

CITY DOME

Ruth Ewan

The Beast

25 June – 18 September

The crowned heads of Europe
All make an awful fuss
Over Uncle Andy
And his old Diplodocus
Tavern song (c.1905), author unknown

Ruth Ewan and Collective present a major new commission: *The Beast*. Ewan has long-term interests in creativity and social justice, alternative systems and radical histories. Her work stems from research resulting in a wide variety of forms including events, performance, writing, installation, sculpture and print.

The Beast presents an unearthly morality tale centred on the story and legacy of famous Scottish/American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie and his namesake *Diplodocus carnegii*. Fossils of *Diplodocus carnegii* were first found in Wyoming in 1899 on an expedition financed by Carnegie. He subsequently had the species named after himself and commissioned a team of Italian artisans to cast seven replica skeletons in plaster, which were donated to international museums between 1908-1913, as a 'peace keeping exercise', an

act which first brought dinosaurs into popular public consciousness.

Comprising a new animation, a selection of archival material and a wall text, this exhibition tells the story of Carnegie's ruthless accumulation of wealth and the place he bought in history via an uncanny encounter with his palaeontological namesake.

Carnegie was one of the wealthiest individuals in history, and this exhibition considers his era of unscrupulous capitalism, highlighting the practices which enabled him to accumulate his fortune. These included abject working conditions, union busting and catastrophic environmental pollution. Carnegie's wealth predominantly came from steel production in Pittsburgh and Homestead, where the growth of surrounding trees was said to be stunted by pollution. In July 1892 Homestead Steel Works was the site of one of the most violent events in U.S. labour history, when a lockout sparked by a 15% cut to worker's wages resulted in the deaths of ten men. The lockout is said to have ended unionisation in the

US steel industry for 40 years. Without the hindrance of a union, Carnegie was able to slash wages, impose a 12-hour working day and lay off 500 workers. Record breaking profits followed.

Inspired by the aesthetics of the late-19th century American political satire magazine *Puck*, Ewan's animation connects the legacies of this time to the modern day, and imagines what we could learn from what happened to the dinosaurs. The script has been written as a collaboration between Ruth and the self-styled Marxist magician Dr Ian Saville, and centres around an imagined conversation between Carnegie and a *Diplodocus carnegii*. The dialogue, realised with the actor Dave Anderson and musician and actor Keeley Forsyth, reveal a provocative and layered history.

A collection of archival material relating to Carnegie along with specimens from the University of Edinburgh's Cockburn Geological Museum including rocks and minerals associated with steel production are found in the display cases.

COLLECTIVE

CITY DOME

Ruth Ewan
The Beast

25 June – 18 September

With the assistance of the Rivers of Steel Archive, Pittsburgh, the artist gathered the names of the workers who died as part of the Homestead strikes, including steel workers and Pinkertons (private security guards hired by businesses to infiltrate unions and keep strikers out of factories), and has presented them here in a new text piece.

The combination of ideas and objects speak of the long-term consequences of over industrialisation, where natural resources, geology and labour are seen as resources to be plundered indiscriminately for individual gain.

Silent Agitator

Alongside *The Beast*, Collective are also showing Ewan's 2019 work *Silent Agitator* on the viewing terrace. Collective's site is the birthplace of astronomy and timekeeping in Edinburgh, and *Silent Agitator* is presented alongside our collection of historic timepieces. The City Observatory was built to house transit telescopes which were used to monitor passing celestial objects, providing accurate time for sailors docked in the Port of Leith, facilitating accurate naval navigation and enabling the expansion of trade and empire.

Clocks had a considerable effect not only on our ability to navigate the globe but also in labour struggles. *Silent Agitator* is based on an illustration by American activist Ralph Chaplin, originally produced for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) labour union. The illustration was one of many images that appeared on "stickerettes," known as "silent agitators," millions of

which were printed in red and black on gummed paper and distributed by union members travelling from job to job.

IWW was established by a diverse group of socialists, anarchists, labour activists, schoolteachers, and immigrants in June 1905 in Chicago, in response to the fractured unionising of the day and the need for consistent messaging around workers' rights. Their main organising principle is the concept of One Big Union – or a unified conglomerate of workers, regardless of trade or experience.

Chaplin's illustration and Ewan's clock nod to the round-the-clock organising work of the IWW, and the ubiquity of the clock in labour struggles: both in the ways that factory owners separated private and public time; and the fights for the now-diminishing labour rights we have today, such as the five-day work week and eight-hour workday.

CITY DOME

—
Ruth Ewan

The Beast

25 June – 18 September

Artist Biography

Often working collaboratively, Ruth Ewan has created music projects, guided walks, radio programmes, design projects, workshops and books. She has exhibited extensively within galleries and museums including current exhibitions at The Laing Gallery, Newcastle and Tate Liverpool (2022) and at the Cooper Gallery, Dundee (2021); Pitzhanger Manor and Gallery, London (2020); Yorkshire Sculpture Park, CAPC, Bordeaux and Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris (2019); Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2018); 32nd São Paulo Biennial (2016); Camden Arts Centre, London (2015); Tate Britain, London (2009 & 2014); Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen and Glasgow International (2012); Dundee Contemporary Arts and Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla (2011); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk (2010), the New Museum, New York (2009) and Studio Voltaire, London (2006).

She has also realised projects for The High Line, New York (2019); Edinburgh Art Festival (2018 & 2020); Glasgow Women's Library (2018); Create, London (2012); Folkestone Triennial (2011); Art on the Underground, London (2011); Frieze Projects, London (2009) and Artangel, London (2007 & 2013). In 2016 she was awarded the Arts Foundation Yoma Sasburg Award for Art in Urban Space.

Her work is in the collections of CAAC Seville, FRAC Champagne Ardenne, Folkestone Artworks, FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, McManus Galleries Dundee, Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, the Scottish Parliament and the Tate Gallery.

She is represented by Rob Tufnell, London / Venice.

CITY DOME

—
Ruth Ewan

The Beast

25 June – 18 September

The Beast Production Credits

Running time: 12 mins

Written by Ruth Ewan and Ian Saville

Sound design and music: Ross Downes

Diplodocus Carnegii voice: Keeley

Forsyth

Andrew Carnegie voice: Dave Anderson

Animation: Regina Ohak Additional

animation effects: Duncan Marquiss

Sound recording: Ronan Fay, Greendoor

Studios

Exhibition Production:

Design and construction: Dan Griffiths,

Jonny Lyons and Kit Craig

Sign writing: Erin Bradley-Scott

Geology curator: Dr Gillian McCay

With thanks to: Julie-Ann Delaney, Liv

Laumenech, Ron Baraff, Rivers of Steel

Archive, and Heinz History Center.

Production of *The Beast* was funded and supported by the University of Edinburgh Art Collection, and the work will go on to join the holdings of the institution for use in research,

teaching and display across a range of disciplines and sites. A research document has also been commissioned by the Art Collection, proposing to bring together the artist's research and production materials, with the aim of providing students and researchers an insight into Ewan's methodology.

This commission forms part of a body of work developed by the Desire Lines Steering Group, Edinburgh, exploring the value of art and culture to Edinburgh citizens and communities.

The geological items in the exhibition are from University of Edinburgh's Cockburn Geological Museum. The museum holds an extensive collection of geological specimens that reflect the whole spectrum of Earth science materials including minerals, rocks, meteorites and fossils, as well as historical objects such as maps and

photographs.

A transcript of the script is available to read in the City Dome.

The installation of *Silent Agitator* was supported by David Narro Associates.