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## Thomas Abercromby *John*

21 October – 23 December 2023

Film run time: 30 mins, 35 secs

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Titled in tribute to the artist's late father, *John* is a film installation by Glaswegian artist and curator Thomas Abercromby.

Thomas has collaborated with an all-working-class cast and crew to produce an experimental narrative film, which can be viewed on a centrally suspended dual-screen installation within the Hillside Gallery.

*John* juxtaposes details from childhood paintings made by Thomas' late father, John, with opulent gallery interiors, after-school dance classes, and painterly shots of urban locations from the artist's youth, where the edges of the city meet the rural landscapes beyond. These components are interwoven with behind-the-scenes moments that unveil the subjectivity and relationships among the cast and crew, offering insight into the labour and dedication of working-class creatives invested in the film's production and, more broadly, the art world as a whole.

The film explores social mobility, the profound process of claiming space, and the ways in which working-class people tell their own stories. It introduces us to the artist's father, John, through his childhood paintings: a mountainous landscape; a ruined castle by the sea; and a naively rendered bowl of fruit. As the narrative unfolds, we become familiar with John through a symphony of voices: John's great-niece Jodie, dancing; his sister Mary, grieving; and through conversations with the artist himself.

Both the audio and visual elements of the work play a significant role in exploring the distinctions between high and low culture. They traverse soundscapes ranging from classical music to low reverberating beats while moving through various scenes to question the conventional benchmarks for determining what is culturally valuable.

As it transitions from morning to evening, the film moves through many

settings. Much is set in and around North Glasgow, where the artist grew up. In other sections, a talented ensemble of working-class performers takes centre stage against a backdrop from which they have historically been excluded. They move through the opulent confines of the gallery interior, a space where labouring classes have often been relegated to the background of artworks, propping up stories in the character types of the worker, the beggar, or the merchant. Rarely are they given the authority to craft their own narratives or take centre stage as storytellers, an imbalance which is still pertinent within contemporary art today.

In the setting of the Hillside Gallery, the work challenges preconceived notions of who occupies artistic space. Vinyls are placed on each window, so that a golden glow fills the space. On the external wall is a painting created by Thomas' father, now getting his moment in the sun. This painting, one of just a number still in existence, holds immense importance to the artist, as one of the few objects Thomas owns belonging to his father.

COLLECTIVE

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Beyond their sentimental value, these paintings represent the beginning of Thomas' early art education and the profound bond between father and son. This connection has left an indelible mark on the artist's own creative development, from cherished memories of learning fundamental drafting skills to their visits to galleries and museums together – all amidst his father's struggle with addiction.

*John* delves into the ways in which individuals from working-class backgrounds continue to navigate and influence the art world. In the penultimate scene of the film, viewers witness Thomas hanging the newly framed painting on the gallery wall, paying homage to the creative potential inherent in people given the right circumstances.

The film seeks to resonate with audiences on an emotional and relatable level, offering a window into the complexities of working-class lives: their grief, their resilience and their significant contribution to the art world.

Satellites is Collective's development programme for emergent practitioners

based in Scotland. The 2022/23 participants are Thomas Abercromby, Rabindranath X Bhose, Kaya Fraser and Matty Rimmer.

### About the artist

Thomas Abercromby is a Glaswegian artist and curator based between the UK and Norway. He has been part of the programme teams at CCA Glasgow and Glasgow Sculpture Studios and is currently the Associate Curator at Grand Union in Birmingham. He has been involved in independent projects and residencies, collaborating with organisations including Glasgow International, British Council Scotland, and Raw Material Company. His artistic practice explores contemporary societal issues concerning the environment, race, sexuality, and social class; manifested as films, sculptures, installations, and radical pedagogical programmes that centre overlooked histories and narratives that challenge societal power structures. Recent projects include Rocabarraigh, The School of Abolition, and You're Never Done.

### Thanks to

The Cast and Crew, Andreas Brekstad, Stephen Kay, Daniel Hughes, Maria Fusco, Abigail Webster, Giulia Gentili, Casey Miller, Kirsty Abercromby, May McManus, Tony Stewart, Adebisola Ramsay, Rabi X Bhose, Matthew Rimmer, Kaya Fraser, James N Hutchinson, Alberta Whittle, Craig Manson, Annie Crabtree, Andrew Black, Louise Briggs, Eoin Dara, Beverley Bennett, Anne-Marie Copestake, Ruth Switalski, Jude Shirres, David Green, Glen Clydesdale, Sonya Kearins, Maria Kearins, Maxine O'Lone, Dance Kingdom and Hospitalfield, Stephanie Straine, Mark McQueen, Edinburgh Art Festival.