



Watchtower, New Calton Burial Ground, interior prior to installation



Daughters of Decayed Tradesmen, installation shot, work in progress

EDINBURGH ART FESTIVAL

Christine Borland and Brody Condon
Daughters of Decayed Tradesmen

Watchtower, New Calton Burial Ground
off Regent Road, EH7 5BL

1 August – 1 September 2013
Mon–Sun, 10am–6pm

Biographies

Christine Borland lives and works in Kilcraggan, Argyll, Scotland. Recent solo exhibitions include *SimBodies & NoBodies*, Galeria Toni Tàpies, Barcelona, 2010; *Cast From Nature*, Glasgow Sculpture Studios, 2010 and Camden Arts Centre, London, 2011; *Divine Imperfect*, Pier Arts Centre, Orkney, 2012. Recent group exhibitions include, *Extraordinary Renditions*, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, 2013; *Pivot Points IV*, MOCA, Miami, USA; *Doppler Effect*, Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Switzerland, 2010. Work in private and public collections include Tate Gallery, London, The Arts Council of England, Wellcome Collection, Scottish National Galleries and The Hirschhorn Collection, Washington. She is BALTIC Professor, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Brody Condon lives and works in Berlin. Recent exhibitions and performances include: united states, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, 2012; *Level Five and Future Gestalt*, On Stellar Rays, New York, 2012; *Line Up (after Trisha)*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 2011; *Level Five*, Abandon Normal Devices Festival, Liverpool; *Without Sun*, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara and Museum of Modern Art, New York. Condon's work is represented in collections of Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles and Albright-Knox Museum, Buffalo. Participated in residencies at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in 2004 and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2001.

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Cover image: Watchtower, New Calton Burial Ground
photograph by Stuart Armitt

Christine Borland and Brody Condon *Daughters of Decayed Tradesmen*



Suspended through the three storeys of the derelict watchtower in New Calton Burial Ground, Christine Borland and Brody Condon's *Daughters of Decayed Tradesmen* is created from hundreds of Jacquard loom punchcards laced together to form a series of long looping arcs.

First invented in the eighteenth century, Jacquard weaving looms used thousands of perforated punchcards to translate complex designs and patterns into high quality fabrics. Used into the late twentieth century, Jacquard weaving with its very large-scale looms has now migrated away from Scotland and Britain in all but a few instances. As objects, the cards represent an important meeting point for Borland and Condon – for Borland the cards carry strong childhood memories of visiting her father at his work in an Ayrshire lace factory; for Condon, who first came to critical attention for a series of works which modified computer games, they are the foundation stones of modern day computer programming.



Edinburgh Trade Maidens photographed in 1940, photograph courtesy of Conventry of the Trades of Edinburgh

Encoded in the punchcards (after having been translated into binary code) are the oral histories from two of the last surviving alumnae of Edinburgh's Trades Maiden Hospital, an institution founded in 1704 by Edinburgh Trades (the society representing and controlling the interests of the artisan classes) to provide board and education for the daughters of 'decayed' tradesmen, and which finally closed in 1971 (although the foundation continues to exist as a grant-giving body).



Hologram made and painted by Mary Anne McLeod an Edinburgh Trade Maiden, 1854 photograph by Stuart Armit



Curator, Klaus Staubermann, with the Jacquard Loom, NMS, photograph by Stuart Armit

Borland and Condon's punchcards are accurately modelled on those used on a Jacquard Loom made in Newmilns in Ayrshire and now on display in the Technology and Industry Galleries of the National Museum of Scotland. In theory, the artists could weave new cloth on the museum's loom, the pattern visualising the encoded stories of the last surviving residents of the Trades Maiden Hospital. By coincidence, the first Edinburgh Trades Maiden Hospital originally stood adjacent to where the south east corner of the museum is now. In 1855 the hospital relocated to a new building in Rillbank and the building which housed them was demolished to make way for construction of the Royal Scottish Museum (now the National Museum of Scotland).

Borland and Condon are drawn to the multiplicity of meanings in the term 'decayed' (encompassing everything from unemployment to death), and the site chosen for their installation offers a resonant context for an extended reflection on decay and dereliction. The tower which houses their work belongs to a type of architecture which emerged in the early nineteenth century in an attempt to address a growing problem with body snatchers. Until the passing of the Anatomy Act in 1832 (which put an end to the lucrative market for bodies to be sold to Anatomy Schools), the building allowed the resident caretaker to watch over recently interred bodies.



New Calton Burial Ground belonged to the Society of Incorporated Trades of Calton, a plot of land given to them in compensation for the loss of a portion of their original burial ground (Old Calton) to make way for the building of Regent Road. The headstones proudly declare a lifetime dedicated to honing a particular skill 'upholsterer': 'jeweller': 'tanner', as well as the shifting status of individual generations; a builder whose son becomes a stockbroker, for example. In contemporary society, the relative seclusion of graveyards (and this is especially true of New Calton) means that while they might no longer attract bodysnatchers, they continue to play host to illicit activities. In the present day, the watchtower, last occupied by a caretaker and his family of ten in the 1930s, stands as the derelict witness to those who have chosen the graveyard precisely because they don't wish to be seen.



Lacing of punchcards, photograph courtesy the artists

Borland and Condon's installation draws on all these associations to remind us of the essential relationship between decay and a profoundly human urge to record and preserve. A beautifully unravelled scroll, their installation bears witness to an institution that no longer exists; it records a history that is yet to be written, using a technology evolved for weaving, once one of Scotland's most important industries, now all but defunct. The artists feel a profound connection to the performative action of making something by hand; and the way in which the crafted object (as much as any headstone) can stand as a testament to an individual's actions, as well as human existence itself. Their installation crafted from punchcards not only records the individual stories of the Trades Maidens alumnae; it celebrates the performance inherent in gathering and recording histories.

