

SIT-IN #1: RUTH EWAN



We Could Have Been Anything That We Wanted to Be and It's Not Too Late to Change

The Ignorant Art School

Five Sit-ins towards Creative Emancipation

Cooper Gallery, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee

Sit-in #1: Ruth Ewan

We Could Have Been Anything That We Wanted to Be and It's Not Too Late to Change

Preview: 2 September, 3–7pm

Exhibition: 3 September – 23 October 2021

Cooper Gallery's major five-chapter exhibition and event project *The Ignorant Art School: Five Sit-ins towards Creative Emancipation* strides forward this autumn with a timely new exhibition by internationally celebrated Scottish artist Ruth Ewan.

Bringing together artists, designers, educators, activists, cultural workers, students and other publics *The Ignorant Art School* questions what art education is and whom it serves. Enthused with revolutionary solidarity and organised as a collaborating collective *The Ignorant Art School* creatively co-constitutes radical blueprints for a socially transformative art education that opens towards an emancipated future.

Composed as five 'Sit-ins' *The Ignorant Art School* adopts the activist tactic of occupying institutional space as a critical and creative attitude and praxis to transform the Cooper Gallery into a laboratory for radical, ethical and accessible pedagogies for the many underscored by an economy of solidarity.

For *Sit-in #1*, launched in February 2021, Ruth Ewan stated *We Could Have Been Anything That We Wanted to Be and It's Not Too Late to Change*. Foregrounding the revolutionary potential of education and keeping step with the contemporary necessity for collective action, in collaboration with *The Ignorant Art School*, Ewan devised a two-month sequence of online gatherings which activated radical forms of collaborative learning and grassroots knowledge creation. Deploying imagination in all its rich emancipatory power and literally unsettling the time and duration of conventional learning, *Sit-in Curriculum #1* traversed multiple histories, alternative social structures and popular culture to empower a lucid pedagogy grounded in communities of care and resistance unconstrained by classroom hierarchies.

Indexed by Dundee's historical connection with the 1789 French Revolution, *We Could Have Been Anything That We Wanted to Be and It's Not Too Late to Change* brings together evocative manifestations of revolutionary time with the creative energy of dissent. Featuring a decimal clock especially installed on the public façade of Cooper Gallery, a virtual and physical perpetual Republican Calendar and an immersive installation *How Many Flowers Make the Spring?*, Ewan's exhibition offers us a transcendent moment resonating with dissent and solidarity.

Resetting time is an abiding and representative leitmotif of revolution and 1789 is its quintessential expression. Desiring to introduce a new 'civil era', the French Revolution secularised and rationalised time by

abolishing the 24 hour day in favour of a decimalised 10 hour day and by renaming every month of the year to reflect not the names of Gods or Kings but nature, science and the labouring classes. Inherently political, this revolutionary reclaiming of time rings loud and clear in ***We Could Have Been Anything That We Wanted to Be and It's Not Too Late to Change.***

Featuring a new ambitious installation by Ewan, ***How Many Flowers Make the Spring?***, weaves together oral histories and the personal recollections of activists involved in public moments of dissent with an indoor meadow-like landscape made of dried grasses and plants. Channelling the natural symbolism of the French Republican Calendar ***How Many Flowers Make the Spring?*** asks us to embrace liberty and freedom not as individualistic goals nor as distant utopian aims, but as collective trans-historic struggles to which we can all contribute and effect social change.

“As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history.” (Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History IV*, 1940).

Artist Biography

Ruth Ewan is an internationally celebrated artist whose research-led and critically engaged practice has drawn attention within contemporary art and socio-political history. Engaging with the circulation of radical ideas and social movements, her work explores the processes by which ideas take form and spread from individuals to society.

Ewan's work is recognised internationally and she has shown extensively at major venues including; Edinburgh Art Festival (2018 & 2020); Pitzhanger Gallery (2020); Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2019); CAPC, Bordeaux (2019); Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris (2019); Victoria and Albert Museum (2018); 32nd São Paulo Biennial (2016); Camden Arts Centre, London (2015); Tate Britain (2009 & 2014); Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, Glasgow International (2012); Dundee Contemporary Arts and Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla (2011); The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk (2010); the New Museum, New York (2009). She has realised projects for The High Line, New York (2019); Glasgow Women's Library (2018); Create, London (2012); Art on the Underground (2011); Frieze Projects (2009) and Artangel (2007&2013). In 2016 she was awarded the Arts Foundation Yoma Sasburg Award for Art in Urban Space. ruthewan.com



Image: Ruth Ewan, *We Could Have Been Anything That We Wanted to Be*, 2011. Installation view, Cooper Gallery, 2021. Photo courtesy the artist.

Notes for Editors



1. **[The Ignorant Art School: Five Sit-ins towards Creative Emancipation](#)** is a five-chapter exhibition and event project that runs until 2023 by Cooper Gallery, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee.
2. **[The Ignorant Art School](#)** begins with **[Sit-in # 1: Ruth Ewan](#)** **[We Could Have Been Anything That We Wanted to Be and It's Not Too Late to Change](#)**
3. The Ignorant Art School Sit-in #1 was launched in February 2021 with **[Sit-in Curriculum #1](#)**. View video documentation of selected Sit-in classes **[here](#)**.
4. **Key dates: Ruth Ewan Exhibition at Cooper Gallery DCJAD: 3 September – 23 October 2021.** Exhibition Preview 2 September 2021. Details to follow.
5. Cooper Gallery is open Monday – Saturday, 11am–4pm.
6. For more information on **Ruth Ewan** and her practice, collaborations, and previous projects please see the artist's website **ruthewan.com**
7. The artist Ruth Ewan, Cooper Gallery Principal Curator Sophia Hao **may be available for interview**. For more information on specific availability please contact **exhibitions@dundee.ac.uk**
8. Book required in line with University of Dundee and Scottish Government COVID-19 Guidelines. Advance tickets available from 16 August. See Cooper Gallery's website.
9. For further information about **The Ignorant Art School** and forthcoming events please visit Cooper Gallery's website: **<https://www.dundee.ac.uk/cooper-gallery/exhibitions/the-ignorant-art-school/>**
10. **Cooper Gallery DCJAD** at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee is a distinctive platform in Scotland for challenging and innovative practices and critical discourse in contemporary art, design and culture. A collaborative process of knowledge exchange and production, Cooper Gallery's experimental and transdisciplinary approach sustains a critical engagement between multiple contexts, practices and discourses. Navigating the efficacy and necessity of equality, diversity and inclusion Cooper Gallery explores the full breadth of the creative, social and educational impacts of contemporary art practices. Cooper Gallery is a member of Plus Tate. For further information, please visit: **<https://www.dundee.ac.uk/cooper-gallery/exhibitions>**
11. **The Ignorant Art School: Five Sit-ins Towards Creative Emancipation** has been made possible with funding support from **National Lottery through Creative Scotland, and Henry Moore Foundation**.
12. Cooper Gallery would like to thank the following organisations and individuals who have supported gathering material for the installation. **[University of Dundee Botanic Garden](#)**; **[Pillars of Hercules Organic Farm](#)**; **[Auchtermuchty Common](#)**; **[Hospitalfield](#)**; Becca Clark; and Edinburgh Ferry Road Allotment.



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