

[*Inside there is a goat on the table* was a performative walk that took place at Collective in May 2024. Made in response to the themes of the exhibition "*U Scantu*": *A Disorderly Tale* by Elisa Giardina Papa and the wider site of the gallery, the work reimagined Calton Hill as a place of magical occurrences, where history, myth and healing intertwine. The walk was created and performed by artist and writer Megan Rudden, who was eight months pregnant at the time.]



The Cailleach's Telescope

Scotland was built by a giant woman. The Cailleach or Beira, the Veiled One, the Goddess of Winter. She formed the hills from her chest, carried rocks on her back, placed them down and shaped them with her hammer. She breathed icy air through the landscape, capping mountain tops white as she laid out her aprons to dry. She beckoned the sea to run rivers between, gestured direction as salty water turned clear, formed valleys and pooled lochs beneath her. Beira named this hill after the Gaelic word *calltainn* meaning hazel tree. Here she planted huge groves that stretched across the landscape. From this high point, she kept in communication with sirens and selkies, watching the sea from the clouds through her telescope.

One day during a particularly turbulent storm, she dropped her telescope from the skies and it landed here, upturned, lens to ground. Not meant for this world, it instantly solidified into stone and was no longer useful as a device for looking. Centuries later it was found, protruding vertically from the rock, in the exact same place where she dropped it. Men who dedicate their lives to discovering and naming are known to make a habit of rationalising the magical, and soon her telescope was turned into a device for time keeping. Every day at 1 o'clock a ball drops from its top to alert sailors in the port of the time. They set their chronometers and calculate their longitude at sea. Looking is quicker than hearing, but a zinc coated ball couldn't always been seen through the veils of rain and fog common to Edinburgh and so the 1 o'clock gun was introduced as an auditory back up, connected to the tower by a single wire. The ball drops, a split second later the castle follows suit and a cannon fires. The 1 o'clock gun has now been in operation for over 150 years, yet it wasn't until 2006 that a woman was trusted to fire it.

Beira still wanders the hill in the winter months. She was startled the first time she saw the new kinetic addition to her telescope and confused as to why this ball, which to her is about the size of a malteser, had been attached to its top. Why this violent insistence on declaring the time, she wondered, when it can be found just as easily by looking up at the sky.

Edinburgh's Disgrace

The parthenon in Greece was a gift to the Athena, goddess of wisdom and war. The Edinburgh imitation however, commemorated men fallen in battle. When Athena heard that the Calton Hill copy was not even in part devoted to her she was outraged. In fact, this poor imitation enraged her so much that she descended on the hill and struck the replica, splitting it down the middle. A parthenon sliced in half. Athena threw one part into the Forth, leaving the other half on the hill top. The failed architecture of this semi formed relic would serve as reminder to the people of Edinburgh never to cross her again. In time she spread a rumour, making sure to target the local gossips first, who could be found in the courts and churches. *'The men have run out of money and so building could not continue. What a disgrace,'* she whispered, into any ear that might listen. She laughed at their pallid attempt to replicate her temple. How dare they claim her name; Athens of the North, a joke now wet with slime. Inside the observatory jumpers bare its slogan, a title reclaimed in gift shop irony.

On the north side of the hill women were burned alive yet no stone marks their name as martyr, instead we immortalise battles and carve the pallid faces of brutal enslavers in perfect reverence. At the castle, where many more women burned, there is a small plaque that says she died here. Yet even in this gesture, language still suggests it might have been her fault. Just feet away there is a statue, several times in size, dedicated to a horse.

A two faced clock, Jekyll and Hyde, a fur coat city with no knickers underneath. Boy racers cut dirt lines through tourist trodden pathways as revved up engines battle against the tartan drone of streets below. Bagpipes without a war to start. Time is kept by cannon fire, a castle etched into a shortbread tin barely leaves change from a twenty pound note. The window next door offers novelty aprons displaying saltire bikinis with plastic cleavage and clanless kilts tucked under imitation abs. Darkness descends on the hill and nightclubs empty, concrete pathways become canals for cruising without a ship in sight. Underage drinkers sit beneath Enlightenment columns playing tinny music from their phones as they laugh at the Age of Reason. Pretences of a capital ancient with half told histories.

Politicians Clock

When I was younger my auntie took my birth month out of the calendar that hung on her living room wall as a practical joke. When I asked why there was a gap between March and May she told me Tony Blair had cancelled April. I was old enough to know he was prime minister at the time and young enough to believe his ministerial powers could extend to removing entire months of the year. A page is ripped out, a politician steals time and celebrations. Synchronised networks set hour, minutes and seconds through computers. Clock face and hands become relics. Living is accelerated as Neoliberalism reshapes time into something new and under pressure. We live alone and urgently.

Before the ball was dropped or the gun fired, sailors would park their boats in the port of Leith and make the lengthy journey up Calton Hill to set their chronometers from this device. It is called a politician's clock because it has two faces, one that can be read from the interior of the building and the other looking outwards. Telescopes, of a much smaller size than Beira's, were used to monitor passing celestial objects, providing accurate time to set the clock by. Beira was not a fan of the sailors, she couldn't understand why they insisted on taking so much from the sea when dinner was available so abundantly on her land.

While the sailors scaled the hill, their boats sat unattended in the port. Beira saw an opportunity in this and told the sirens about the daily journey made by the sailors from sea to hilltop. While they made their lunch time ascent, the sirens raided their boats for tools, trinkets and secrets. They learned as much as they could about the sailors, studied their maps and examined their devices. With this knowledge the sirens could better hunt them once they left again for sea, anticipating their whereabouts and passing this information on to the rest of the collective. But soon the sirens got greedy and lured so many sailors to their death that they began to arouse suspicion. Beira knew she had to restore the balance between the sea and the land, the creatures and the humans. In the 1860s the clock was struck by lightening and hasn't worked since.

Goat

In phones and on the internet the goat emoji means 'greatest of all time' but it's a while before I understand this as an acronym. On instagram people post images of Messi captioned with these tiny sigils. I think that they are saying he looks like a goat and wonder how everyone has reached this very specific yet seemingly collective conclusion, but then I can see where they're coming from. Pictorial language invites misinterpretation; a smiling face that seems sarcastic, a fruit that symbolises something less literal. We slip between words and modern hieroglyphs, meaning is autocorrected as we write, rapidly and using only our thumbs.

Inside there is a goat on the table, alive and not for eating. Pagan Gods or Catholic Sinners depend upon who's looking. The first biblical sacrifice, a test of faith on another hilltop; pious relief as livestock replaces son. In a time and place that is less sure of itself, teenage girls ride through an abandoned landscape wondering what might have been. The architecture hopes to shrink them but they are too alive for the dead future they trail past. I catch her eye, she stares with intention, fearless and unbounded by the vastness of concrete that surrounds her hooded body. Nails painted black grip a rubber handle with blue and silver foil streaming out the sides. Some of the girls sit on amphitheatre steps while others ride around the perimeter of the stage, circling a giant globe overwhelmed by blankness. Her hair is pleated ceramic, copied from her grandmother, but unlike her elders she unravels the braid from the top of her head and lets it hang heavy in the gap between her shoulder blades. In the palace, pleated hair is pulled through a hole in a wall and still the goat is on the table. Her grandmother tells her both of these places were built after earthquakes, the palace and the forgotten attempt at utopia. Legs and lemons are bound, a spell is cast, the rope is cut. Fear is released by the women who are *from the outside and beside themselves*.

Meridian Line

Never a fan of being told what to do by those south of the border, the Scottish meridian line runs 12 minutes west of the Greenwich meridian line and was invented 200 years earlier. Adhering to this line would put London and Aberdeen in the eastern hemisphere instead of the west.

Eastern medicine understands meridians in relation to the body, rather than geographical time keeping. They are lines that connect acupuncture points, a system of pathways through which vital life force energy or 'qi' might flow. In this system of thought, illnesses are experienced as blockages and healing means letting go.

Open your palm. Follow the lines creased into skin by holding and living. Stretch your fingers, pushing them outwards and back as each crevice defines itself; heart, head, life, sometimes even fate. Examine each one, trace its length and ask how you might understand yourself better. Predict each possible future in lines cultivated by the past. Veins layered underneath reveal themselves and remind us we are here and living. Relax as muscles tire from the tension. The palm becomes soft and padded, a tiny cushion below each finger. Pushing into this pad creates a fleshy ripple that pools outwards and darker. Smaller lines appear like offshoots, watercress roots brought to the surface. A scrunched up ball of paper is retrieved from the bin and flattened out again, discarded ideas reconsidered. Between the base of your thumb and index finger is a pressure point. Do not press here if you are pregnant as pushing this point can instigate labour. If there is no baby in your belly then pressure might relieve pain and headaches. This point is known as Hegu, meaning 'joining valley' and runs along the large intestine meridian of the hand.

Press down on this point with your thumb. Move your thumb in a circle while applying pressure. You can move it in clockwise or counterclockwise circles for 2 to 3 minutes.

[At the end of the walk we sat together in guided meditation, as the following text was read out. The breathing exercise lasted the length of a labour contraction.]

Meditation

I ask you now to take a seat and close your eyes or soften your gaze.

To continue holding the pressure point is optional. We are going to begin by taking some healing breaths, inhaling to the count of four and exhaling to the count of eight. We will do this together four times. If you are able please inhale through your nose as I count 1, 2, 3, 4 and out through your mouth 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

In 2, 3, 4

Out 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

In 2, 3, 4

Out 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

In 2, 3, 4

Out 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

Now return your breathing to a comfortable pace. Don't worry about any thoughts that may arise, just allow them to flow back into the sea of awareness. Notice the natural rhythm of your breath. I want to take you back in time. To when hazelnut trees covered the hill. There leaves are green and luscious. The nuts are brown and ripe. Sweetened air breezes gently past your nose. A small bird lands on a branch and knocks a hazelnut to the floor. You reach down to pick it up. You hold it in your hand, running your fingers across its smooth surface. Nearby there is a flowing stream, you walk there now. The gentle trickle of the water gets louder as you approach. You bend down beside the waters edge and place your hand into the stream. The velvet water strokes your skin, it is clear and sparkling in the sun. You wash the hazelnut in the water then place it in your mouth, biting down. The flavour fills your mouth and you swallow. You cup your hands, submerge them into the stream and take a drink. The water cools your throat. Now we come back to the present, where we are now, together on this hill. Notice any sensations that arise in your body. Feel the breeze on your skin. Listen to the sounds around you. You notice a doorway before you. Behind it is a kitchen and Beira is standing inside. She is mixing dates, milk and chocolate into a huge cauldron. She stirs the deep brown liquid and gestures for you to join her. She offers you a glass.

[As the group opened their eyes a drink appeared before them on the table. We shared this together.]

To end this walk I offer you a drink, a potion of hazelnuts, of which this hill is named after, chocolate and dates.

Ingredients;

Cocoa Powder

Nibs ground into a fine powder, gorgeous chocolate dust. Ingesting improves blood flow, reduces cholesterol and takes care of the heart. Cocoa effects the body like oestrogen. Oxytocin is released, chemical love, necessary for instigating birth and milk production.

Dates

Wrinkled amber skin holds in its sticky insides. A sickly sweet fruit picked from a flowering plant. The centre is solid, a giant stone interrupts teeth too eager to bite down. Old wives tell tales of fruit inducing labour and softening the cervix, centuries later science agrees; *Studies show that eating six dates a day for the four weeks before birth significantly reduces the need for medical intervention.*

Hazelnut Milk

The nuts of a hazel tree mulched into thin milk. Pearlescent liquid coats the throat with magnolia wisdom. If offered instead of a breast to babies born in Autumn they might develop the gift of second sight, but only if the nuts are yet to ripen. Taken from the tree, soft branches become divining rods to aid in finding water. A salmon gains a red spot on its skin for every hazel eaten and learns to navigate the sea.

Please enjoy your drink in honour of Beira. Thank you for joining me on the hill today.

