's career-long body of research and practice focusing on institutional care and the conservation of objects, artefacts that embodied the duality of institutional care/caring were a key focus of the *Controlled Explosion* inquiry. This is aligned with research arising from *Ethics of Care* (Gilligan 2001) and its' subsequent critical extension into Feminist Studies and practices of scientific knowledge (Harraway 2016, de la Bellacasa 2017, Lowenhaupt Tsing A 2017).

The emphasis on narratives of care and concern in a medical and nursing context is typical of Borland's broader practice which is based in negotiation with experts in institutions of science and medicine to make visible hidden narratives and often discredited practices within bio-medical research and practice. These works have often been made alongside researchers and practitioners in the cross-disciplinary field of Medical Humanities. Examples of works in this context range from *From Life* in 1994 through *Communication Suite* an exhibition of site - specific work, curated alongside the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Association for Medical Humanities in the Wolfson Medical School Building, University of Glasgow 2008.



Above: Detail *The Monster's Monologue*, 1997 *Photo credit: Christine Borland* 

Right: Detail *The Dead Teach the Living*, 1997 *Photo credit: Roman Mensing* 



Below left: Detail From Life, 1994 Photo credit: Simon Starling

Below right: Detail *Communication Suite*, 2008 *Photo credit: Christine Borland* 





## METHODS AND PROCESSES

#### Controlled Explosion: reanimating WW1 cultural heritage

A long-term structure for the development of the research (2016 – 2018) was established in line with achievement of aims;

- Embedded periods in archives and stores, exploring WW1 objects through photography and drawing and in dialogue with curators, conservators, and collections managers.
- A series of visits to museums throughout Germany to engage with reciprocal collections of WW1-related material culture.
- A series of guided visits to Flanders and related WW1 sites.
- A year spent on practice-based research and production in artist's studio and on site at GM & MS.

As a result of the embedded methodology, Borland identified several objects from stores, which resonated across both Glasgow Museums and Mount Stuart collections; linked by their function, material qualities or narrative associations.

These objects acquired an important performative focus and were the catalyst for the development of extended 'artists object biographies' which sat alongside their official records in the museum register;

1. A collection of boxes labelled as containing mascots, charms and amulets carried by soldiers during World War, which on opening were found to be empty. These un-located objects acted as the catalyst for conversation around care in collections both with collections staff and at the public symposium *Doubtful Occasion* (Oct 2017). These objects suggested overarching themes of absence and loss as well as of the superstitious powers invested in objects and materials, explored in *to The Power of Twelve*.



Right: Collection of boxes Photo credit: Glasgow Museums 2. Moss pillows & sample box of sphagnum moss present in Glasgow Museums Collections. Millions of wound dressings made from Sphagnum moss were used during World War I. Research into this unlikely antiseptic material was carried out at both sites; the woods around Mount Stuart are richly carpeted in such mosses, which are depicted in illustrations from the Botanical Tables, 1785 by Johann Sebastian Müller, commissioned by the 3rd Earl of Bute.

> Left: Moss pillow Photo credit: Glasgow Museums

Right: Botanical Tables, MS Collection Photo credit: Christine Borland





#### 3. Invalid Feeder Cup

Examples of white ceramic invalid feeder cups were present in both Mount Stuart and Glasgow Museums collections; through its' historical use in both invalid care and force-feeding of hunger-striking Suffragettes, this object embodied the duality of institutional care/caring. Engaging with relevant staff and Museum's Ethics committees, Borland negotiated the exchange of this artifact with a similar one from her own collection; engendering a dialogue around ethics, conservation and care. The GM feeder cup was taken to Flanders and 'made safe' through a controlled explosion, carried out by the Belgian Bomb Disposal Squad. At the same time, a large collection of 144 Feeder cups from the artists own collection, each of which had been isolated and photographed, were also exploded and the fragments subsequently treated as sculptural material developed for exhibition across both venues.





Above: Invalid Feeder Cup Photo credit: Glasgow Museums

Right: Invalid Feeder Cup Photo credit: Cat Auburn Below: Invalid Feeder Cup Photo credit: Cat Auburn

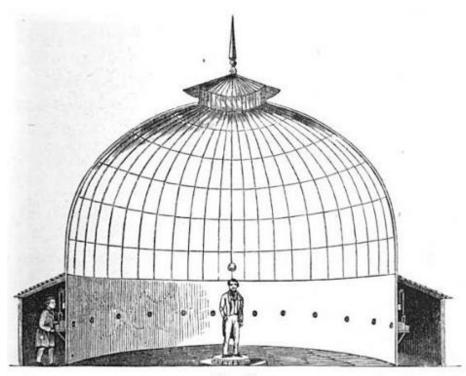




## *PhotoSculpture* Event, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum 23 April 2018

The *PhotoSculpture* event further exemplified innovative participatory methods developed around the performative associations of the Invalid Feeder Cup.

A scale reproduction was made of the photo-sculpture studio of François Willème that operated in Sedan, France, during the mid nineteenth century; a process which combined experimental photographic and sculptural methods to reproduce three-dimensional portraits. This method was identified as an appropriate, non-traditional means of representation, which incorporated a performance-based method. It was re-constructed and re-enacted in *PhotoSculpture*, an event at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum on 23 April 2018.



Right: Photo François Willème's photosculpture studio, rotunda serving as pose room (from Le Monde illustre, 31 December 1864); *Photo credit:* © Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF).



Twenty-four invited participants photographed models who were posed in the centre of the circular structure built in the central hall of Kelvingrove Museum in recreation of archival images which featured a feeder-cup being used in nursing and force-feeding scenarios.

In order to emphasise the dualities and complexities of these representations of 'care', models wore interchangeable 3D printed masks produced by scanning the faces of sculpture *Peace and War* by Paul Raphael Montford on Kelvin Way bridge, at the entrance to KG.



Right: Laser- scanning the sculpture Peace and War by Paul Raphael Montford on Kelvin Way bridge, entrance to KG Museum, Glasgow. *Photo credit: Christine Borland*.



Left: *PhotoSculpture* Event, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum *Photo credit: Glasgow Museums* 



Below: *PhotoSculpture* Event, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum *Photo credit: Glasgow Museums* 



Pages 70-78: PhotoSculpture event in the Centre Hall at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

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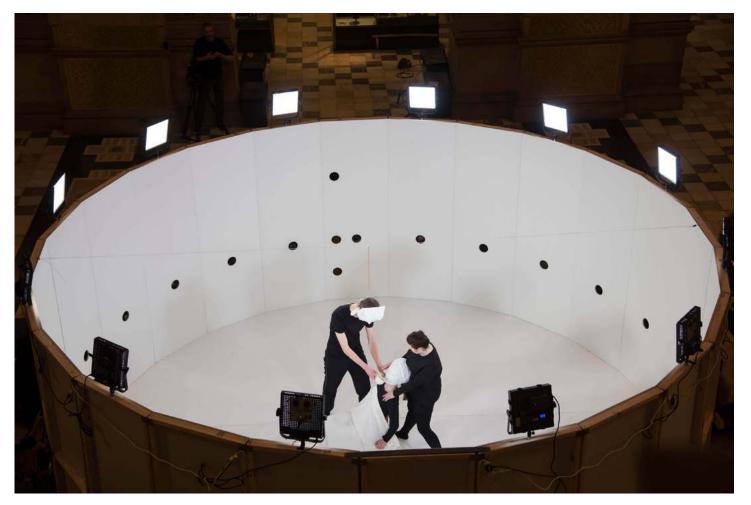






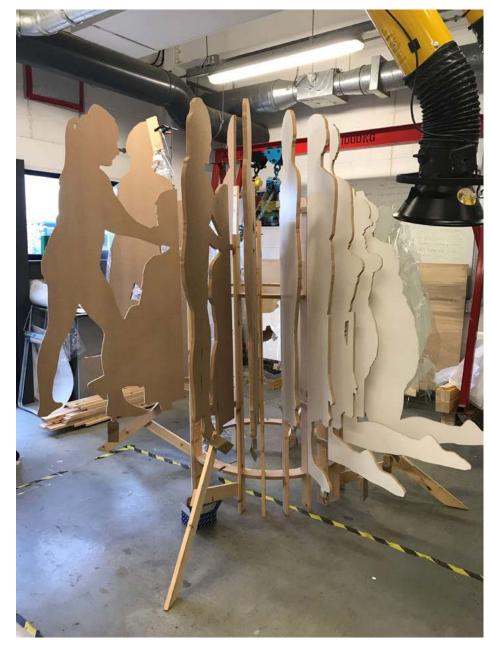
DOUETFUL OCCASION TO PHOTOSCULPTURE 71

Below: *PhotoSculpture* Event, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum *Photo credit: Glasgow Museums* 



#### **Studio-Based Practice**

The development of the project towards the finalized artwork was based on experiments in the studio with the information and images produced at the *PhotoSculpture* event. The photographs taken during the event were turned into silhouette 'cut-outs' of the figures posed within the photo-sculpture structure and tested in a variety of materials from plaster to papier mâché. The figures were distorted in form and scale, depending on their proximity to the camera that captured them.

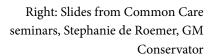


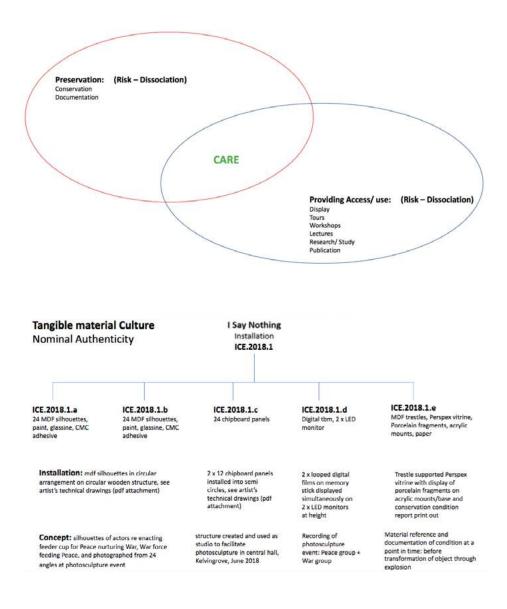
#### Common Care Seminar programme

Borland and GM conservator Stephanie de Roemer ran a series of 6 seminars at KG & GMRC from October 25, 2019 – end March 2020, entitled *Common Care* which explored themes of care and conservation around the de-install and storage of *I Say Nothing*. The programme was aimed at a small invited audience who had been engaged with the evolution of the project and participated in activities throughout. It aimed to;

- Raise awareness of the hidden activities and practices of artists, and conservators.
- Explore new avenues for broader community and audience engagement with museums through participatory practice in the documentation, research, revelation and preservation of shared cultural heritage and test these participatory methods in the communication and preservation of the art work '*I Say Nothing*'
- Explore the potential for artist-led research and practice to empower and engage individuals and communities in their cultural heritage.

Development of findings and *Common Care* Symposium planned for September 2020, for wider public dissemination of research, has been postponed due to COVID-19.





## DISSEMINATION

#### Controlled Explosion: reanimating WW1 cultural heritage

Over a two-year period, as part of the practice-based research process, a number of public events were organised;

- 3 artist-led tours of GMRC stores which publically explored artefacts selected from the WW1 Collections
- The symposium *Doubtful Occasion* enacted participatory research and shared research in progress; presentations by invited artists, curators, museum professionals and academics.
- The re-enacted PhotoSculpture event involved 24 participants and streamed live on Facebook (1.7k views) and Periscope (573 viewers)
- Public 'In Conversation' event between the artist, archivists and representatives of Mount Stuart Trust at Mount Stuart.
- Book Launch with readings and 'In Conversation' between the artist and Mount Stuart curator, Rothsay Library, Isle of Bute
- to the Power of Twelve Documentary Film, MS 10 mins Connolly/ Clark films
- A series of I Say Nothing short You-Tube Documentary Films, GM
- A 314 page hardback book; 14-18 NOW: Contemporary arts commissions for the First World War Centenary was published by Profile Editions; 28 March 2019. ISBN-10 : 1788161467 ISBN-13 : 978-1788161466

A number of further talks have been given to both general public and specialist groups; with representatives of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and separately to patrons of the Whitney Museum of American Art, a public talk at the KG launch, to Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop, and to the Friends of Glasgow Museums. A dedicated 126 page publication *I Say Nothing* containing 6 texts from invited authors, was published by Glasgow Museums, 11th October 2018; ISBN-10 : 1908638281 ISBN-13 : 978-1908638281

A dedicated 56 page publication *to The Power of Twelve* containing 2 texts from invited authors, was published by Glasgow Museums, 23rd August, 2018; ISBN 978-0-9567262-0-9

A 314 page hardback book; 14-18 NOW: Contemporary arts commissions for the First World War Centenary was published by Profile Editions; 28 March 2019.

The research and practice has been shared at several conferences and symposia to date, including a joint presentation between artist & conservator at The Dutch Foundation for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (SBMK) summit, Amsterdam, 15/16 November 2018, supported by Jonathan Ruffer, Gabo Trust and 14-18 NOW, and at Creative Methods in Military Studies, Military War and Security Research Group Symposium, Newcastle University.

On 9 February, GM curator Dr Jo Meacock gave a paper, 'Exploding Convention: *I Say Nothing*, a World War I centenary art commission' at the conference *Sculpture in Scotland*, organised by the Scottish Society for Art History in association with Art UK. The paper has been published in the SSAH's annual journal. MS curator Morven Gregor gave a presentation on the project at *Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience* Conference Newcastle University, 2019 (https://ssahistory. wordpress.com/current-journal/).



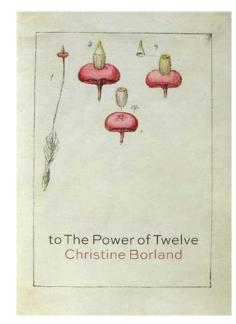


Above left: Screen shot from *to the Power of Twelve* Documentary Film, MS

Above right: Screen shot from a series of *I Say Nothing* Documentary Films, GM Below middle: *I Say Nothing* Catalogue

Below right: to The Power of Twelve Catalogue CHRISTINE BORLAND

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#### I Say Nothing Exhibition

An exhibition of large-scale sculptural works sited on the balcony of Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow.

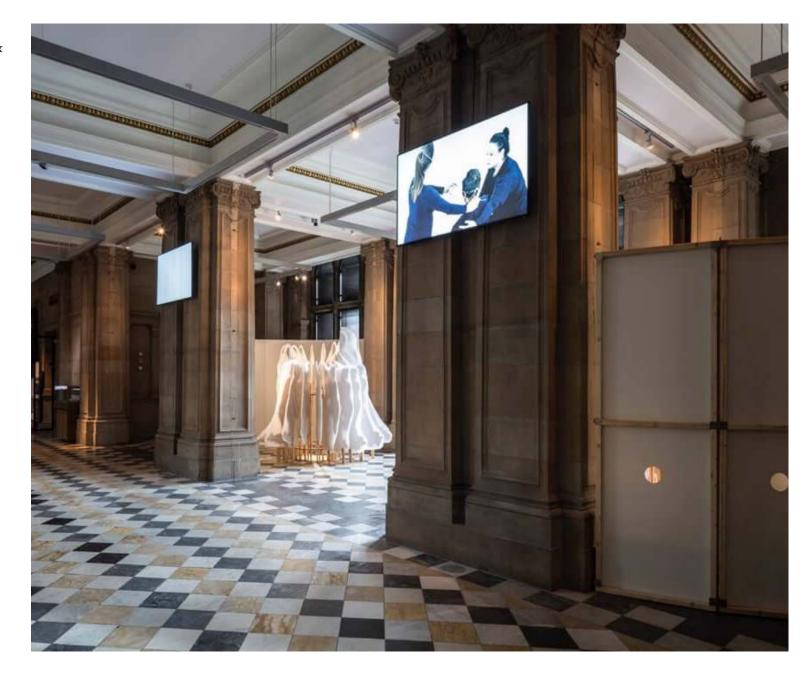
I Say Nothing is an installation in 6 parts;

- *I Say Nothing, (War)* 2018 A group of 24 MDF figures, produced from the *PhotoSculpture* data. These are painted white and covered with Glassine paper; the material used in the archival preservation of photographic negatives.
- *I Say Nothing, (Peace)* 2018 As above but figures painted black.
- *I Say Nothing, (PhotoSculpture Structure)* 2018 The figures are enclosed by the circular structure used in the *PhotoSculpture* event.
- *I Say Nothing, (Drone, War & Peace)* 2018
  2 x LED Displays, Digital Video, 12 minutes. Created from documentation of the *PhotoSculpture* event, filmed by drone.
- *I Say Nothing (Source Material)* 2018 Trestle table with Perspex cover enclosing fragmented invalid feedercup which is presented on acrylic mounts alongside conservator's condition report documenting the object prior to its' controlled explosion.

Right: Detail *I Say Nothing*, Balcony Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum, Glasgow *Photo credit: Keith Hunter* 



Right: Detail *I Say Nothing*, Balcony Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum, Glasgow *Photo credit: Keith Hunter* 



Below: *I Say Nothing*, Balcony Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum, Glasgow *Photo credit: Keith Hunter* 



*to The Power of Twelve* is a site specific installation of works throughout Mount Stuart with works corresponding to rooms and spaces used when the house was utilised as a Military Hospital during WW1. The project comprised seven works/bodies of work;

• to The Power of Twelve

444 hand blown clear glass spheres, section of silk army surplus parachute stuffed with dried sphagnum moss.

- *The China Harvest* Fragments of 144 ceramic feeder cups, blown up in controlled explosions.
- Wrong Right Hand

A series of collages developed from images contemporaneous with the period between 1914-18, which include a number of found historical and archive images and photographs from Mount Stuart and Glasgow Museums collections.

• Moss Depository

Suspended silk army surplus parachute filled with dried sphagnum moss.

• Witness Boards II

144 exploded double-sided digital prints of feeder cups, acrylic wall, aluminium frame, magnets.

• Floating Groins/Fastened Groins

Twelve 3-D sculptures, printed in BrassFill fillament and strung with nettle thread, larch wood base.

• The Velocity of Drops

Four sets of six framed digital photographic prints; *The Velocity of Drops, Sphagnum Moss Grove, Mount Stuart Empty Swimming Pool, Mount Stuart, Orchard, Mount Stuart, East Shore, Mount Stuart.* 

Below: Detail *The Velocity of Drops*, Sphagnum Moss Grove, 2018 Photo credit: Alan Dimmick



Right: *Moss Depository*, 2018 MS *Photo credit: Keith Hunter* 



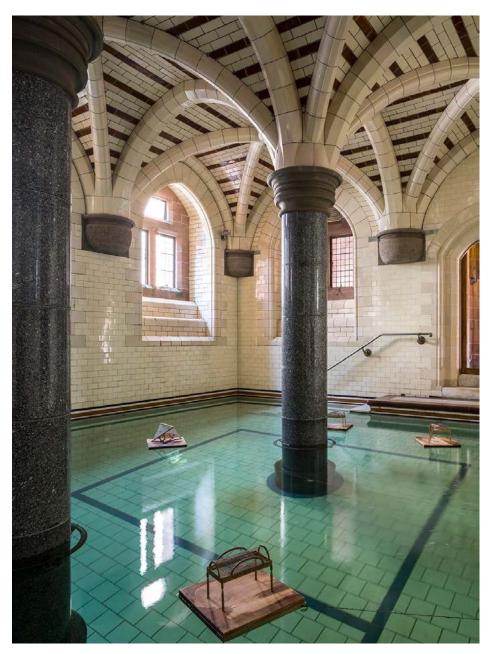


Right: Witness Boards II, 2018 MS Photo credit: Keith Hunter

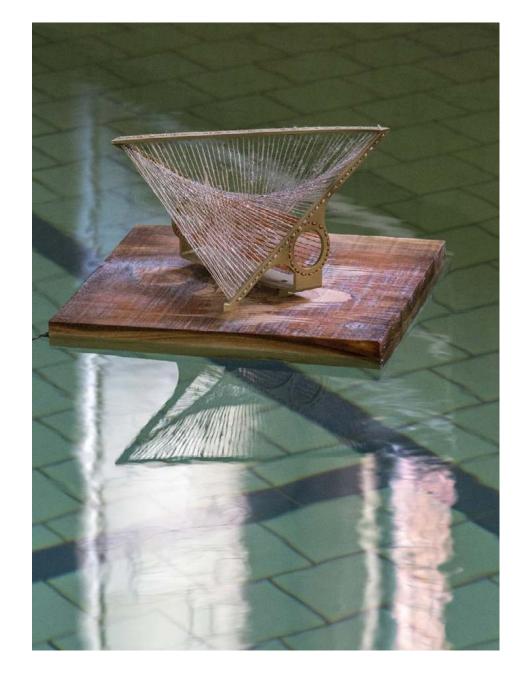
#### Links

- Appendix 14-18 NOW website (& film) https://www.1418now.org.uk/artists/christine-borland/
- Appendix 9 YouTube Documentary Parts 1 & 2 <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGiKx1PHpsE</u> <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLv9VFwU0ds</u>
- Appendix 2
  <u>https://www.patriciaflemingprojects.co.uk/single-post/2018/04/04/</u>
  <u>Christine-Borland</u>
- Appendix 3 Glasgow Life Tours
  <u>https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/event/1/special-interest-tours-scottish-artist-christine-borland</u>
- Appendix 4 review <u>https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/art-reviews-brushes-</u> <u>war-christine-borland-i-say-nothing-227212</u>
- Appendix 5 Review https://www.heraldscotland.com/arts\_ents/16978522.caring-forwounded-soldiers-and-force-feeding-suffragettes-two-sides-of-thefirst-world-war/

Right: Floating Groins, 2018 Photo credit: Keith Hunter



- Appendix 6 Documentary Film https://vimeo.com/282532690
- Appendix 7 Institutional Website <u>https://www.mountstuart.com/artist/christine-borland-to-the-power-of-twelve-2018</u>
- Appendix 8 AN interview with artist https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/qa-christine-borland/
- Appendix 9 Review <u>https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/art-review-christine-</u> <u>borland-power-twelve-mount-stuart-isle-bute-1427694</u>
- Appendix 10 Review <u>https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-herald-magazi</u> ne/20180714/282402695154923
- Appendix 11 Review <u>https://www.artlyst.com/reviews/christine-borland-moving-tribute-veterans-everywhere-clare-henry/</u>



Right: Detail Floating Groins, 2018 Photo credit: Keith Hunter

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Back cover image: to The Power of Twelve, 2018 MS Photo credit: Keith Hunter Northumbria University, Newcastle. Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory.



