

*April*



Sarah Forrest  
17 Oct–10 Nov 2018



LUX and LUX Scotland present a solo exhibition by Glasgow-based artist Sarah Forrest, featuring her new film *April* (2018) commissioned for the Margaret Tait Award.

Working across film, installation, text and sound, Sarah Forrest's practice weaves together elements of theory, fiction and philosophy to produce narrative-driven works that playfully explore perceptions both by and of the self. *April* draws from her research into second sight (*An da shealladh*, literally translated from Gaelic, means 'the two sights'), a prophetic phenomenon particular to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. To this subject, she brings questions pertinent to her wider creative practice that consider appearance, perception, doubt and belief. Set on the Isle of Lewis in the Western Isles of Scotland, the film performs through its cyclical structure and narrative slippages the sensation of being uncertain of what has been seen or heard.

*April* is presented alongside a new companion film produced for the exhibition at LUX. This is accompanied by a presentation of other films, videos, audio works and publications selected by the artist.

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*April* was commissioned as part of the 2017/18 Margaret Tait Award, a Glasgow Film Festival commission supported by Creative Scotland and LUX Scotland. Curated by Nicole Yip, Director of LUX Scotland, the exhibition is presented as a partnership between LUX and LUX Scotland, with additional support from the Hope Scott Trust.

## Brian Dillon

### *Your eyes are full of hesitation*

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The stories circulate in many families, especially those with some connection to wildness, edges, ancient lonely places. You may have your own, but here is mine. It is 1974, and my maternal grandmother is dying in a small hospital in the south west of Ireland. Her daughters have left her for the night and returned to a farmhouse kitchen several miles away, where they sit up late drinking cups of tea and talking, remembering, wondering if a call will come before they can return to their mother's bedside in the morning. Around three o'clock there is a wild banging at the kitchen door. One of the sisters rushes out in the dark. Nobody there. As the story is told, this happens more than once - loud knocking or rapping, and an empty farmyard - before the phone rings: their mother has died. Not quite a death foretold, but a variation on the sounds, sights and smells that in family and folklore may be said to attend a death. How did I hear this story? From my own mother? From an aunt? I can no longer recall. I just know I have told it so often that I cannot be sure I did not invent or imagine the tale.

In the Highlands and Islands of Scotland - including the Isle of Lewis where Sarah Forrest's *April* was shot - premonitions of death have historically been associated with the phenomenon of second sight. Certain individuals are gifted or cursed with the ability to see (or hear, or smell) what is not there, but which points to the future. A vast literature exists on this and related curiosities, but one of the most suggestive early texts is Martin Martin's *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (1703), which describes these powers thus: 'The Second Sight is a singular faculty of seeing an otherwise invisible object, without any previous means used by the person that sees it for that end; the vision makes such a lively impression upon the seers, that they neither see nor think of anything else, except the vision, as long as it continues; and then they appear pensive or jovial, according to the object which was represented to them.' What does the seer see? Perhaps a man or woman either side

of a woman or man, presaging marriage. Or houses, trees and gardens where there is still only desolate hillside: a prediction of material comfort, continued settlement of the island. More ominously: sparks along the seer's arm, the voice of one known to the hearer when there is nobody else there, a recognizable figure shrouded as if for the grave. Children and the elderly are especially apt to see such visions, and when they do their eyelids will flicker upwards, or even fold back on themselves.

Sarah Forrest is intimately aware of such stories, passed on from her own mother and from an aunt who lectures on the folklore of the region. *April* is by no means a literal rehearsal of these narratives or beliefs. Rather, the film enacts certain features of both second sight and the retelling of such tales. And it casts the seer not only as a figure of melancholic insight, but as somewhat hapless, confused, subject to a kind of comedy as much as darkling knowledge. Forrest's narrator finds herself alone on Lewis, staying in a friend's house, paying close but blurred and shaky attention to the landscape, water and fauna around her. This person, who is not quite the artist herself, is apparently visited by the vision of another woman, who gives her a photograph of two women, sitting together and seemingly doubling each other. Or so it seems: the anecdote repeats, ramifies, coils on itself time and again until we are unsure if these characters are all distinct or merely emanations of the one mind. To begin with, 'I' and 'she' and 'they' are stable if enigmatic; by the end of the film, all these categories have begun to blur into one another - a woman appears 'slightly behind her, just over my right shoulder' - to become as fleeting and indistinct as the foliage, reeds and weed that recur in the film's imagery.

Traditionally, seers have been amazed or tormented by visions of figures that resemble themselves, and Scottish literature, more than most, has been interested in the mystique of the double. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) is the most well known example, with its twin extremes alternating in the same overreaching and tragic figure. But Stevenson's novel is presaged decades earlier by James Hogg's *Private Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), whose protagonist Robert Wringhim is haunted by a sinister double called Gil-Martin. 'We are all subjected to two distinct natures in the same person. I myself have



suffered grievously in that way.' *April* is in some respects a continuation of this Scottish lineage of Gothic doubling. Except that it is also filled with mundane details (the female apparition's Goretex jacket, her jeans and trainers) and has a singularly incongruous soundtrack. The yearning, breathy opening bars of 'Yes Sir, I Can Boogie' (1977) play over sublime footage of the Lewis landscape, and the song unfolds at the end of the film. 'Yes Sir, I Can Boogie' was a huge hit for Spanish duo Baccara, and in a 1977 promo film the two women mimic each other's dance moves awkwardly but exactly: a kitschy but uncanny presaging of the doubled women in *April*.

In his account of second sight in 1703, Martin Martin (what is this writer if not another double?) tells us that 'a girl of twelve was troubled at the frequent sight of a vision, resembling herself in stature, complexion, dress &c., and seemed to stand or sit, and to be always employed as the girl was.' An uncanny double, for sure, and a kind of supernatural mirror. But isn't the apparition or invention of the seer also obviously a type of cinema? Or better: a spectral foretelling of a world in which, even or especially when most alone, we are ghosted by images of ourselves and our loved ones? The double narratives of nineteenth-century fiction were always, without saying it, partly concerned with photography - and *April*, though it draws on ancient ideas and beliefs about appearances, is also obviously about the present.

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**Brian Dillon** is a writer and critic based in London. His books include *In the Dark Room* (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2018), *Essayism* (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017) and *Objects in This Mirror: Essays* (Sternberg Press, 2014).

## Events

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### Breakfast Preview

Wednesday 17 October, 9–10.30am

A special breakfast viewing of the exhibition with artist Sarah Forrest and exhibition curator Nicole Yip (Director, LUX Scotland). Coffee, tea and pastries will be provided.

### Exhibition Opening & Performance

Saturday 20 October, 2–5pm

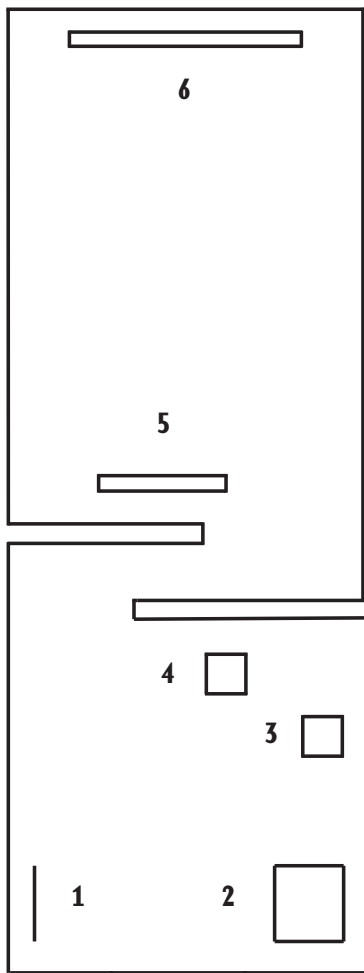
Join us for drinks to celebrate the opening of the exhibition, with a performance and readings by Sarah Forrest from 3pm.

### The Second Sight Reading Group

Saturday 3 November, 2–4pm

Take part in a reading group led by Elsa Richardson that will look at the narratives and structures of stories of second sight, bringing together a selection of texts from the 17th century to the present day. All texts will be provided on the day. Booking required on our website.

Full details on our website  
[www.lux.org.uk](http://www.lux.org.uk)



1. *Youth Administrator*, Sarah Tripp, 2014, limited edition print co-published by Book Works and Flat Time House, 430mm x 600mm
2. *Youth Administrator*, Sarah Tripp, 2014, HD video, 6 min
3. *Where You Had Been*, Peter Todd, 2005, 16mm film transferred to video, 3 min
4. *Grey-Matter*, Mark Briggs, 2017, audio, 8 min 30 sec
5. *Frame for Frame*, Sarah Forrest, 2018, HD video, 5 min 18 sec
6. *April*, Sarah Forrest, 2018, HD video, 21 min 30 sec

This free booklet is an edition of 500, produced on the occasion of Sarah Forrest's solo exhibition at LUX, London:

**BL CK B X: Sarah Forrest  
April**

17 October – 10 November 2018  
Wed–Sat, 12pm–4pm

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*April*, Sarah Forrest, 2018.  
Courtesy the artist.



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**LUX**

Waterlow Park Centre  
Dartmouth Park Hill  
London, N19 5JF  
www.lux.org.uk  
@LUXmovingimage

**LUX Scotland**

350 Sauchiehall Street  
Glasgow, G2 3JD  
www.luxscotland.org.uk  
@LUXScotland



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