

# Moving Image

## Season: Katy Dove

17 April–25 May 2015

GoMA launches an Artist Moving Image season with four works by Katy Dove: *Luna* (2004), *Stop It* (2006), *Motorhead* (2002) and *Sooner* (2007).

Dove's animations often started from a process of making multiple instinctive, abstract drawings using watercolours or felt-tip pen. The freeness of automatic drawing, similar to improvisation in music, produces concrete forms from intuitive feelings and thoughts without first translating them into words. After being scanned to computer, the drawings become the point of departure for other visual and aural elements, and movement is created through repetition and layering. The four animations exhibited here reflect Dove's interest in the relationships between sound and the moving image, intuition and perception, harmony and disharmony. Producing an immersive environment, they correspond to both her affinity with nature and study of psychology, as her work explores the body as 'the place through which our mind makes contact with the world ... where our thoughts become actions.'<sup>1</sup>

Dove said of her drawings, 'I am not so interested in analysing what these images might mean, but in using them as a starting point to explore a state of mind that is beyond language.'<sup>2</sup> So although she did not divorce images entirely from words in terms of their potential to communicate interior thoughts, she moved them towards a psychological space that reaches beyond the conventions and codified knowledge produced by language. In the works presented here, colourful, abstract forms gesture towards renewal, reproduction and disintegration. They parallel nature, in that each form 'gives birth to itself'<sup>3</sup>, while maintaining connections to the artist's own body through their distinctive hand-made quality.

Many of the recordings in Dove's animation soundtracks come from the natural world; the human voice is bound together with bird song to communicate varied tones, melody and breath. When combined with analogue instruments rhythms emerge to follow a free, organic logic. By exploring processes and ideas rather than fixed meanings, Dove's work relishes the non-linear, the non-narrative, whilst being rooted in the actuality of our sensory experience of landscape and place. Artist Simon Yuill, an erstwhile collaborator of Dove's, suggests we consider her animations 'simply as drawings that move'<sup>4</sup>, yet he recognizes that the complexities of the audio-visual relationships she produced create more complex synesthetic responses than mere doodles.

Movement of these forms across the screen is bound to the particular qualities – pulsing, mirroring, replicating, reversing – that computer technology enables. Dove's attraction to computers as tools and her exploration of the creative potential of software can be linked to a long-standing interest in the computer-art pioneer John Whitney (1917–95). However, rather than considering these works as digital animation they seem closer to abstract experimental film. During a research project at the McLaren archive in the University of Stirling in 2008–9 Dove was drawn towards the work, writings and techniques of Norman McLaren (1914–87), in particular to his 'visual scores'. The hand-made tactility at the core of Dove's aesthetic also nods back to the early traditions of experimental filmmakers such as Len Lye (1901–80) and Oskar Fischinger (1900–67) who worked with the material qualities of film stock and the way its surface responds to adherence and removal.

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*Luna* (2004) was commissioned for *A Kind of Bliss* at The Drawing Room in London, an exhibition of artists for who colour and its affective potential is a key concern. Dove's work was shown alongside two of Len Lye's films from the mid-1930s, opening up a dialogue with his innovative techniques such as drawing directly onto film, applying colour to black-and-white stock and combining drawing with live action. The various shapes and lines that form the visual elements in *Luna* hover, drift, settle and move as though by some kind of physical energy or magnetic force of attraction and repelling. Like the aura of visual imprints on the retina, these shapes multiply and disperse, receding into the background as new forms enter in front. Pulsing lines mirror one another, radiating into fans. The soundtrack begins with six steady clock chimes, repeated in duplicate a minute later with 12 strokes. Set against these clear temporal declarations are ambient sounds like crickets, bells, bird song and percussion that produce a sense of geographic context, and the artist's voice hums and aahhs in a rhythm of breaths that develop into harmonic melody.



Still from 'Luna' (2004), Katy Dove, © the artist's estate.

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In *Stop It* (2006) there is a sense of Dove's watercolour moving beyond the paper it is applied to. Shadow lines from the scanned edges and corners of overlapping sheets of paper are incorporated into the computer animation. As movement progresses, an implied mouth appears in the centre of the screen, framed by moving columns of multiple shapes on either side. Details of splotched watercolour drift cloud-like in opposite directions as intense colours - cerise, red and yellow - add vigour to the interplay between shapes. Intersecting silhouettes cause new visual effects as their overlapping colours switch into negative hues. Eventually it becomes impossible to follow the movement of any single component as the complex arrangement produces a completely immersive visual field.



Still from 'Stop It' (2006), Katy Dove, © the artist's estate.

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*Motorhead* (2002) is the only film shown here in which the soundtrack is by another artist, in this case a track by Devotone (James Seenan). The work was commissioned by artist Luke Fowler's Shadazz label for a compilation VHS tape *Evil Eye is Source* that instigated collaborations between pairings of artists and musicians, including Life Without Buildings, Hassle Hound, James Orr Complex, Mark Leckey, Torsten Lauschmann, Stephen Sutcliffe, Duncan Campbell and others. *Motorhead* has a different attitude to the other works in this exhibition. Upbeat, robotic synth sounds are matched by Dove's felt-pen drawings, which have a more angular, graphic quality. Taking visual cues from the music, shapes form, disperse and reform; some as facial features in a mane of long, bright red hair; others as dots or doodles that circle into fractal trails.



Still from 'Motorhead' (2002), Katy Dove, © the artist's estate.

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Made for the exhibition *Sun by Ear* at Tramway, *Sooner* (2007) has echoes of the visual elements in *Luna*. Unlike the illusion of static background space in *Luna*, the backdrop here is more obvious and active, destabilized by the continuous, awkward movement of cut up squares of watercolour paintings. The passing of time is alluded to in the shifts from dark to light pastel tones. Autonomous shapes and lines group together, teetering, balancing on one another to form the impression of a face, flocks of birds or microscopic cellular patterns. Yet, there is no implicit representation here, only the gesture towards it. The audio track for *Sooner* is guided by a percussive beat that forms a core rhythm. The repetition of a voice begins to imply syntax, picking up pace to the marching machine of a tambourine. Stylistically this is a precursor to Dove's later collaborative project *Muscles of Joy*, bringing together guitar, glockenspiel and various percussion instruments with multiple voices in playful improvisation. Abstract shapes dance as the music speeds up, and increasingly complex layers of sound and image expand towards the sudden conclusion of a clear end note.



Still from 'Sooner' (2007), Katy Dove, © the artist's estate.

## Artist Biography

Katy Dove was born in Oxford in 1970 and died in Glasgow in 2015. She presented solo exhibitions at Duff House for Generation: 25 Years of Contemporary Art in Scotland (2014); SpaceX, Exeter (2013); Artis Den Bosch, Netherlands (2008); Hales Gallery, London (2006); Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh (2006); Pump House Gallery, London (2005) and Sies + Höke, Düsseldorf (2005). As well as prestigious solo presentations at Art Statements, Basel (2005) and Art Now, Tate Britain (2003), her work was included in numerous curated group shows nationally and internationally, including at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Venice Biennale, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Pier Art Centre, Jerwood Space, Prague Biennale, The Drawing Room and Frieze Art Fair. She produced an extensive body of new work for Sun by Ear, a large-scale exhibition with Victoria Morton at Tramway in 2007, and for a commissioned installation of animations in the BBC Scotland building at Pacific Quay, Glasgow in 2009. Dove was selected for a number of international residencies including at La Criée Centre for Contemporary Arts, Rennes, France (2010) and the Scottish Art Council / Location One, New York Residency (2011).

Dove's work extends beyond her own body of paintings, drawings, prints and animations as she gave equal attention, thought and time to various forms of collaboration. As a student at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design she was integral to the establishment of the Unit 13 collective. Along with artists Sarah Kenchington and Belinda Gilbert Scott, Dove organized The Caravan Residencies at Claylands Farm near Balfron, and the subsequent Caravan Club cabaret performance nights. Work resulting from the residencies there by Anne-Marie Copestake, Anna McLauchlan, Barry Burns, Ben Craven, Belinda Gilbert Scott, Christopher Deans, Dick Gilbert Scott, Hayley Tompkins, Kate Davis, Leigh Ferguson, Luke Fowler, Mark Vernon,

Sophie Macpherson and Sarah Kenchington was brought together in the exhibition *Open Field* at CCA in Glasgow 2008, combining art, writing and music with experimental presentations of science and hairdressing.

In collaboration with Simon Yuill, Dove's exhibition *Now is the Time* at The Changing Room, Stirling was centred around an installation using computer programming to link elements of her animations with a room of musical instruments, devolving control to the actions of those visiting the exhibition. In a previous collaboration with Yuill, as part of Dove's 2001 solo exhibition at Transmission, Glasgow, they produced 'Forever Changes', a free downloadable screensaver.

Growing out of a burgeoning interest in singing and the voice, Dove, along with Anne-Marie Copestake, Ariki Porteous, Charlotte Prodger, Jenny O'Boyle, Leigh Ferguson, Sophie Macpherson and Victoria Morton began informal improvisation sessions that led to the formation of *Muscles of Joy*, whose debut record was longlisted for the inaugural Scottish Album of the Year award. Dove moved away from performing with the band in 2011 but instigated a new musical collaboration last year, *Full Eye*, with Copestake and Porteous for a project at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design in Dundee as part of Generation: 25 Years of Contemporary Art in Scotland.

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This open sense of collaboration was also evident in her other professional activities such as devising art workshops. In 2006 she began a two-year pARTners residency at the inauguration of Platform in Easterhouse, producing collaborative works with adults from the Positive Mental Attitudes art group and local primary children. These were included in the exhibition *Rhythm Section* at the conclusion of the residency, also the setting for *Muscles of Joy's* first live performance. During the residency at Platform Dove collaborated with Edinburgh-based choreographer Sheila McDougall to explore movement and its meanings, an interest that she developed further in her most recent work that brought together a wider set of interests around the body, the healing potential of plants and ideas of mantra.

This is the first exhibition of the artist's work since she died earlier this year. Although it was scheduled in advance and consists only of works held in Glasgow Museums' collection, it is inevitable that it takes on the form of a tribute. Katy's spirit of autonomy and distinctive approach to life is greatly missed by her family, partner, friends and those who worked with her.

Kirsteen Macdonald, 2015

*GoMA would like to thank Katy Dove's family, partner and friends, particularly the author Kirsteen Macdonald, and Charlotte Prodger, Anna McLauchlan and Isla Leaver-Yap for their recent support and advice on her work.*

<sup>1</sup> Press release for Dove's solo exhibition *Meaning Becomes Action* at Spacex, Exeter 18/1/13 retrieved on 22/3/15 from <http://spacex.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/KatyDoveSpacex.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Yuill, S. in Ross, S. (2004) *Katy Dove* published by Pump House Gallery, London to accompany her solo exhibition. Quotations from an interview between Dove and Yuill in Summer 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

Gallery of Modern Art, Royal Exchange Square, Glasgow, G1 3AH