



Royal Conservatoire  
*of Scotland*

# What can Art Do?

Making Performance in Times of Crisis

can Art



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Introduction

# Introduction

By Dr Laura Bissell





'What can art do?' was one of the key questions that staff and students of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland were asking themselves in the lead up to the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) held in Glasgow from 31 October to 13 November 2021.

COP26 is over, but the challenges we face continue, and this publication invites the conversation to develop, and new ideas to emerge.

During these weeks, the eyes of the world were on Glasgow with many delegates, climate scientists, activists and public figures travelling to be in the city for three weeks of discussions and events. The Blue Zone on the banks of the River Clyde provided the arena for the formal negotiations for delegates and world leaders, while the nearby Green Zone based in Glasgow's Science Centre hosted the COP26 cultural programme.

A few miles away from the activity on Clydeside, at RCS we had our own programme of events and performances. These were varied in scale and scope: there was the **Climate Portals Festival**, **Hope Springs Eternal** (part of the Green Zone programme) **Vital Signs** at the Royal Concert Hall, the student-led **ETCH Festival**, daily **Climate Cafés** with visiting speakers and guests, and other satellite workshops working with young people to explore art and climate crisis happening in schools in East Dunbartonshire.

At the top of Renfrew Street, the campus was quiet, with many students and staff working from home or avoiding the travel disruption. The gold shipping container in the car park, our Climate Portal, had a steady stream of events and visitors, but there was a sense of things happening elsewhere.

They were. The **Climate Portals Festival** specifically focused on making connections beyond Glasgow, to other Portals around the world, but there was also a contemplative feel within the RCS community during these weeks in November. For those who live and work in Glasgow, the city felt different, and we reflected on what our artistic practices can do in the face of climate crisis.

This publication captures the engagement of members of the RCS community, students, staff and alumni, in the lead up to, and during, COP26. Key themes include art as climate action, performance as a space to hold intimacy, grief and care, and how creative practices can encourage the sense of connection, community and collaboration, which feels vital as we face the challenges of climate change.

The ambition of this publication is to archive the works that were created during COP26, and to capture the spirit, strengths and challenges of these projects. It aims to reflect on the conversations that were had and the questions that remain. We hope that this will provide some sense of the legacy of the at times frenzied activities of these weeks, and, importantly, collate the green resources presented during the festival into one accessible 'living' document. COP26 is over, but the challenges we face continue, and this publication invites the conversation to develop, and new ideas to emerge.



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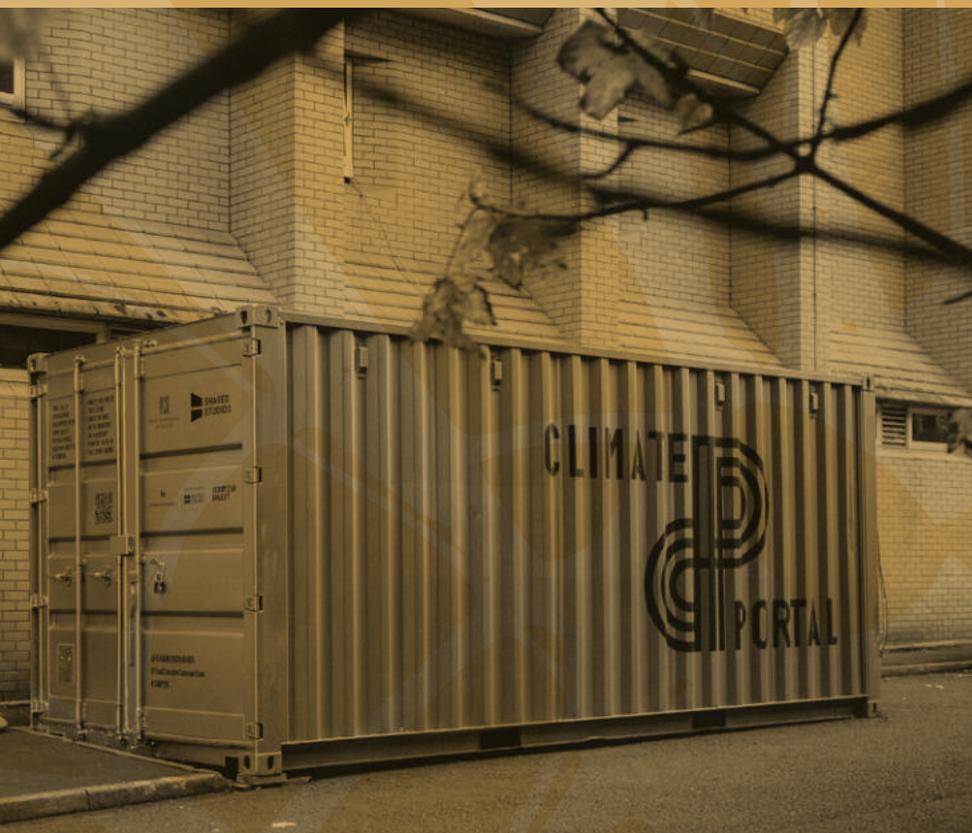
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Climate Portals  
Festival



# Climate Portals Festival

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Climate Portals Festival came to life during COP26 as a way of engaging people in Glasgow and across the world in intimate acts of connection, creation and conversation exploring climate crisis. The festival, funded by the British Council Creative Commissions and the Global Challenges Research Fund, consisted of two main events. The Climate Portals project which existed outside the Renfrew Street campus in the form of a ten-foot-tall shipping container, provided by creative partner Shared Studios, and equipped with the technology to connect performers and people in Glasgow to small audiences in other Portals across the world; and the accompanying Climate Cafés which saw members of the RCS community coming together to enjoy talks by climate-engaged artists and leaders, as well as sharing ideas, activities and conversations over tea and biscuits.



The Climate Portals Festival brought together RCS and three creative partners who helped to make the festival a reality: Shared Studios, Scottish Ballet and Harrison Parrott. The festival would not have been possible without its global partners in Bamako, Erbil, Gaza, Nakivale, Mexico City, and Kigali, with whom Glasgow had the chance to connect with during COP26.

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# Meet the Team

The Climate Portals Festival had a dedicated team to bring it to life. From feeding the creative vision, to supporting artists, to running the tech – here is the team that made the festival tick.



Glasgow Producer /  
**Caitlin Fairlie**

As producer, Caitlin was responsible for coordinating the four partners on the project, and delivering the day-to-day aspects of the Climate Portals Festival.

"As a result of the Climate Portals Festival, I was reminded of how important artistic framing is in accessing difficult and complex problems. I was witness to some truly beautiful moments of connection between participants here in Glasgow and around the world. These moments were framed by artists making an offer to participants to connect with them, sometimes without speech. These connections, in the context of our threatened planet and survival, felt incredibly important to make."

*-Caitlin Fairlie*



Assistant Producer /  
**Holly Worton**

Holly was assistant producer on the Climate Portals project, which included supporting Caitlin and the wider project partner team in the creation and delivery of the festival.

"From the Portal I have learned that small, unexpected connections have a large, lasting impact on the ways in which we see the world."

*-Holly Worton*



Portal Facilitator /  
**Sally Charlton**

Sally joined the team as a Facilitator in the Portal in Glasgow, holding spaces between people in Glasgow and beyond .

"What felt meaningful in the exchanges in the Portal was the smallness in the interactions; against the backdrop of the large scale and public nature of COP26, the Portal became a space for the soft, the quiet and the human."

*-Sally Charlton*



**Project Partner – Lead in Glasgow /  
Deborah Keogh**

**Programming Committee Member /  
Dr Laura Bissell**

Deborah is Knowledge Exchange Manager and Innovation Studio Project Director at RCS. Her key focus is on shaping and facilitating support for effective engagement between RCS and external communities. This happens through a wide range of programmes and initiatives focused on creative enterprise, project partnerships, innovation seed funding and public engagement.

Working alongside Sam McShane, Caitlin Fairlie, and Deborah Keogh, Laura Bissell formed a key part of the Climate Portals programming committee. The Committee worked together to agree logistics, the artistic exchange programme and wraparound events.

“The Portal offered something completely different as part of the COP26 programme, an opportunity to connect quietly and in a meaningful way with extraordinary communities around the world. A very unique and intimate medium for connection, communication and exchange on a small scale with big impact.”

*-Deborah Keogh*

**“The Climate Portal has provided moments of connection, curiosity and intimacy across time and space. The community of students, staff and alumni at RCS have been able to consider how their art-making can be an important part of the conversation around how we address climate crisis.”**

*Dr Laura Bissell*



**Programming Committee Member /  
Sam McShane**

Sam McShane played a key part in the Climate Portals Programming Committee. The Committee worked together to agree logistics, the artistic exchange programme and wraparound events.



**Features & Publication Development /  
Althea Young**

Althea wrote all the features and guided this publication development from its early stages, through to the design phase.

“Observing the diverse range of creative, critical and social responses to climate crisis offered by RCS students, staff and alumni, I have had the privilege of seeing the immense capacity of performance to engage in environmental issues and injustices with an intimacy, empathy and care that feels precious, yet rebellious in these times we are living in.”

*- Althea Young*

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**Climate Portals  
Festival: Meet  
The Team**

# RCS COP Task Force

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The RCS COP26 Task Force was formed as a short-life committee in February 2021 to act as a convening space for the various threads of activity focused on the themes of climate action and sustainability leading up to COP26 (and beyond) and taking place across the conservatoire's artistic programmes, as well as institutional operations.

Members of the Task Force represented staff and students from across a wide range of areas of the conservatoire. The Task Force met regularly and was a key disseminator of information across the community. The Task Force was also responsible for supporting the advancement of two key areas of engagement – the presence of RCS within the COP26 Green Zone and the development of the Green Room microsite.

In general terms it felt important both to capture and to share internally and externally the many different threads of socially-responsible and ground-breaking artistic practice which runs throughout RCS's curriculum as well as our research, doctoral and knowledge exchange portfolio and many of our research and doctoral staff are international specialists in areas around sustainability, ecology and environment. RCS's Contemporary Performance Practice Honours degree programme, for example, holds at its core a commitment to exploring to ecological and social function of performance and how performance itself can be 'an act of community'.

Through the Task Force a formal application was made for RCS to perform at COP26. The Hope Springs Eternal initiative was selected as the piece of work we would put forward. Developed through a partnership between RCS and the Scotland House international business hub network Hope Spring Eternal put climate change and in particular adaptation, resilience and nature, at the forefront of our focus for a series of newly-commissioned creative pieces which culminated in the live performance as part of COP26 of a sound and visual experience which included new music by Scottish composers and digital media which reflected Scotland's environment, landscape and nature.

We were delighted to be short-listed and then to be chosen to perform in the Green Zone.

## Janette Harkess

Director of External Relations  
Chair, RCS COP26 Task Force



Climate Portals  
Festival: RCS  
COP Task Force

# Meet the Creative Partners



**Shared\_Studios** is an arts and technology organisation fostering global connection through Shared\_Spaces like the Climate Portal. Shared\_Studios created and provided the Portal for the Climate Portals Festival and worked with global partners to provide materials and help curators organise their own Portal spaces to be ready for connection.

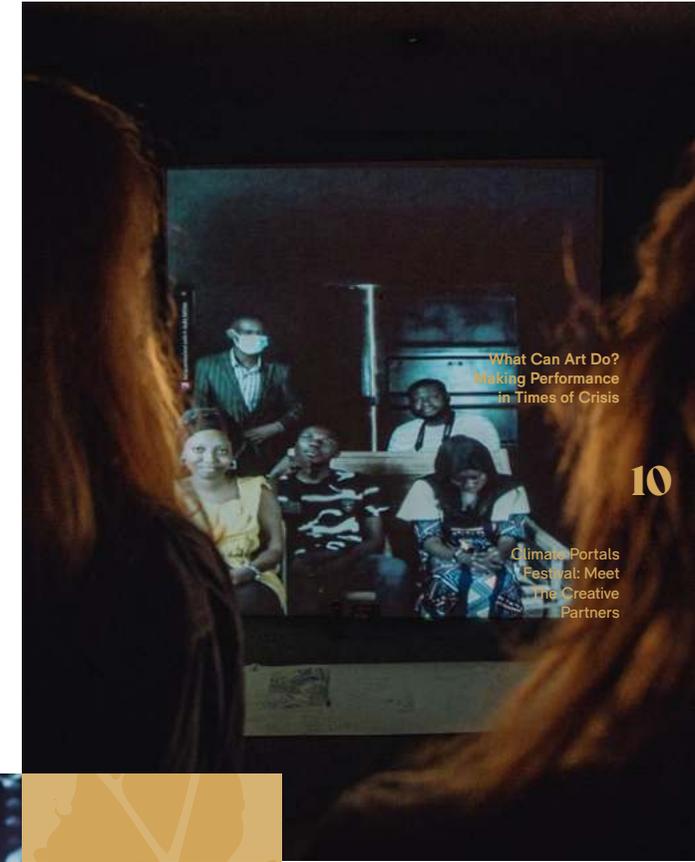
Brandon Ferderer, Director of Global Community at Shared\_Studios, said: "Over the past seven years, Shared\_Studios has leveraged technology to connect communities separated by distance and difference – using transformative conversational practices to address the world's most pressing issues. We were thrilled to be a part of Climate Portals, to connect communities around the world to exchange ideas and collaborate on solutions on the environment and sustainability. Climate Portals provided a space for people to listen and to learn from the lived experiences of communities, artists, experts and changemakers around the world."



**HARRISON PARROTT**

**HarrisonParrott** is an award-winning classical music management and creative agency and one of the world's leading arts management companies. They represent numerous professional musicians and tours while harbouring a commitment to sustainability and social action.

Henry Southern, Tours and Projects Manager at HarrisonParrott, said: "Creating truly distinctive and thought-provoking work has been part of HarrisonParrott's ethos for over 50 years. Climate Portals demonstrated our dedication to present projects that promote international cultural exchange, diversity and inclusivity, technological innovation and, of course, sustainability. We endeavour to embrace the challenge of climate change and we are proud of how Climate Portals addressed this pertinent topic through global conversations and artistic exchange. We hope that it inspired transformational change."



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Festival: Meet  
the Creative  
Partners





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Climate Portals  
Festival: Meet  
Our Global  
Partners

## SCOTTISH BALLET

Commissioned by



**Scottish Ballet** is Scotland's national ballet and dance company, hosting professional productions, providing classes for all ages and levels, and leading community initiatives. Scottish Ballet has made a commitment to sustainable action which you can view through their Scottish Ballet Green Action Plan.

The **British Council** Creative Commissions Fund was the catalyst for the development of the Climate Portals Festival, alongside several other projects, as part of the cultural programme in the build-up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties, COP26. Climate Portals was one of seventeen UK projects funded by the British Council to bring together art, science and digital technology to offer innovative, interdisciplinary and collaborative responses to climate change.

Rosanna Lewis, Creative Commissions lead, British Council says: "The Creative Commissions are an impressive set of unique and bespoke projects addressing climate-related challenges from around the world. Each project explores our relationship to ourselves, to one another, and to our environment. Through arts, science and digital technology, stories are brought to life and action is being taken by indigenous communities, young people, artists, researchers, and many more. The British Council is honoured to work with such talented and passionate partners to raise awareness of climate change and the role of arts and culture to address shared global challenges."



# Meet our Global Partners

## Bamako, Mali



**Aichatou Dembélé**

Aichatou Dembélé is a fashion entrepreneur and designer for the brand Farafina Designs which she has been managing for six years. She is also the co-founder of a start-up cultural and event engineering company called Domunday. She has a masters degree in cultural project management, a degree in fashion design and a degree in modern letters. She is a Bamako Portal curator at Shared\_Studios and a communication officer at Kabakoo Academies. She is passionate about art and culture and an agent of art in her spare time. She loves to learn and share her experiences.



**Talhata Z Toure**

Talhata Z Toure studied electrical and electronic engineering. During his studies, he worked with many non-profit organisations as an electronic trainer. Today, he serves as a Bamako Portal curator and a facilitator at Kabakoo Academies. Talhata speaks English, French, Sonhrai and Bamanakan. He loves reading books, testing new ideas and sharing knowledge.

## Erbil, Iraq



**Rami Khalaf**

Rami Khalaf is originally from Mosul City but resides in the Harsham IDP & Refugee Camp in Erbil. He has worked as a volunteer with UNICEF and with TDH Italy as an events coordinator. He is an experienced curator, connector and speaker on the matters of displacement in Iraq. He is a veteran rapper who uses his music as a tool to address social injustices in his community. Currently, Rami is pursuing his masters degree in computer engineering and IT at the University of Bahcesehir.



**Mohammed Burhan Zaidan**

Mohammed Burhan Zaidan is a university student in the Faculty of Administrative Technology, Department of Business Administration. He is a refugee in the Harsham IDP & Refugee Camp in Erbil. He has been volunteering in the camp with different non-profit organisations, and has a vast range of experience conducting surveys and collecting data. His hobbies are travelling and meeting people.

## Gaza, Palestine Territories



**Mira Bakri**

Mira is the Gaza City Portal curator and for the last twelve years, she has worked with various local and international organisations, including Mercy Corps, in programmes that target young women and men to help them build their capacities and establish networks with other youths from all over the world. Through the Portal, she played a vital role in building bridges between Gazans and youth all over the world. Mira has coordinated several hackathons providing the youth with guidance and a platform to share solutions to various challenges the world is facing including the Coronavirus crisis.

## Nakivale, Uganda



**Bourgeois Kajangu Jim**

Bourgeois Kajangu Jim is a Congolese refugee living in the Nakivale settlement in Uganda. He is a life coach, entrepreneurship mentor and curator at the Nakivale Portal, and a married father of one. His passion is education and farming and he studied computer applications at Nakawa Institute of Business Studies.



**Raphael Muvunga**

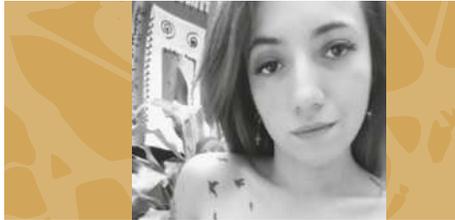
Raphael is a Congolese refugee living in the Nakivale refugee settlement in Uganda. He graduated from the Social Innovation Academy, where he studied entrepreneurship. He is now running a project called Opportuneege that helps refugees create their own opportunities. He is a mentor and a life coach who is passionate about improving people's lives and learning coaching skills. He loves sharing his experiences with others.

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Partners

## Mexico City, Mexico



**Ciela Herce**

Ciela Herce is from CDMX and has a degree in language interpretation from the Instituto Superior de Intérpretes y Traductores. Ciela's favourite word is *wanderlust* and this word also describes her well. She loves to travel and learn about cultures around the world, which is the principal reason she became a translator and serves her and her guests well in the Mexico City Portal.



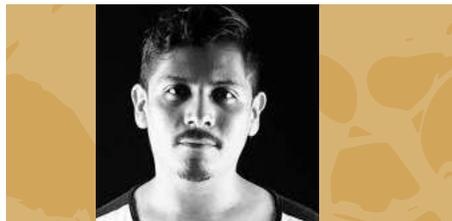
**Ezra Ruiz**

Ezra Ruiz recently earned his degree in Language Interpretation at the Instituto Superior de Intérpretes y Traductores in Mexico City where he studied linguistic mediation in English, French and Italian. His primary focus is on language education and he has worked as a teacher. His interests include poetry and history as well as engaging in wonderful conversations with people around the world.



**Samuel Ordoñez**

Samuel Ordoñez is a conference interpreter and art enthusiast with broad experience in energy, SAP, and engineering assignments. He is currently one of the Mexico City Portal curators and recently started a company that provides language interpretation through web conferencing technology.



**Tomás Ramírez**

Tomás Ramírez is an interpreter and translator who studied at the Instituto Superior de Intérpretes y Traductores in Mexico City. Tomás serves as the Portal Director for Mexico City in addition to being a freelance booking agent who has worked with several entertainment agencies including: Ache Entretenimiento, Filter Mexico, TAPE, Sicario, among others. He currently works with Noiselab and curated over 38 concerts and festivals in 2019, including digital and VR installations around CDMX.

## Kigali, Rwanda



**Eloi Mugabe**

Eloi Mugabe is a young Rwandan creative and a musical connoisseur who has worked in the Rwandan creative industry, and a curator at the Kigali Portal since 2017. He holds a bachelor degree in Business & Information Technology from the University of Rwanda. Eloi loves connecting with people from around the world.



**Olivier Dushimimana**

Olivier Dushimimana is a tech nerd and a happy father of one. He is multilingual and enjoys meeting new people. When he is not curating at Kigali Portal, he is busy with his full-time job as a project manager at a big solar energy company in Rwanda. In his free time, he likes volunteering and trying new things. Olivier is currently pursuing a bachelor degree in Business Administration at the University of the People. He is very kind, very courageous and eager to connect with people!



**Jay Nsanzi**  
**Shared Studios Programming Associate**

Jay supports the Shared Studios programming team across activations, social media, the global guest contributor community, and the global curator community. Jay is a 'jack of all trades' having previously worked in the humanitarian non-profit sector in Rwanda, Burundi, and Kenya, the arts and cultural sectors in Rwanda and Uganda, and the service sector in the Netherlands. With interests in human history, culture, literature, and art, whenever he gets a chance, Jay is on the road with new friends, exploring new cuisines, cultures, destinations, and new dance moves. He is a passionate curator who believes that breaking barriers and connecting people will lead us to a better, peaceful, 'united' world.

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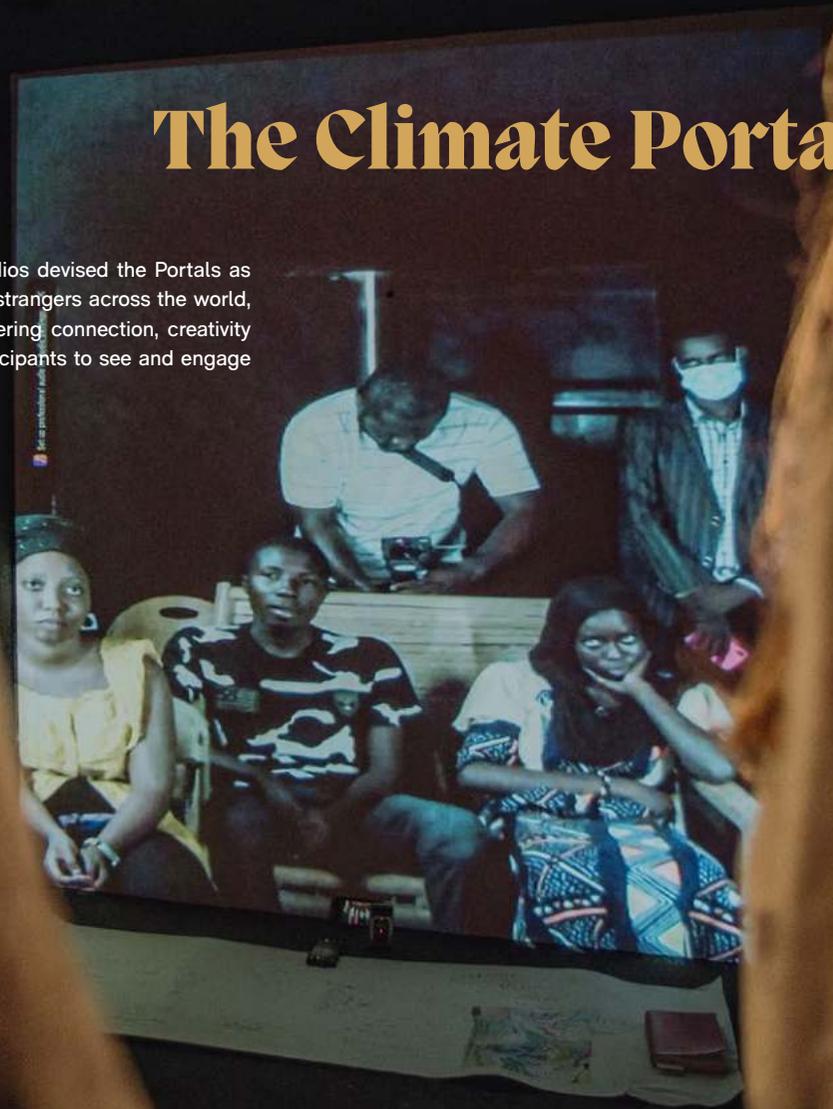
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Climate Portals  
Festival: The  
Climate Portal  
Project

The Climate Portal was host to a broad and innovative programme of performances, exchanges and events, from students, staff and alumni during this COP26 conference. As well as running during COP26, the Climate Portals Festival also included artistic and community exchanges in the lead up to the conference, open hours in which members of the public could meet with people in other global Portals, and a residency by artists through the Dear Green Bothy project at the University of Glasgow.

In 2014, Shared\_Studios devised the Portals as a way of connecting strangers across the world, with the goal of fostering connection, creativity and challenging participants to see and engage the world differently.

# The Climate Portal



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Project

# 2021 Climate Portal Programme

## Pre-Festival Lead Up

### RCS connects with Young Climate Activists in Milan

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland students and staff connected with young climate activists in Italy as part of the Youth for Climate 2021 event held in Milan. Glasgow participants had the chance to meet and engage in open discussion with Youth for Climate attendees including climate activists, youth delegates, fellow students and members of the UN Youth Advisory Committee for Climate Change.

### Portal Café! With Seán Talbot

Fourth-year BA (Honours) Contemporary Performance Practice artist Seán Talbot invited people across the globe to join him on an intimate coffee date. On the menu: a chat about coffee, how you like it, where you buy it, and its social and global impact. What do sustainability and climate change mean for coffee trade? Will that affect your cuppa?

### Global Poetry Exchange

Poet Teresa Horn performed her poems relating to the climate crisis to an audience of poets in Nakivale and Gaza, as part of a poetry exchange trading ideas about how to articulate the feelings of the climate crisis in a poetic form.



## Festival Line Up

### Siobhan Dyson

*Shot*, performed and scored by Siobhan Dyson, this film work explored the effects humans have had on the oceans and the horror of a potential future if these behaviours don't change.

### William English

Glasgow-based photographer William English created a series of "everyday" images that can be commonly seen across Glasgow. This photographic series acted as a conversation starter for audience members, both in Glasgow and across Portals, reflecting on who is being invited to speak about the climate crisis, and who is being left out.

### Dorothee Nys

The festival kicked off with an *a cappella* performance by three women, co-written around climate change and women's perspectives. The work was created by participating performers in the Portal, facilitated by Dorothee and then performed to an audience in Bamako, Mali.

### Connor Bristow

*Meditation on the Trees (A Breath of Life)* was a musical meditation about our vitally important trees. The work was a largely improvisatory piece that looked to explore the idea of trees and their importance to life. The piece was performed on the flute, an instrument that relies completely on the magnificent air that our trees give to us.

### Joana Carvahlas

A new musical performance using the things we see as waste. With music being created from plastic, this performance asked questions about how we might reuse and repurpose the materials we have created, and was performed to an audience in Erbil, Iraq.

### Kaiya Bartholomew

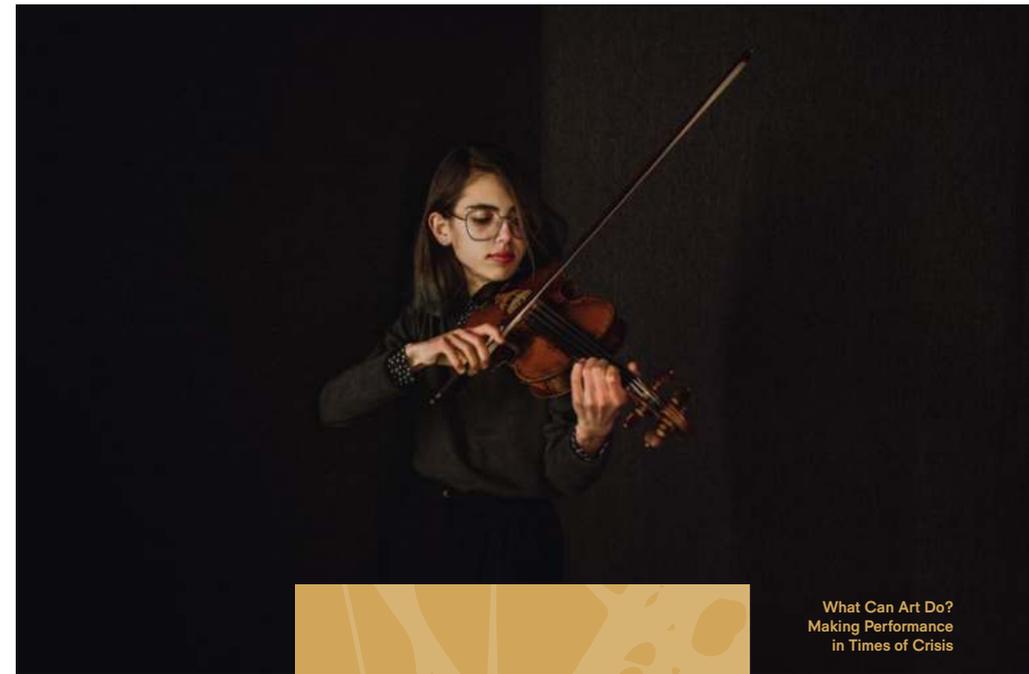
Accompanied by three female members of her family, Kaiya performed a collection of choral and harmonised songs exploring the climate and our calls for action, be that climate action, celebratory unity, or community support and resilience in times of adversity. Kaiya and her family performed this work to an audience in Kigali, Rwanda and Mexico City, Mexico.

### Laura González

*Breath At The End of The world* was an intimate performative intervention, which considered what we can do to make the unbreathable breathable again. The event was meditative, an act of communal consideration and awareness.

### Stasi Schaeffer & Jenny Knotts

This new composition was performed to audiences in Erbil, Bamako, Gaza and Nakivale all on the same day. It explored questions such as - How can we rewrite the story of humankind's relationship with nature from one of exploitation and destruction to one of love and harmony, and most importantly, hope?



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### Sara Cook

Sara Cook created conversations around natural landscapes to remind us of nature's places that need protecting and preserving. Using her cello, Sara improvised based on conservation and improvisational movement from participants. It was performed to an audience in Gaza.

### Tom McFadyen

Tom presented a piece which explored a unique format of visual storytelling. He combined an active engagement with nature, with the process of data bleeding - the art of distorting a file's data to produce glitch-like results. This piece was performed to an audience in Gaza.

### Sally Charlton & Althea Young

*Intimate Infinities* existed as an audio piece for two individuals, one in each Portal, to experience together. Audience members were invited to sit and watch each other as they were guided through a process of acknowledging the space between and considering the complexity of another human life and its surrounding landscape.



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### Lawrence Boothman

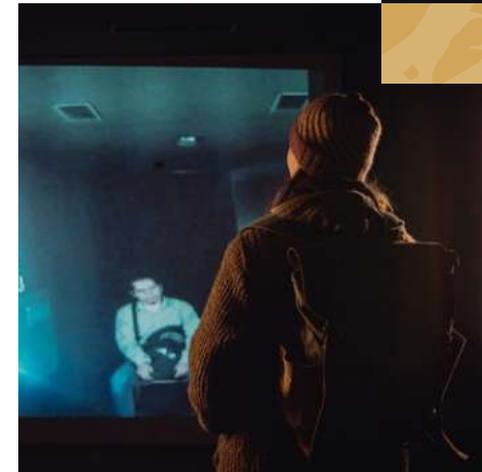
This performance was an intimate production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, which explored ecology, gender politics, modern slavery, and what it is to be an Unwoman (a term used by author Margaret Atwood in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*). It was performed to an audience in Nakivale and Erbil.

### Julienne Restall & Sophie Suliman

Julienne Restall and Sophie Suliman performed *Landfill* - their take on consumerism and waste in the West. By connecting to the Global South, they commented on the 'throw-away' nature of capitalist society and its disconnection from the environment and impact on the climate.

### Laura Bissell & David Overend

People were invited to experience an audio walk down Hope Street, then to listen to an audio walk created in Mexico City on their return journey to the Portal. Participants then entered the Portal to meet someone in Mexico City who had also been listening to the sounds of both places.

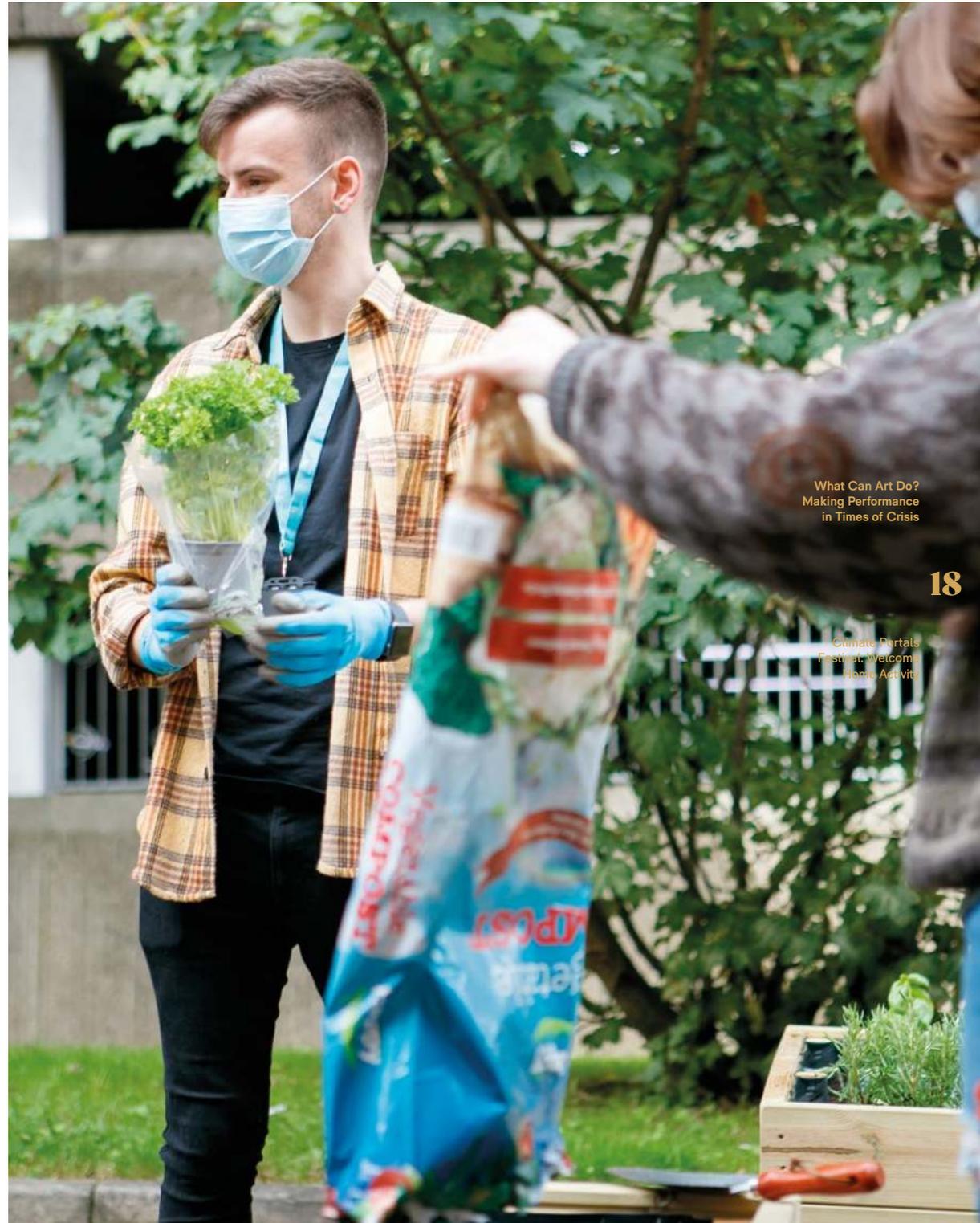


# Welcome Home Activity

Sustainability was centre stage in September 2021 during RCS's Welcome Week for new and returning students.

A series of 'open hour' sessions took place at the Climate Portal where students could drop in then enjoy free Fairtrade and organic tea, coffee (from the ethical brand Grumpy Mule) and hot chocolate from the visiting Airstream coffee bar from Dunblane Coffee.

Also during Welcome Week, in a fun and interactive activity, green-fingered students got to grips with four wooden planters outside the Climate Portal. The RCS Students' Union helped students plant a variety of fast-growing herbs and salad leaves, including basil, parsley, dill, coriander, kale, chard and pak choi.



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Festival: Welcome  
Home Activity

# Climate

# Portals /

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## Pedestrians passing by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland may have noticed something a little out of the ordinary on their journey through Glasgow during the COP26 Conference.

*If you had passed through the lane off Cowcaddens Road between the 25 October and the 12 November, you too would have seen the large gold shipping container placed beside the Conservatoire's Alexander Gibson Opera School. If you had stopped and read the black lettering rippling across the side of the metal structure, you would have seen the words Climate Portal. Standing ten feet tall, and gleaming metallic in the autumn rain and sun, the Climate Portal was hard to miss. Between its shining exterior and hidden interior, the Portal created an intriguing presence, beckoning passers by to stop and investigate its contents. Serving as an interactive digital space which connected people in Glasgow through live-stream video to people in other Portals across the world, on any given day the Climate Portal, created by festival partner Shared\_Studios, hosted a broad and diverse programme of artistic exchanges, meetings and performances.*

On this particular day in Glasgow, November 11th, the air is crisp and the sun is beaming. Inside the Portal it is dim and warm, the carpeted walls gently muffling the sound of blustering wind, passing traffic and operatic voices emanating from nearby practice studios.

In the quiet of this hidden space sits a person, whose face is softly illuminated by the glow of a life-sized screen that covers the entire surface of the Portal's far wall. On the screen they see another person, who is also sitting, facing them. While the scale of the screen in the Portal might give the sense that this person is only a few feet away, they are in fact 3,443.9 miles away, across space, across deserts and forests, across the river Danube, which separates the borders of Hungary, Slovakia and Austria. They live in a refugee camp in Erbil, Iraq.

As they sit facing one another, a disembodied, echoing voice arrives into the Portal, first in English, and then in Arabic, through an interpreter also in Erbil. The voice reassures the participants that they do not have to say anything.

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Feature:  
Climate Portals /  
Intimate  
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*Don't worry, you don't have to say anything  
All you have to do is look, see.*

*Sat across from you is another living person  
As you can see them, they can see you  
as well.*

A nervous awkwardness teeters in the air as they try to observe one another in detail - try to see the colour of each other's eyes.

*Notice how you're feeling, looking into  
their eyes*

*Do you feel uncomfortable?  
Or awkward?*

*Do you have the urge to laugh?  
Or do you want to look away?  
Or not be looked at?*

*How does it feel to be looked at?  
To be observed and noted in detail  
Is this feeling unfamiliar to you?  
Do you think they feel the same way?*

Gentle laughter bubbles up as the pair acknowledge their giddiness with an exchange of silly faces, a mutual agreement to let their respective barriers drop. From this release of tension, the fog of apprehension clears like a deep exhale to reveal a new kind of atmosphere that was not there before, or maybe was all along, under the surface, suppressed beneath the weight of social formality, waiting to be freed by a moment of unfiltered human connection. The voice asks them to consider a body.

*What is the balance of their body?  
This body made up of 60 percent water  
Does it move like a body made up of 60  
percent water?  
Is it warm?  
A warm body  
Is it precarious like your own body?  
Maybe you can imagine its gravity  
This warm, and precarious body*

And the voice asks them to consider a soul.

*Maybe,  
If you are the kind of person that believes  
these things  
You may even believe it has a soul  
And if you could look hard enough  
See close enough  
Imagine deeply enough  
enough that you feel yourself in them  
And them in you  
If you try to stretch yourself 3443.9 miles  
across space  
If you reach far enough  
And they reach back  
You might be able to grab hold of them,  
And them of you  
Your gravities pulling you together  
until you find yourselves meeting somewhere  
in the middle  
maybe, right in the middle*



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They reach, and reach back. Stretch and grab hold. In, and within, and without. And between. And the voice asks them to be with one another.

*You float on the river Danube  
Which separates the borders of Slovakia,  
Austria and Hungary  
And you are next to them  
With them  
For a moment  
And you see them, really see them  
And they see you.*

And again, the voice asks them to see one another.

*Take a moment to look at the person sitting  
across from you  
The person sitting in a chair, in a room  
3443.9 miles away  
Can you see the colour of their eyes through  
the screen or is it hard to tell  
hard to tell  
From this far away  
This far away body*

The voice does not return again, as the music fades. There is a beat of silence before the metal of the Portal door clangs and the sharp light of the sun cuts into the dimness, bringing the sounds of the world back again. The bustle of busy traffic, humming vents and harmonic voices; the thrum of 598,830 individual human lives.

Amidst the cacophony of a bustling Glasgow full of important political figures and international delegates, amidst the performances of epic orchestral concerts, towering light installations and drumming protests, one might find it easy to think of this private interaction as but a drop in the vast ocean that is COP26. What is the value of an intimate moment in times of climate crisis? In a world that demands urgent and practical solutions, that demands more than ever before that we come together in number, on a global scale to address climate injustice, what does it mean for just a few individuals to share a moment of connection, just between themselves?

'These intimate moments of performance put us on level ground with other people and create an empathy that is exactly what is needed for us to support each other and have common goals globally. Because if you don't understand someone, and you don't know what position they're in, it's much easier to disregard the life that they're living or the climate struggle that they're going through.' says Climate Portal artist and Fourth-year BA (Hooors) Contemporary Performance Practice student Kaiya Bartholomew.

**"Because if you don't understand someone, and you don't know what position they're in, it's much easier to disregard the life that they're living or the climate struggle that they're going through."**

*Kaiya Bartholomew*

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For performance maker Kaiya, connection and communication was key in her restrained and evocative *a capella* work, in which she, accompanied by her aunt and grandmother, sang together in harmony to individuals in other Portals across the world. The performance was offered as an exchange, inviting people in other Portals to share their own songs with Kaiya and her family. Although Kaiya was initially uncertain as to whether she would receive any responses to her call-out, what resulted from the offer was a lively and moving exchange of singing, in which, despite the absence of any translator, spoken word or shared language, a dialogue came to life. Kaiya's performance never speaks of climate crisis directly, taking instead a more human-to-human oriented focus. Yet, amongst the performances created for the Climate Portal, her work is not alone in attempting to engage audiences in an embodied experience that transcends the solution-orientated and greenwashed rhetoric that often surrounds the climate crisis conversation.

In Laura González's guided meditation, *We Are Air*, facts about decreasing air quality weave harmoniously into the process of meditative breathing, tying the experience of breathing in this moment into the knowledge of our own decline both present and future. It is clear from the Climate Portals Festival that one of the key strengths of the artists engaging in the climate conversation, is the ability to breathe life into the grave facts and statistics that (while intended to offer clarity) more often present inconceivable numbers that obscure the scale and weight of individual human lives, and deaths. By bringing an awareness to our breath, as it is now, Laura asks participants to feel the weight of their own life as it sits amongst the apocalyptic numbers. She says "I feel that very often, climate change up to a point is related with fact. You know the "2 degrees," the "1.5, by 2050". All of these things feel very abstract but how do we feel that they affect us, already affect us? What does it feel like when you touch those kinds of facts? Or when those facts touch you?"

When an artist like Laura is successful in giving weight to the facts; when they make the numbers tangible, hold them out in front of you and you finally feel what it's like to touch those facts and for those facts to touch you... then what? Where do we channel these excavated fears? We have allowed crisis to enter our bodies but now what do we do with our resulting panic and our grief? On one hand, Laura says she had had 'hope devising this piece, that feeling what is already here and will happen very soon, in terms of the atmosphere, will give us a bodily memory that will make us truly act.' but upon discussing what it means to 'truly act' she added "I think it's really interesting that we understand that we are going to suffer, going to suffer climate change. This is not by negotiation in the Hydro. It's going to happen."

This friction that emerges in many of the Climate Portal works, between the emotional embodiment of climate crisis, the amplified hunger for action and, still, an overwhelming sense of powerlessness, is one of the most complicated and moving aspects of the festival, and in a microcosmic way represents a wider societal cycle of fear, hope and disempowerment that always seems to be circling the drain of climate crisis. Apathy: the result of the belief that our care and grief will never bring in change, and so is experienced only in vain. While it may be tempting to avoid this rocky thread of the climate conversation, out of fear of dipping into nihilism, it feels important to acknowledge the dilemma many artists face when approaching making work about climate change - what does performance offer in the effort against climate crisis, if not solutions? Furthermore, what is the value of encountering the full emotional spectrum of our climate experience, if these encounters do not effect significant global change?

"I don't think that there is a single solution available anymore." says Kaiya, 'I think what it's going to be now, it's going to be a 'living with' or 'coping with' or trying to build a support network that allows people at the forefront of this climate crisis, people in places that are struggling with the direct impact of it, to be understood, and supported by people and places that are not currently facing direct impacts in the same way. Performance is always about communicating commonality, or finding commonality and empathy with each other. I think that's what feels important. I'm not going to be able to do more than that."

While Kaiya's sentiment here acknowledges a certain sense of futility in the face of climate change, it also highlights one of the most essential values of art in times of crisis - to provide the circumstances for connection, circumstances necessary to begin to have those affected by climate catastrophe be heard, understood and supported. Perhaps we are not going to be able to do more than that, but maybe that is enough: to see and be seen in a time where facts, statistics and politicians render individual lives invisible.

It feels important to acknowledge the dilemma many artists seem to face when approaching making work about climate change - what does performance offer in the effort against climate crisis, if not solutions?



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"I think sometimes with problems, when we communicate them, we're not always looking for a solution. Sometimes we just want to be heard. So I think sometimes that can be enough. And then the idea that there's a connection and other people feel the same way, and you're not alone. There is a great bulk of humanity, motoring together to try and effect change."

Clad in sky-blue suits and adorned with clouds, Zeo Fawcett and Oskar McCarthy's improvised viola and voice duet asks nothing more of its audience than for a space to be heard. Glasgow rushes by, unaware that inside the Portal a small opera of feelings rages before an audience of two. This opera, by Stasi Schaeffer, makes no attempt to convince or present something concrete; rather the work finds its home in the precarity of human emotion, a conversation between players floating and spiking between climate grief, hope and anger, in a dark box where what cannot yet be put into words is shared through sound.



**"I think sometimes with problems, when we communicate them, we're not always looking for a solution. Sometimes we just want to be heard."**

*Stasi Schaeffer*

The slipstream of the Portal has a way of quickly moving beyond the cerebral into an atmospheric world where the more bodily, inarticulate experiences of climate crisis come to the fore. RCS MA Opera graduate and performer Oskar McCarthy reflects on a particular interaction in the performance shared with individuals in Gaza. "It was like they'd been in the rehearsal room with us. They just listed feelings and emotions and associations that just kind of made our jaws drop. It didn't need any more didacticism. It didn't need any narrative isolation. It just was a moment in time that was shared fantastically."

In order to appreciate the significance of these intimate interactions, we must first rethink how we measure the value of the impact we make on audiences. In ecologically engaged performance, the pressure placed on higher audience numbers and inspiring direct climate action appears to mirror a wider model for how society as a whole tends to prioritise the most macroscopic approach to the climate conversation. If the value of a performance is measured like the value of a conference, measured only by the very numbers that make the gravity of a single human life seem inconsequential, the vital and affecting capacity of the arts to facilitate empathy on a human-to-human scale becomes limited. What if we allowed the weight of a single human life to take up more space than an auditorium? How then might our art change and grow into its fullest capacity for care?



Many of the artists who have made work for the Portal see their performance as a process of confrontation and care. Almost palliative in nature, these works dealing with climate crisis embrace the unresolvable, encouraging an uncensored, unrepressed acknowledgement of our feelings surrounding climate crisis. Taking it a step further, they ask us not only to feel these feelings for ourselves but to try to feel with our bodies the complexity of the lives sitting across from us, lives with the same wealth of grief, hope and uncertainty. All this, not necessarily to end climate change, but to make climate death, well, more liveable. After all, as Laura González says, “We are breathing the same air.”

Laura adds “It’s kind of like a pile of stuff that you don’t deal with,” and asks ‘what would it be like to deal with these facts, to truly embody and say this has affected me, this thing that’s out there is actually here too, in the body?’

There exists, potentially, a fear that stems from a Western-centric, or maybe even patriarchal, culture around grief and action; that to open oneself to the full extent of one’s grief we must accept defeat, that to acknowledge and mourn our loss, present and especially future, is antithetical to the hope that propels us towards action and solution. If we cling to the idea that accepting loss ratifies that loss totally, making it irreversibly true, then we are inclined never to look our loss in the face. We do not cry out. We do not connect. We do not offer up our grief, and as a result, we do not make space for others who share our fears and share our losses to do the same. While we are encouraged by greenwashed adverts and performative politicians’ campaigns to believe that our grief and fear named out loud will be the end of us, that these intimate moments of connection aren’t enough, the wisdom of the artist and the activist and anyone who has ever fought for a cause will tell us something different, that to allow grief is to make space also, for hope. When we step out of this golden shipping container, back into the bustling streets of Glasgow, what will we carry into the world? Even if it is only a memory, has something shifted in us? Does something small but vital exist in us, where it did not before?

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**“I won’t forget it. It is unforgettable  
to have done something like that.”**

*Oskar McCarthy*



# Feel Field: Sound and Vision Walks at the Climate Portal

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Feature:  
*Feel Field:*  
Sound and Vision  
at the Climate  
Portal



Using sounds, images and impressions of the natural world captured during a residency at Inshriach Bothy near Aviemore, artists Paria Goodarzi's and Francisco Llinas-Casas's *Feel Field* installation explored our sense of place and dislocation, of intimacy and distance from what we call the natural world, and of walking as a social and political act.

*Feel Field* was a partnership project with University of Glasgow, RCS, the Bothy Project and Shared\_Studios, and drew inspiration from the Walking Publics/Walking Arts research team. It formed part of the Dear Green Bothy programme, which creates spaces for researchers, artists, and communities to respond creatively and critically to the challenges of the ecological crisis.

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Feature:  
*Feel Field*:  
Sound and Vision  
at the Climate  
Portal

# The Climate Café

The Climate Café, part of the wider Climate Portals Festival, was a daily event, taking place between 11am and 12noon, where the community of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland could gather over a cuppa and a biscuit to hear speakers from the arts, education and community present insights around the ecological, natural and climate-engaged ideas that shape their practices. Café presentations were followed by questions, and a group discussion about the topic and provocations offered by the speaker.

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# Meet the Climate Café Team

"My take-away is that this was a really fun and rewarding way to discuss important issues and be inspired by what people are doing, and we are all looking forward to figuring out how to continue this as a monthly activity at RCS."

*Dr Emily Doolittle*



Organiser /  
**Dr Emily Doolittle**

Co-organiser of Climate Café / Together with the rest of the organising team, Emily ran a daily Climate Café, with a series of speakers, followed by informal discussion with RCS students and staff and visitors.



Organiser /  
**Dr Sarah Hopfinger**

Co-organiser of Climate Café / Sarah collaborated with Dr Emily Doolittle and Dr Stuart MacRae to create a series of provocations and conversation starters around art and climate change, which sparked thoughts and reflections about what art can do when it comes to ecological emergency.

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"Working at The Climate Café reminded me that the simple things - talking to people, having a cup of tea, sewing, knitting - are vital ways for us to meaningfully connect with ourselves, each other and wider ecological questions."

*Dr Sarah Hopfinger*

# 2021 Climate Café Programme

**Sapna Agarwal**  
Independent Artist

Sapna is part of the Hope Street feminist collective with roots in the Woodlands area of Glasgow. Its four members are artists, designers, writers and sociocultural agitators; two are from minority ethnic backgrounds and all are devoted to growing a Dear Green Place fit for the 21st century, with wellbeing of people and planet at its heart. Sapna Agarwal uses play, stories and everyday chat to explore social justice and climate issues, working primarily with young people and intergenerational groups. She is an artist, educator, community activist, facilitator, organiser and someone who loves to stop and talk.

**Anne Guzzo**  
Locust Opera

*Locust* is a one-hour chamber opera that has been performed in the United States and Morocco. The operatic murder mystery tells the story of the Rocky Mountain Locust, an iconic species whose swarms blackened the skies of North America in the 1800s but suddenly disappeared forever at the turn of the 20th century. In this opera, the ghost of the Rocky Mountain Locust haunts a scientist until he can figure out how her kind was driven to extinction. The opera was written in collaboration between Anne and an entomologist, Jeffrey Lockwood, who is also the librettist.

Anne Guzzo was joined by other members of the creative team at the Café session.



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### Scott Morrison

Scott is responsible for the Environmental Responsibility work at Sage Gateshead and is a member of the Green Arts Initiative Steering Group, co-founder of the award-winning Scottish Classical Sustainability Group, and co-author of the Scottish Classical Music Green Guide 2021. He is especially interested in the role the arts can play in creating a just transition towards net-zero.

Scott spoke about the formation of the Scottish Classical Sustainability Group and writing the Green Guide; how and why the group was formed and the kinds of changes required to make to the sector. Scott also led a discussion and informal exercise in thinking about changes in the sector to build towards sustainability.

### Neil Banas & Jen Argo

Neil Banas, an oceanographer and computer modeller, and Jen Argo, an artist and arts educator, are partners in a new project called Mapping Ocean Change through Art, which aims to weave together scientific and personal narratives of seascape change, migration, and adaptation, and make visible the hidden lives and worlds of the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans under climate change. Neil spoke about tiny zooplankton, how they knit the oceans together, and how expanding his practice from computer modelling to origami modelling has raised new questions in his research (participants folded their own plankton origami while they chatted). Jen shared thoughts about mapping, migration, and her practice as a science-engaged artist.

### Fashion Revolution Team

This Climate Café took the form of a 'stitch & bitch' session. Participants brought along garments in need of repair and needles and thread were provided for those who didn't have them. This Climate Café was also for guests who had nothing to stitch but wanted to hear more about the topic. Fashion Revolution is the world's largest fashion activism movement, formed after the Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh in 2013, which killed over 1,100 people. Fashion Revolution campaigns for a clean, safe, fair, transparent and accountable fashion industry through research, education, collaboration, mobilisation and advocating for policy change. Fashion Revolution is a global movement with national offices and voluntary teams in 90 countries, including in Scotland where the team campaign year-round across industry change, policy change, education and citizen activism. [www.fashionrevolution.org](http://www.fashionrevolution.org) and [www.fashionrevolution.org/europe/Scotland](http://www.fashionrevolution.org/europe/Scotland)





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### Michael Begg

Experimental Sound Artist

Michael Begg is an experimental sound artist and composer based in East Lothian, Scotland. He is presently Associate Artist in Residence at Edinburgh's Queen's Hall and is a past winner of a New Music Scotland Award. He is the musical director of Black Glass Ensemble; a fusion of classical and electronic musicians, and performs and records with Fovea Hex.

His most recent work, *LIGHT WATER IS BLACK WATER*, is a commission from the Ocean ARTic partnership in which he worked with climate data modellers and marine biologists to create new, data-driven compositions to raise awareness of climate and environmental changes arising from diminishing Arctic Sea ice.

### Sylvia Gray

Sustainability and Climate Change Officer at East Dunbartonshire Council

Sylvia has worked in sustainable development for over 20 years and is currently the Sustainability and Climate Change Officer at East Dunbartonshire Council, where she collaborates with a broad range of partners to produce and implement climate change policies and other related policy agendas. She has served on various boards including Climate Ready Clyde and the Sustainable Scotland Network, which she chaired for 4 years.

Sylvia is also passionate about sustainability in her non-work life; her interests include growing food at Sandy Road Community Garden in Partick, where she is a long-standing member of the management committee. She was a Volunteer Team Leader in the Green Zone at COP26.

**Alex South**  
Independent Artist

Alex South is a clarinetist, improviser and composer, currently carrying out doctoral research into humpback whale song considered as a music-like phenomenon. Supervised by composer Dr Emily Doolittle at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and biologists Luke Rendell and Ellen Garland at the University of St Andrews, Alex uses quantitative and qualitative methods drawn from bioacoustics and zoömusicology to study temporal aspects of humpback song structure, performance and evolution, and creates and performs new music informed by these studies. He is seeking to develop an understanding of how the use of animal song in human music can encourage an ‘animalcentric anthropomorphism’ in opposition to anthropocentrism.

**Paria Goodarzi and  
Francisco Llinas-Casas**  
Collaborating Artists

Paria Goodarzi and Francisco Llinas-Casas are visual artists and community art practitioners. Their work revolves around cultural and political transfers and translocations, the ideas of the contemporary human condition, cultural identity and political issues that resulted in an ambivalent coexistence of civilised life, conflict, and displacement.

Their work responds to such contemporary, cultural, and political aporias by examining the hybrid condition of our society and the processes of formation, performance, and representation of identity through a multidisciplinary praxis that often takes the shape of collaborative, participatory and socially engaged artworks.

Paria and Franc completed an artist residency in the Portal week commencing 15th November for the “Being Human” festival.



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# The intersection of Performance

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Feature:  
The Intersection  
of Performance  
and Scientific  
Data

# and Scientific Data

The intersection of performance and scientific data was a recurring point of conversation amongst staff and students attending the weekly Climate Cafés.

Sparked by the insights of several presenting artists whose practices involve encountering and interpreting scientific data as performance material, Climate Café attendees exchanged a wealth of musings and ideas on artist-scientist cross collaboration, the draws for artists to working with scientific data, and the ethics of translating the data of the natural world into a creative product for an audience. At the centre of this discussion, topically, was a question about what these creative practices, which harness scientific data, offer in the quest for deeper climate conservation. Whether it be transcribing whale song, or musically notating climate decline, the works of artists and researchers engaging in these practices help to tell a story about the climate and its creatures which may vitally change how we understand and sense climate catastrophes and the living beings they affect.

Creatives across many disciplines find intrigue and inspiration in not only the sights and sounds of the natural world, but also in the numbers, graphs, and facts that give them shape and meaning for humans. Despite the stereotype of the free flowing, meandering creative, there appears to be a natural draw for many artists, particularly musicians, towards stimulus which offers a way of codifying nature: 'Exposing' it, 'contextualising' it, or even, in the case of the composer, 'notating' it. Numbers are woven through music and form the basis in Western classical practices for its notation. In this way scientific data becomes a bridge for composers to interact with and highlight the patterns of the natural world. "When the data begins there, it's a spreadsheet, and so it's a mystery that I don't know, and no one knows what it's going to sound like when it comes through", shares Climate Café speaker Michael Begg.

**“My processes tend to involve a means whereby I can try and make as authentic as possible a representation of the subject... which comes down to a basic mistrust of my own abilities to be sensitive to the truth.”**

Sound artist and award-winning composer Michael’s work emerges largely from a series of data processing software instruments he designed, called Witness Engines. The Witness Engines, Begg’s website reads, “consume live, real time and archival data and transform the data into musical information”. Michael has sonified data relating to lunar and solar eclipses, weather stations, air quality, earthquakes and arctic ice melt. He came to Climate Café to discuss his work *Light Water* is *Black Water* which was developed during residency with the Ocean ARTic partnership, in collaboration with a team of climate scientists based at AWI, Germany, alongside scientists affiliated with MASTS, and Blue-Action EU, to input arctic climate factors to the Witness Engines, creating a piece of music that could articulate future glacial and climate decline. Michael’s artistic relationship to data is one of great reverence: his philosophy towards working with data places great importance on honouring the true voice of that data to the best of his ability. “My processes”, says Michael “tend to involve a means whereby I can try and make as authentic as possible a representation of the subject... which comes down to a basic mistrust of my own abilities to be sensitive to the truth.”

For Michael, there is a sense of mystery and wonder in blindly following the data. If you were to imagine the factors that he works with - sea ice coverage, air pressure, level of precipitation- input into the Witness Engines to result in a piece of music, what do you imagine that music might sound like? In the context of climate decline, we might expect drama and discordance, as Michael describes his expectations “jumps up and swooping descents, that it be all over the place and show that it’s really kind of fragile; increasingly uncoupled madness; a chaotic scene emerging as the climate crumbles”. But the data, in time, subverted expectations. If you try to compress the vast range of differently proportioned and measured climate factors that the scientists at AWI work with, into that of a musical scale, notated side by side, some factors that we as humans consider monumental, take the two-metre rise in ocean level (which equals only to the height of a tall man), in the grand scheme, create only relatively subtle shifts musically.

However, the unpredictably simmering, drone-like atmosphere of the resulting piece does not lessen its impact. The structure of the music takes on that of something much more realistic, and insidious. Rather than peaks and valleys suggesting sudden and catastrophic crisis, the sound teeters between a sense of stability and precarity, always threatening to lose form, continually hinting at something horrible to come. As Michael reflects, “We’re not on a roller coaster and that suddenly struck me as being much more authentic and truthful in a way that I could never have forecast - that we tend to think of our position here as being the big defining factor as to whether it’s going to work or not. That any changes that we put in place have got these huge dramatic impacts upon the world: really, it’s not the case. You know, our survival is dependent upon this tiny, little, possible fluctuation and so many environmental elements. If it tips over one and a half degrees, we’re in trouble.”

Also investigating the relationship between music and natural sciences, is the RCS doctoral student and clarinetist Alexander South, who presented at the Climate Café, discussing his PhD research into humpback whale song and its relation to human music. Alex collaborates with other musicians as well as whale biologists at St Andrews, Luke Rendle and Ellan Garland, to explore ‘music-like aspects’ and ‘non-music-like aspects’ of whale vocalisations and the historical relationship between whale song and activism. In Alex’s work, ‘data’ comes in a different set of forms. From studying the vocal range of various whale species and notating rhythms or lack thereof in whale calls, Alex, through musical interpretation, seeks to better understand what the perceived similarities and differences between human song and whale song reveal about our definition of music, our inclination to anthropomorphise other creatures, and the power of music activism to engage audiences’ hearts and minds in causes like the fight against whaling.

For both these artists, musical ideas like range and rhythm are essential considerations in their process. While range and rhythm are perhaps always factors in music, it is especially relevant where the music relates to natural elements or lifeforms whose way of being in the world, acoustically and culturally, follows a different set of rules to that of humankind. Especially when it comes to our relationship to the natural world, acoustic similarity, our ability to hear human-like qualities in beings of nature, often directly impacts the degree to which we care for those beings. The word 'personify' itself holds both the words "person" and "sonify"(sonify meaning to map data to sound in order to allow listeners to interpret it in an auditory manner). Alex explains that "Many, if not most, of the sounds which impress us the most, make us feel the most, are the ones which obviously fall into the human vocal range." So the compulsion to use music to personify and narrativise these beings and events is strong, but both Alex and Michael bring up some ethical questions that they grapple with when considering the degree to which they add their own flair into the translations of the data with which they engage.

Whether or not they wish to remain objective to the data, there comes a point where, in order for the translated data to become more than a ruckus of midi noise or impenetrable sound, the artists must make some creative decisions about how this information will manifest in the world of music. At this stage of the process the artist becomes the arbiter, and the question becomes 'How do you give a musical voice to the non-human?'. For Michael, that is when the real work begins. He says: "Sonification is something that I reach early on in the process - when the data is making a sound, I haven't filtered or altered or channelled it in any way. It's after that that you enter the much richer process of having to work with the scientists. Once the scientists understand it's not a piece of science that they're doing, it's a piece of creative work, they can join much more freely in this idea of 'how much do we want to shift those numbers?'"

Part of both Michael and Alex's process relates to instrumentation and deciding how to represent their data with acoustic instruments. For Alex, this comes as a more comparative process that is about listening to the whale song and trying to

**"The most satisfying bit is that it opens up these new areas of self-reflection for the scientist. They suddenly want to start getting a little bit more poetic (for the want of a better word) within what they're doing."**

*Michael Begg*

find and match tonal similarities in instruments, while for Michael it comes as a conversation with scientists about what they imagine these factors they are working with might sound like. What instrument is the ice or the wind? For Michael, "the most satisfying bit is that it opens up these new areas of self-reflection for the scientist. They suddenly want to start getting a little bit more poetic (for the want of a better word) within what they're doing. When we do this again in the Queen's Hall in January, these scientists will be on stage with us and they will be effectively reading the poetry that is coming from them, associated with their own work, which has kind of been harboured and pushed down through the whole of their scientific career as they strive for objective scientific reporting. They're denied the human response to their work."

Musical personification does more than make the sound of the data enjoyable for audiences. The process of personification here becomes a way for the scientists engaging with climate crisis to explore and articulate their own personal relationship to the often emotionally strenuous work they are expected to approach daily, with objectivity.

Also, when it comes to data modelling, music doesn't just have to be an artistic byproduct of the visual models used to represent data. In some ways music works to fill in the gaps that visual modelling struggles to convey, notably that of 'time'. As Michael explains, "science has historically been critiqued by some philosophers for using predominantly visual or numerical models, which fail to accurately convey temporal aspects of the phenomena they measure - meaning music, a medium based entirely on the experience of time, offers a way of experiencing certain data that is more true to that data's temporal narrative. In the case of climate change, where time is central to how we conceptualise and measure its impact - what it feels like now versus ten years ago, how it will affect today's children in 50 years time - music might actually allow us to touch that data in a way a graph or number could not." As Michael explains, "when we listen to a piece of music we're being influenced as we go along from moment to moment by what's just happened, by what we're expecting is going to happen. We have all these anticipations built up from listening to the piece just up to this point."

While personification can be a useful tool in building understanding and empathy for the natural world, there is a responsibility that comes with speaking for non-human beings. Artists have a great power to act as real-world Loraxes, but there is an argument that using personification alone to build connection between humans and non-humans neglects our fundamental (and necessary) differences, causing us to withhold care for non-human beings whose behaviours or narratives deviate from our own. This is a particular concern of Alex, who shared this provocation at the end of his Climate Café talk. He states, "I've also become aware of some of the dangers of, just from an ethical point of view, looking at animals and trying to make them like us, or only becoming interested in them to the degree that they are like us."

"It's that privilege, you know," Alex argues, "it's a very anthropocentric way of looking at the non-human animal, the many, many non-human animal species that there are. And I think it's really interesting to start looking at some of the differences that there are and in the way that animals use sound, so for humpback whales, for example, that it seems that they're not interested in synchronising their songs at any one time." While both Michael and Alex do to an extent personify their data through the use of acoustic instrumentation and composition, they both show great interest in and respect for exploring the whole truth of the beings and phenomena with which they engage.

From Alex's attempt to notate the sonic qualities which set whales apart from humans, to Michael's commitment to remaining as true as he can to the proportions and measurements of his data, both these artists walk a line between representing things as they are and representing them as we need them to be.

"I wasn't composing a piece of work that was based on my anxieties and fears about these changes to the Arctic. This was evidence-based. This was allowing the subject to speak for itself as much as possible." says Michael, and yet what resulted was something which did speak to a human experience of climate change. What resulted, as Michael puts it, was "a new music that would speak to this process of entering into the Anthropocene and, specifically, this term that had been coined in 2015 or 2016 - 'solastasia' - the acute anxiety that is triggered by suddenly realising that you're living through acute environmental change." Following the data is an act of uncovering, a sort of paint-by-numbers, where by connecting the dots through creative practice, a picture begins to form that we were not able to see before. Data will always tell a story, whether by graph or by orchestra. What are the vital stories we might unearth through music? Or for that matter, movement or text? And what is it that those stories might do?

"I made a piece called *Entanglement*", says Alex, "and it didn't actually start out as a piece about how whales get entangled, it started out as an

**"I wasn't composing a piece of work that was based on my anxieties and fears about these changes to the Arctic. This was evidence based."**

*Michael Begg*

improvisation based on some data, if you like, some recording of whale song, which I transcribed the rhythms and some of the pitches from. And then during the process of making it, I found out more about the actual process of entanglement, but also at the same time the piece that I was making had lots of different lines which were, in a musical sense, entangled with each other. It was just one of those moments when you suddenly make the connection and you go - Oh, this is actually, in some ways, a metaphor for what goes on in the process of entanglement."

It becomes clear through listening to Michael and Alex speak about their practices, that while there are complexities in approaching how and why artists work with scientific data, at the core of these processes, at least for them, is an immense duty of care towards the well-being of the natural world, and a desire for that world to be heard and understood in a way that creates care in others and shows care for others experiencing climate change. Alex argues that "Classical music is about creating beauty, and it's not necessary. [But] That's to look at only one function of music. It's about creating something new rather than about representing something that's already existed. And I would say that for me, as time has gone on, I've realised that I've really wanted to become interested in the way that music is used in activism, and it has been used successfully in the past and in my field to change the attitudes towards whaling and the way the whales have been seen as industrial resources."

# What We Mean When We Talk About Change



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Climate Portal  
Festival: What  
We Mean When  
We Talk About  
Change



[Click here to watch the film](#)  
Password: climate

What we mean when we talk about change was an action research project led by Claire Lamont, Head of BA Performance in British Sign Language and English at the RCS. It began with a live, week-long exploration of the language used to communicate climate science. The theatre and film artists involved in this process contributed to a short film, which reflected on how current climate change messaging risked excluding or alienating some communities. The film's online premiere was followed by a discussion with the RCS creative team and Fellows of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Claire explored the content and communication of messages relating to climate change, notably around major events like COP26. Her research delved into the lack of collaboration and communication with non-English-speaking communities. Specifically, Claire's process focused on the perspective and expertise of first language BSL users. The creative team included deaf and hearing performers, and benefited from the insight of deaf Dramaturg Rita McDade.

"There's a whole spectrum of translation choices involved when we try to communicate climate change messages. It's not just a matter of distributing summarised scientific information in English. The fact that these messages are urgent for our future survival just underlines the importance of connecting with - and listening to - communities who scientists and governments have maybe failed to bring on board so far."

- Claire Lamont

During the initial live process, the team developed text and character journeys between actors who used BSL and those using English, focusing on the ways in which we can understand and communicate with each other outside of conventional interpretation. The film includes excerpts of this material, along with interviews with Claire Lamont and Rita McDade as they discuss the need for a different way of thinking about how we approach access if we are to move towards meaningful change.

## Event Panel

Chaired by **Professor Jeremy Smith FRSE**

**Professor Antonella Sorace FRSE**  
**Claire Lamont** Royal Conservatoire of Scotland  
**Dr Leslie Mabon** The Open University  
**Michael Duke** Playwright  
**Rita McDade** Royal Conservatoire of Scotland



# Coorie Doon at the Climate Portal

Coorie Doon is a songwriting project which explored the process and impact of writing music with individuals and families, to create a song for (and often with) their child. It was an initiative of Chamber Music Scotland in partnership with Dr Rachel Drury, and has had five other iterations prior to this one. This latest iteration, in partnership with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, saw an artistic team collaborating with individuals and families from around the world to create new music and spoken word centred around the theme "a world for our children."

The theme was the basis for discussion around environmental and social issues inherent in society and culture, and encouraged reflection about the world we want to leave for the next generation. The songs were a musical response to these reflections. Participants met with families from around the world via the RCS Climate Portal. These conversations were captured over Zoom, and short clips were used along with footage of the musicians to create a short film, which included a soundtrack made up of musical responses to these conversations.



**Project Organiser /  
Dr Rachel Drury**

"All of us were forced into considering our own positionality as humans within our art form, our society, our country and as a member of a much wider global community. It was such a privilege to be able to have such open and frank conversations with people through the Portal that we would otherwise never have met. The stories we heard were so rich and affecting."

*Dr Rachel Drury*

Click the link below to watch *Coorie Doon: A World For Our Children*

 [Coorie Doon: A World For Our Children](#)

# Climate Portal Research



**Climate Portals Research /  
Dr Jill Morgan**

Dr Jill Morgan has been exploring the impact of international artistic collaborations in raising awareness of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and their potential to facilitate transformational change for our global partners. The work involves questionnaire responses from the Portal curators and artists who took part in the creative conversations, alongside meaningful interviews with a sample selection from these two groups. The aim is to gain participant perspectives and subjective experiences of the Climate Portal hubs in order to listen to the collective voice on the benefits of artistic dialogue as a means of responding to global challenges. A Partnership Playbook was disseminated to all the hubs which outlined the findings of this project and suggested ways of encouraging ongoing collaboration in relation to the of increase knowledge and awareness in line with the SDGs.

Click the link below to read Jill Morgan's completed research

 [Climate Portals Playbook](#)

**"Art allows people to feel more, live more and of course love more. It creates this magical connection by using their own imagination and feelings."**

*Jill Morgan*

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ETCH  
Festival



# ETCH Festival

The ETCH Festival was the culmination of a year-long, student-led project which used the COP26 summit as inspiration to create a collaborative arts festival around the theme of climate change.

Funded by the RCS Diversity Fund and initiated by the RCS Students' Union, the ETCH Festival has a clear vision – to nurture versatile and socially responsible young talents who will push the boundaries, and to launch careers.

This festival was led by Jasmine Ong, a Bachelor of Education (Music) student at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, who believes in working through the arts to create meaningful contributions to society and hopes everyone can feel the positive, lasting impact of art in life.

Project Lead /  
**Jasmine Ong**

'It's been an honour to work on the ETCH Festival alongside my fellow students and create art on such an important topic. It's a critical time for the global community to consider our future actions on climate change and I'm very proud of the work we showcased to contribute to the discussion. This project would not have been possible without the dedication and artistry of the RCS student body. Despite the challenges presented by our current circumstances, they proved that art will persevere and thrive in the face of difficulty.'  
*Jasmine Ong*

## ETCH Programme Calendar

### Amazonic

An exploratory journey of original works from the RCS dance and composition students.

[Click the links below to watch the performances](#)

 [Amazonic 1](#)

 [Amazonic 2](#)

 [Amazonic 3](#)

### Chamber Music Showcase

Emerging from the ashes, this was their first performance after lockdown at the restored site of Cuningar Loop along the Clyde River.

[Click the link below to watch the performance](#)

 [Chamber Music Showcase](#)

### Urgency

The musical theatre students sounded the alarm and called on us to examine the ways we impact the world.

[Click the link below to watch the performance](#)

 [Urgency](#)

### A Guide to Stargazing

An audio experience which took participants through a mindful appreciation of the night sky to an introspective examination of our relation to nature.

[Click the link below to listen to the audio](#)

 [A Guide to Stargazing](#)

### Storytelling and Song

Using a medium at the heart of Scottish culture, the RCS Storytelling and Song Club shared moving works through colourful lenses on the world.

[Click the link below to watch the session intro](#)

 [Storytelling and Song](#)

### Community Outreach

Information session about the efforts of our outreach team to empower the younger generation.

[Click the link below to watch the session intro](#)

 [Community Outreach](#)

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# Students Take the Lead

Students have been at the forefront of RCS's engagement with climate action and COP26 this year, with Bachelor of Education (Music) student Jasmine Ong taking the lead to produce ETCH Festival, the culmination of a year long, student-led project responding to COP26 and themes of climate change.

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Feature:  
Students Take  
the Lead

ETCH, funded by the RCS Equality and Diversity Fund, brings students from across the School of Music and School of Drama, Dance, Production and Film. Led by Jasmine Ong, it aims to create projects which collectively celebrate the earth, grieve for past and future loss, and educate one another on what must be done next. These involve original student works, imbuing old pieces with new messages, as well as community outreach efforts to make their platform more accessible. The festival, which is still available to view online, hosted a large number of works - all student-led and performed.

During lockdown, Jasmine realised that there was a gap that she could fill - to offer a project where students of all disciplines at the RCS could come together and collaborate on a shared creative outcome. This is where ETCH was born. Jasmine says, "I started thinking about my experience of arts and what lockdown has done to the arts industry. I started thinking about the kind of things I'd want to do if I had the opportunity or if there were things that were possible, even though we were in lockdown. I realised there wasn't really a school-wide opportunity for all students to participate in together." With COP26 ahead, and encouragement from lecturers and staff, Jasmine and her colleagues decided there was a chance to make something which allowed students to express their opinions about climate change and sustainability.

ETCH performances included a Chamber Music Showcase filmed in Cuningar Loop, a Storytelling and Song series, and Amazonic, a series of original collaborations from dance and composition students. Amazonic commissioned choreographer Amy Groves to create a series of dances exploring the ticking clock of climate crisis. Jasmine relates Amy's idea behind the works and the creative process that followed - 'there's been enough conversation about hope and optimism, and we need to address the fact that there is a real possibility that we may have gone too far. You know, it might be too late to save the planet, and so with that thought in mind,

we began discussions with composition students and a lot of them were very much on board with this idea, and we decided to take the theme of a clock ticking like our time is running out. So throughout all the works, you'll hear it ticking in the background and so that's kind of where it comes from, because it's like counting down our seconds on this planet.'

What do student voices have to offer to climate conversation and action? Jasmine's take is that her student colleagues are the future of the industry. She believes that, as that future, it is essential to begin developing, at the earliest stages of artistic practice, the skills and awareness needed to address climate issues on an industry-wide level. Jasmine emphasises, though, that it is not just about what a student can offer once they graduate. Student engagement is also about voicing climate concerns to those who are in power now.

"I think it's important that students are getting involved in this conversation and it's very heartening to see that a lot of people understand the severity and the gravity of the situation and are really wanting our voices to be heard, not just because we are the ones who will be participating in the conversation in a professional aspect in the future but as young people whose futures depend on the actions that are being taken by the current people in power. We're pushing for our voices to be heard and so it's quite important in those two ways, both as people who will take up that mantle in the future and as people who are already feeling the effects right now."

Jasmine says encouraging students to be proactive about climate change is like encouraging them to be proactive about any important topic, whether that be systemic racism, healthy performance practice, or mental and physical wellbeing. It feeds into the quality of their present and future, and that of others. She hopes that for other educational institutions like the RCS, climate action will become a top priority in the list of talking points and initiatives.

She feels that these institutions should be taking the first step to provide students with information, 'showing them how to have the conversations and encouraging them to have the conversations amongst themselves so that they're knowledgeable enough to actually put on their own events and develop their own initiatives.'

While Jasmine was busy producing ETCH, production student Coral Nelson also took time to contribute her skills as a stage manager to the festival, and beyond, as a travel route volunteer for the wider COP26 conference. This isn't Coral's first time using her knowledge of production to support climate positive action. Coral has a history of stage managing shows that engage with climate issues, including BA Acting's *Parliament Square* and BA (Honours) Contemporary Performance Practice's adaptation of *As You Like It, Aliena/Or One That Can Move Freely*. Not only has she worked on shows with climate themes, Coral is also an avid advocate for more sustainable practices in production and scenery. From transportation to materials, Coral has a depth of knowledge when it comes to the industry practices that could be improved to be greener. She expresses in her blog for the RCS's Green Room that sustainability initiatives must be incorporated by producers into the very framework of the shows they create and suggests that grabbing the Theatre Green Book would be a great place to start. Coral also worked on ETCH, project managing its Outdoor Chamber Music Festival which was performed at Cuningar Loop, a reservoir turned landfill turned greenspace, located in Glasgow.

Lecturers Ros Maddison and Lynfryn MacKenzie are working with production students and staff on piloting approaches from the Theatre Green Book to ensure production processes and outputs are as sustainable as possible. Sustainable performance-making practices are being considered over multiple disciplines and artforms with the aim of embedding sustainability within all of the RCS's performance-making processes.

Embracing sustainable actions can feel daunting if not everyone is on board, so it is vital that institutions, staff and fellow students encourage and support each other to foster more sustainable practices and build critical climate conversation into how we discuss the culture of our industries. No artist or individual should feel at odds with their community for taking on sustainable practices or have to worry that their sustainable choices might compromise their success in an artistic field. In order to encourage sustainable action amongst students and staff, we may sometimes have to reframe how we make and tour work, which also involves rethinking our definition of 'success' in performance. Not only will this contribute to a healthier planet, but may even create new and exciting performance that exceeds our own expectations.

Making sure that information about all the great resources and initiatives is available and accessible in one place can help students and staff looking for ways of engaging in the climate conversation to know where to begin.

**"I think it's important that students are getting involved in this conversation and it's very heartening to see that a lot of people understand the severity and the gravity of the situation"**

*Jasmine Ong*



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Concerts



# Concerts For Change

## Concert in the Green Zone

Students from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland were selected to perform and showcase their work to a global audience in Glasgow in November as part of the cultural programme surrounding the COP26 climate change conference.

An ensemble of emerging artists from Scotland's national conservatoire took to the stage at Glasgow Science Centre in a creative collaboration that blended music and film inspired by the climate crisis.

The performance on Friday 12 November, took place at the Science Show Theatre. It featured classical guitarists Tim Beattie, Finlay Hay, Dominika Dawidowska, and Leonard Rannallo who performed works by Leo Brouwer, Eddie McGuire and Philip Glass with each work purposely reflecting the constancy of change.

Leo Brouwer's *Cuban Landscape with Rain* and Philip Glass' *Metamorphosis* were performed alongside a newly commissioned film, inspired by the music, created by Rosslyn McCormick and Rhona McCalman, students of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's film school.

The concert was part of COP26's Green Zone, managed by the UK Government to offer a platform for the public, youth groups, civil society, academia, artists and business to have their voices heard through events, exhibitions, workshops and talks that promote dialogue, awareness, education and commitments.

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## Vital Signs of the Planet November 2, 2021

The power of music, combined with dramatic footage from NASA and National Geographic, brought the impact of climate change over the last 20 years on planet over the past two decades to the forefront for a powerful live and cinematic event at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall during COP26.

Against a backdrop of volcanoes fuming, hurricanes flooding and wildfires sweeping across the landscape, young musicians and leaders, international champions of the environmental movement, told their stories of climate change in their regions in a concert designed to inspire and motivate audiences in Glasgow and internationally. The young global leaders included Elizabeth Wanjeri Mahuthi, Founder of the Green Generation Initiative, Ghana, Change Agent of the World YMCA, Cedric Dzelu, Founder of Panama's Guna Youth Congress, Iniquilipi Chiari and Coordinator of the Indigenous Women of Panama, Agar Castro Tedja, and, representing Scotland, National Geographic Explorer, Natalie Sinclair.

Musicians from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and its Junior Conservatoire joined with internationally recognised conductor Emil de Cou, singer-songwriter Natasha Bedingfield and the Global Climate Uprising Festival to create this exciting experience. Emil de Cou, is a former conductor of America's National Symphony Orchestra and musical advisor to NASA. Mr de Cou has worked with NASA for more than ten years, most recently for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the moon landing.

*Vital Signs of the Planet*, brought together a 100-strong symphony orchestra of young musicians from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland to create a live blend of sound and cinematic visuals. Highlights included new footage of climate change from NASA and National Geographic, messages from the International Space Station and in-person testimony from young environmental partners from the most impacted areas of the world. The result was a 90-minute symphonic spectacular, taking place right at the heart of the climate debate, blending together music, messages and cinematic visuals.

This was a special moment for global youth and the arts to speak for the planet in Glasgow at a vital time for the world. The unique occasion was delivered in partnership by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the Global Climate Uprising Festival and was supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies. The Global Climate Uprising Festival is an international collaboration of environmental organisations, educational and cultural institutions, artists and activists, who will present their work in climate change research, advocacy and new solutions through media, art, and technology at COP26.

The concert was captured by Urbancroft Films and the resulting film was premiered to a global digital audience on Earth Day, April 22nd 2022.

**"Art speaks a universal language. It unites us, it moves and inspires us, and it is a powerful vehicle for change. We're intensely proud to have our young artists of Scotland come together with young leaders from across the planet and powerful advocates for climate action as the world's attention focused on our city and our nation. These young artists and activists are the future, our planet's future, and their message must be heard."**

*Professor Jeffrey Sharkey*

*Principal of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland*

### Which Song Will You Sing?

*'I used to be hesitant. Hesitating to make the wrong decision, to be different and stand out from the crowd. You know that feeling? That was me.*

*I wouldn't trust myself to take a leap and to be the first to start a trend.*

*Until I did.*

*I was born about half an hour away from where we sit tonight and grew up in a small town called Bannockburn in Stirling. My journey to conservation began in this very city at the University of Glasgow, this journey grew from a deep desire to protect wild animals and see them thrive.*

*To the west of Scotland. I have studied the sounds of freshwater birds, to the north seabirds and even on the east coast, seals.*

*A scholarship gave me the chance to study humpback whale songs.*

*Melodious moans, screeching sirens, wild woops and grand groans all merging together to create a long complex acoustic display resonating in the deep blue.*

*I found myself on the other side of the planet, funded by the National Geographic Society – in the middle of the South Pacific Ocean – collecting recordings of these songs.*

*In some places of the world, instead of songs gradually accumulating changes – every few years a new song comes along and completely wipes out the old song in what is called a revolution.*

*In the 1970s, their songs captured the hearts of a generation and in part led to their own resurgence as public opinion and action led the implementation of a moratorium in many countries across the world to stop whaling and allowed their numbers to increase. The voice of the public and the song of the whales literally saved them.*

*But while removing one major stressor can help some species recover ... the effects of climate change on the ocean will be severe and cumulative.*

*At 1.5 degrees warming 70 – 90 percent of worlds coral reefs are projected to die and at 2 – 3 degrees warming half of land and sea species threatened with extinction this century.*

*Like an orchestra has many different types of instruments, we need all parts of society to act – and to connect with nature's symphony.*

*And so I established Wild Bannockburn – a grass-roots community action group focusing on protecting nature – I was able to use my voice to inspire others – rather than waiting for someone else to start singing first.*

*We need a revolution in our own behaviour, to swap our old - business as usual - song for something completely different. A few brave individuals have been singing this NEW song for some time now and it is time to truly listen.*

*Which song will you sing?*

**Natalie Sinclair**  
National Geographic Explorer

**“Addressing the climate crisis requires moving our hearts, minds and souls into action. By combining live and cinematic images with the power of music and the voices of today's young leaders and visionaries, *Vital Signs of the Planet* brings home the urgency for immediate meaningful climate action.”**

*Jayni Chase*

*Board Chair, Friends of the Earth US*



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## Hope Springs Eternal

### A year-long artistic journey for the eyes, ears... and soul

In our contribution to the official COP26 Green Zone, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland worked in partnership with Scotland House, Scotland's international enterprise network, to stimulate global conversations and provide a diverse range of artistic responses to the climate change debate.

Throughout a year of reflection, and focused on the goals of COP26, the conservatoire Artistic Planning team worked with students, staff, alumni and external artists to develop and commissioned multi-disciplinary programme from our community offering a creative response from our community of young artists at RCS - *Hope Springs Eternal*.

Climate change, and in particular adaptation, resilience and nature, were at the forefront of this specially commissioned series. These works shared how a new generation of artists responded to what is happening in the world, and to help us understand it, question it, mourn it, celebrate it, and learn from it.

In the months leading up to COP26, a range of new digital commissions across a range of disciplines were premiered on the RCS at Home channels to international audiences. The commissions included dance, traditional music and spoken word filmed in a range of natural locations.

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland was proud to be selected to perform *Hope Springs Eternal* within the official Green Zone. For this prestigious performance, an ensemble of RCS guitarists performed music inspired by climate change. Each work was performed alongside a newly commissioned film, inspired by the music and created by RCS Filmmaking students.



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The performance included works by Leo Brouwer, Eddie McGuire and Philip Glass with each work purposely reflecting the constant tensions of change: we can either contribute positively to evolution by harmonising with nature and working together to forge a brighter future, or stand by in placid ignorance.

Following COP26, this performance was to tour, travelling by bicycle, to small venues and schools in and around Glasgow as well as feature in the British Council-supported 'Climate Portal' that acted as a global portal to creativity, collaboration and conversation, connecting Scotland to the rest of the world.

The COP26 Green Zone performers were Tim Beattie, Finlay Hay, Dominika Dawidowska and Leonard Rannallo.

While COP26 was in Glasgow, RCS Principal Professor Jeffrey Sharkey presented on the Hope Springs Eternal initiative to the Association of International Conservatoires (AEC) Congress in Antwerp. His presentation highlighted some of the project key highlights included the fact Hope Springs Eternal was:

- An amazing digital project over the last year and an opportunity for students from so many disciplines to work together, collaborate and create new work on the themes that feel so important to all of us right now
- A focus on the collaborations that are possible in RCS and could give students agency
- Supported by Scotland House – international network of Scottish Government international business hubs – in Europe, US, Far East – so an opportunity to showcase the work of RCS students internationally.

[Click the link below to view the film that accompanied the keynote](#)

 [Hope Springs Eternal Film](#)



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Research in Conversation

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Engaging Young  
Voices in Climate  
Conversation



# Engaging Young Voices in Climate Conversation

Both as part of, and beyond, the RCS COP26 programme, alumni of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland have been working creatively with young people across Scotland to make critical conversations, performance experiments and performance works around climate crisis, landscape and ecology.



## RCS Alumni - Youth Climate and Ecology Practitioners and Projects

### Gudrun Soley Sigurdardottir & Eoin McKenzie

RCS Art and Climate Crisis Workshops with Schools in East Dunbartonshire

Eoin and Gudrun have collaborated to lead a series of digital artist-led workshops with primary and secondary schools on behalf of the RCS, exploring the relationship between art-making, ecology, activism, and the climate emergency. Gudrun is also currently continuing climate-engaged work with young people in Edinburgh and remotely in Sydney, as part of an Imagine commission. Eoin has previously made work with young people exploring climate crisis in 2019/20 as part of the Lyra Connections Commission, which resulted in a show called *...And It Goes Dark*.

### Sinéad Hargan

Youth Engagement with Coastal Communities in Caithness (as part of a Highland Culture Collective residency)

Sinead Hargan is currently working with two young groups in coastal communities in Caithness, in Thurso and Lybster, to explore and create performances around the sea. As part of the project the groups created a film which was brought to the Climate Portal and shown across the world.

### Sally Charlton

Landscape workshops at Cove Park

Sally has run workshops with young people at Cove Park exploring Ecological Performance Making. This practice involves creating performance moments, choreographies, and texts in response to the shapes and behaviours of the landscape. While she believes there is a space for discussing the climate crisis with young people, she feels that practices of responding to nature forge a subconscious relationship with the earth, without having to tell a young person how to feel.

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# What does Performance- Making Offer Young People in Times of Crisis?

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What does  
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Young People in  
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The young people of today have been born into a tumultuous time in history where the future of their planet and their lives are currently being dictated by adults in power. Most young people are aware that they will have to live their whole lives facing the realities of the decisions that are being made now. In a system where young people have little to no governmental, legal or authoritative power, how do they grapple with the reality of climate crisis? This question has become essential to the creative facilitators and educators rethinking how to approach making climate-related work with young people. RCS has a rich legacy of alumni working across Scotland to elevate the voices of young people in the climate conversation, from social practitioners highlighting voices of those outside the central belt, to performance makers changing the way that schools approach the climate conversation. Some RCS graduates working with young communities have, in recent years, begun to interrogate deeply what it is young people already understand about climate issues, what they need from adults and artists in times of crisis, and what it is that these creative projects offer to young people faced by a future affected by climate change.

The public awareness of climate crisis has increased significantly in the last decade, with individuals becoming aware of its effects from a much earlier age. Many of the commonly

emphasised predictions about when climate decline will become entirely irreversible centre around the time when those who are now around ten years old will not even have yet reached middle age. In contrast to what earlier generations knew about climate change at a young age, young people now absorb the facts early on in their lives. Where creative projects may previously have been used to offer education and awareness about realities of climate change, young people now already have that knowledge, meaning these creative initiatives have the opportunity to consider what comes next in the development of their offering to young communities. BA (Honours) Contemporary Performance Practice graduate, social practitioner and performance-maker Eoin McKenzie shares his reflections on exploring climate themes with young people: "I think young people already know that stuff. They're the ones living with it, and so for me, there's always an issue that I have; of being an adult, a version of adult, in a room with young people facilitating an experience for them that's about climate crisis, because they are the ones experiencing it and in a much more lived way. Obviously, we're all living through it but they have the weight of it a lot more than us. So there's something there as well, that feels like I'm constantly conscious of, of not wanting to make it feel too heavy, of not wanting to make it feel like there's answers or ways of fixing."

Eoin began making performance with young people around ideas of climate change back in 2019, when he was awarded the Lyra Connections Commission to work with a group of eight year olds to create a piece called *...And It Goes Dark*, which saw the group performing on an unlit stage, as a meditation on the future, a bleak future that, as Eoin expresses, is 'presented to young people as something that is inevitable. I was interested in this sort of intention of a world dictated by adults who maybe don't have the same relationship to the future the young people do'. From there, Eoin went on to collaborate with fellow RCS alumni Gudrun Soley Sigurdardottir, to devise and deliver artist-led RCS Art and Climate Crisis Workshops with primary and secondary schools in East Dunbartonshire, exploring the relationship between art-making, ecology, activism, and the climate emergency. In 2020, Gudrun worked with arts organisation Imagineate to facilitate a digital project between young people in Edinburgh and young people in Bangladesh and Singapore, to explore their emotional response to climate crisis. A fresh iteration of the project is now taking place between young people in Edinburgh and Sydney, Australia, and also involves current fourth-year BA (Honours) Contemporary Performance Practice student Catherine Allison, who is on placement with the project.

In the conversation around what it is these projects offer to young people facing climate crisis, two main aims are expressed by the graduate artists leading these projects - to create spaces for young people to emotionally process and engage with climate ideas, and to facilitate and increase conversation about climate issues. Gudrun talks about how, in her project with Imagineate, they were thinking about an emotive response to it [climate crisis], rather than "these are the facts about the climate crisis". It's educational, because it's in the school, but what I'm doing is getting them to think about what comes with it, and their similarities to things and how they are, how they experience change, and how, I guess, nature experiences change, rather than it being a factual sort of process.' Many of these artists like Gudrun who are facilitating projects with young people, some of whom are younger adults themselves, are extremely cautious in their exploration of climate change, or in this case, climate injustice, on an emotional level with young people. They themselves understand that asking young people to engage emotionally in the climate conversation, is actually a significant request, which needs to be handled with care and consideration, with the intention of offering relief or celebration, rather than just more weight.

Gudrun reflects on her project with Imagineate: 'The conversations quite quickly became really complicated and quite serious, which I maybe hadn't anticipated, and the same as the young people in Edinburgh at the moment. It feels like when they're talking about the future, it feels like there's two things they talk about. They talk about wanting to be social media influencers, rich and famous, which is on one end of the spectrum, and on the other end this kind of like, "well, I don't know what things are going to look like in 50 years time. I would love to have children, but I don't think - I don't know if - I can because of what is going to happen with the world" and they're ten or eleven. It feels like there is a sort of headspace of going - "I am being told that as a young person, I should follow my dreams and pursue what I want and that I'm brilliant and capable, but I also have got this big thing looming over me that makes me have to think differently and have to be maybe more, I don't know, smaller in my vision or something". It's just heavily emotional all the time, emotional, deep and complicated. All the writing [their writing] feels like writing that would come from adults, because there's just so much and as a theme. I think if you're an artist just kind of preaching to a group of young people about climate crisis, I don't think you get to that point. I think you need to access something that allows them to kind of tell you.'

Challenging the role of the 'adult' was of interest to several of the RCS graduates working with young people on climate issues, both from the vantage point of the artist, collaborating with the young people to challenge the adult hegemonies that sustain climate crisis, and as adults themselves, questioning their own knowledge, authority and role in relation to facilitating young people. BA (Honours) Contemporary Performance Practice graduate Sinéad Hargan has been making work with two groups of young people on coastal communities on either side of Caithness exploring their relationship to the sea, as part of a year-long residency award she received from Highland Culture Collective. As part of the project, the two groups, whose locations in Thurso and Lybster are often left out of the political climate discussions housed in the central belt, brought a film they had made to the Climate Portals Festival programme. The group filmed the work entirely on second hand iPhones, a decision Sinéad made to address the digital poverty common to the context. She also provided the group with tape recorders with which they enjoyed recording different sounds and interviewing one another.

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Members of the group even turned the mic on Sinéad herself, she says 'they turned everything I said on its head. They really interrogated me and they're like, "why do you care? And why do you care about what else I like? What about it? And like, why do you care about us? Tell me, why are we involved?" It was really great. It actually made me think about the future so much. I think it's really nice, the method's mentality of turning the hierarchy of an artist going into a group and interrogating them. You allow them to inspire you. It was really fun and helped me articulate why I wanted to work with them.'

For the teenagers of Caithness, being separate from the central belt brings a sense of voicelessness atop the already difficult position of being an unheard young person in society. 'They don't feel like they have any decisions or power in the climate crisis, and it feels very overwhelming for them because they don't feel like they have a say and they're just getting left with a mess to clean up. They spoke about that a lot. I'm quite frustrated by that.' voices Sinéad. Despite this, the groups displayed a remarkable connection to, and knowledge of, the sea and it was clear that their relationship to climate, ecology and landscapes was deeply rooted to their lives in Caithness. Caithness itself, a powerhouse of renewable energy and also home to a decommissioned nuclear plant cordoned off for toxic waste, embodies the climate effort to such a degree that the ever-present structural signs of climate crisis are so looming that the topic itself often goes unspoken.. 'It's really obvious in the landscape. ' says Sinéad, 'It's really alive already in the people in the place that you don't have to dig so deeply to talk about the environment, actually, and it feels like maybe you don't have to talk about climate grief or the weight of it, because this is so obvious in these giants that kind of run and rule this landscape.'

Climate crisis is always present, especially for young people, and some performance makers are questioning the strong emphasis that has been placed over recent years, on making work with or for young people specifically about climate grief and trauma. "I think it forces a level of maturity within young people," says Eoin "which I sort of grieve a little bit because they're not afforded a sort of naivety or ignorance that I think is a beautiful part of being sheltered, so there's something about this conversation that ruptures that and sometimes I think we have to be conscious of that. I feel like also at the moment, a lot of middle aged artists are making work about the climate crisis, quite often for young people, and I have questions around that because why are you doing that? Why are children the right audience for that?"

For adults now, grieving may be part of coming to terms with and living with climate crisis, but most young people are likely have many more years of climate crisis ahead, and for them, this is a grief that has been woven into their hopes and fears for the future from the beginning of their lives, a grief which they may encounter and reconcile with many, many times throughout those lives. This is not to say that works exploring climate grief with young people should not be made; rather, maybe it is a matter of who that performance is made for, what it is really intended to do, and of acknowledging that the research and performance of climate grief by young people is, on their part, an act of emotional and physical labour, offered up generously to the benefit of adult's understanding and care. "I think when you work with young people climate grief is interesting" says Sinéad, "but I would be wary of bringing that into conversations with young people. I feel like that's quite a dark thing to put on them, to tell them that they're grieving. Is that a thing to do? And I can understand as an adult where that comes from. I think grief is a really complex thing."

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For the young people themselves, maybe what these projects can give, ahead of the long lives that sit before them, are ways of taking action, ways of starting conversations, or of finding hope in the darkness. Sinéad's take is that 'actually the joy is more important, figuring out a relationship and also how to tackle these giants in a way, or have conversations with these giants, whether that's the wind turbines or the deanery or just the giant of the climate crisis in general.' Sinéad, Gudrun and Eoin all express their desire to strike a balance in these projects, between starting critical conversations, making space for climate emotions to be felt and expressed, and making sure that the work does not tip over so much into the world of problem solving that it disregards one of performances real strengths - to allow for celebration, celebration even in the worst of times. Especially in the worst of times. 'As an art project, if it just brings in a little bit of joy or if we just have a bit of fun and celebrate an environment, that's also really important, you know? Because if we celebrate something or we acknowledge what we value, then we take care of it and we try to do it in a different way', says Sinead.

Amongst the flurry of climate conversations and artists attempting to voice the reality of climate crisis, work about the end of the world is both necessary and common, but, in the process of foreseeing the apocalypse, of crying out to be heard, maybe on occasion amend we lose sight of hope, forgetting that joy must exist in vital equilibrium to darkness in order that we sustain ourselves, and our young people, in the fight against climate crisis. Sustainability is about more than the environment. It is also about caring for ourselves and others so that we may survive, and even thrive under the trying circumstances of climate crisis. Young people are in an uniquely effective position to start climate conversations. While they may not have seats in government, or own the corporations which emit harmful CO2, their advantage is that by nature of where they are in their lives, many young people sit in the middle of a large network of people. They are surrounded and supported by adults, teachers and parents, who may not at their age have been offered those climate conversations. Young people are the ideal educators in the fight against climate change - with a life full of experience to draw upon.

'I don't think we can tackle the climate crisis without fully democratic spaces to discuss it and to make decisions about going forward', says Sinéad. 'I think fundamentalist kind of views, we're not likely to change them, and to be honest, I'm not so interested in engaging with those kinds of people, but there are other people that are in between and I think that it's a knock-on effect. It's just talking about these things and having them at the forefront of conversation - conversations with family, conversations in the school. I would hope that working with these people for a year, that's where we would by the end of it: they are talking. They're telling other people about the project.'

Addressing adults about climate change can be daunting, even as an adult yourself. This is especially true for young people who have been raised in a culture where adults are considered to have ultimate authority and expertise, and where vocally disagreeing with, or acting against, the wishes of adults is considered bad or wrong.

These projects start conversations, but they also give young people the space and permission to carry those conversations forward and into the world. Eoin reflects on his work *...And It Goes Dark*, 'I think that process was about trying to find a way for young people to feel like they have a way to address adults.' In a way, some artists offer the conditions for young people to contribute to the climate conversation, just by being an adult presence who positions themselves in a radically different role to that of most adults in these young people's lives, allowing them to reframe rebellion as positive agency. Eoin reflects; 'If we boil art down, or working with young people down, to being about creating dialogue in lots of different ways then that is maybe just where it ends, and then there is another part of me that's like, well, is there something about being an adult in the context of schools or those workshops that I was doing in the schools, of being an adult maybe unlike the other adults that are there, who is proactively having this conversation? That is maybe in it's own way an act of hope, or an act of resistance, that provides a spark.'

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# Sustainable Initiatives and Resources Collection

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RCS  
Sustainable Initiatives  
and Resources  
Collection

We want to make sure you can easily find and access all of the great initiatives and resources mentioned during our COP26 programme, and feel empowered to take climate action and learning into your own hands. If you see that we have missed something you think is important, please let us know at [sustainability@rcs.ac.uk](mailto:sustainability@rcs.ac.uk)

...and again, if you are looking for an initiative or resource to aid you in an idea or just get more information on a green subject, but you don't see something for you, reach out to colleagues at [sustainability@rcs.ac.uk](mailto:sustainability@rcs.ac.uk)

## Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Sustainable Initiatives

**RCS Green Room**  
[www.rcs.ac.uk/greenroom](http://www.rcs.ac.uk/greenroom)

(Description)

**RCS at Home**  
[www.rcs.ac.uk/rcsathome](http://www.rcs.ac.uk/rcsathome)

Here you can watch performances and concerts created by RCS and students as part of COP26, including:

 **Amazonic**

 **Hope Springs Eternal**

**RCS Sustainability Committee**  
[www.rcs.ac.uk/greenroom/sustainability-in-the-spotlight/](http://www.rcs.ac.uk/greenroom/sustainability-in-the-spotlight/)

RCS has a Sustainability Committee, and you can get involved. The Committee has also launched a student sustainability prize.

### Green Fingers - RCS Library collaboration with Glasgow Seed Library

Green Fingers aims to support the RCS commitment to environmental sustainability and to support students and staff wellbeing and mental health. It involves the Library collaborating with Glasgow Seed Library to grow plants to create a greener environment that stimulates wellbeing, creativity and productivity. The project will offer opportunities for students and staff to grow their own plants and develop skills.

### Community Sustainability Programmes

**Fashion Revolution Team**  
[www.fashionrevolution.org](http://www.fashionrevolution.org)

Fashion Revolution is a global sustainable fashion movement founded in the wake of the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013. It works towards creating a global fashion industry that conserves and restores the environment and values people over growth and profit. They have a ton of resources and you can get involved with a number of different Fashion Revolution's many initiatives.

## Industry Sustainability Guides

**Theatre Green Book**  
[www.theatregreenbook.com](http://www.theatregreenbook.com)

The Green Book is an initiative by the whole of theatre – working with sustainability experts Buro Happold – to work more sustainably. In three volumes, it sets standards for making productions sustainably, for making theatre buildings sustainable, and for improving operations like catering and front of house.

**The Scottish Classical Green Guide**  
By the Scottish Classical Sustainability Group  
[www.creativecarbonscotland.com/scottish-classical-music-green-guide-released/](http://www.creativecarbonscotland.com/scottish-classical-music-green-guide-released/)

The Scottish Classical Green Guide is a free guide written collaboratively by over 30 orchestras, ensembles, festivals and individual musicians from across Scotland, and contains advice on how to reduce carbon emissions in all aspects of your work. The guide is intended to be relevant and useful to you whether you are an individual musician, part of a team, or in a position of leadership.

**Music Declares Emergency**  
[www.musicdeclares.net](http://www.musicdeclares.net)

Music Declares Emergency is a group of artists, music industry professionals and organisations that stand together to declare a climate and ecological emergency and call for an immediate governmental response to protect all life on Earth.

## Resources from our Climate Portals Festival Creative Partners

**Shared Studios**  
<https://www.sharedstudios.com/portals>

**HarrisonParrott**  
[www.harrisonparrott.com/news/2021-04-21/harrisonparrott-commissioned-for-british-council-cop26-project](http://www.harrisonparrott.com/news/2021-04-21/harrisonparrott-commissioned-for-british-council-cop26-project)

HarrisonParrott also has a podcast:  
**The Cultural Bar - Ep.10 How The Arts Can Respond to Climate Emergency**  
[www.harrisonparrott.com/news/2021-04-22/the-culture-bar-no10-under-the-spotlight-how-the-arts-can-respond](http://www.harrisonparrott.com/news/2021-04-22/the-culture-bar-no10-under-the-spotlight-how-the-arts-can-respond)

**Scottish Ballet**  
[www.scottishballet.co.uk](http://www.scottishballet.co.uk)

**Scottish Ballet Green Action Plan**  
[www.scottishballet.co.uk/articles/our-green-action-plan](http://www.scottishballet.co.uk/articles/our-green-action-plan)

The Green Action Plan will be embedded into the Scottish Ballet overall business strategy for the next five years to ensure it turns this ambition into action.

### EAUC

**Communicating Climate Change**  
[www.eauc.org.uk/communicating\\_climate\\_change](http://www.eauc.org.uk/communicating_climate_change)

**Climate Anxiety**  
[www.eauc.org.uk/climate\\_anxiety](http://www.eauc.org.uk/climate_anxiety)

### Creative Carbon Scotland

**Scottish Classical Music Green Guide**  
[www.creativecarbonscotland.com/scottish-classical-music-green-guide-released/](http://www.creativecarbonscotland.com/scottish-classical-music-green-guide-released/)

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## Sustainability Committee

The RCS Sustainability Committee actively collaborates to embed sustainability into every aspect of our operations. It welcomes all suggestions from students and staff to further the sustainability of our campus and how we operate. The committee reports to the Board of Governors through the Academic Board, with goals to increase awareness, visibility and accountability of sustainable practice across our community. Find out more: [www.rcs.ac.uk/greenroom](http://www.rcs.ac.uk/greenroom)

Sustainable performance-making practices are being considered over multiple disciplines and artforms with the long-term ambition of embedding sustainability within all of our performance-making processes. Production students and staff continue to pilot approaches from the Theatre Green Book and the Whittaker Library developed an ongoing project with Glasgow Seed Library to grow plants within the library to make it a greener space and to promote wellbeing. The committee is exploring a number of possibilities for developing overall efficiencies across the RCS estates including insulation, triple glazing and implementing solar panels. The Sustainability Committee set up working groups last year to focus on Production, Learning and Teaching, Recruitment, Ethics, Estates, Information Services, and the committee is currently working on an RCS Sustainability Policy.

At RCS, we are committed to ensuring that we play a role in tackling the challenges of climate change on our environment. A range of measures are underway, including:

- Growing root vegetables and herbs in our roof garden, for use in our café
- Annual reduction of our carbon footprint
- Managing our investments responsibly. We invest up to 15% in companies specialising in renewable energy and we do not invest in fossil fuels
- Installing energy-efficient LED lighting and solar energy on campus
- Operating a campus energy monitoring system and motion sensor lighting
- Committing zero waste to landfill
- Subscribing to the Caledonian Forest scheme and planting trees to the equivalent of the paper we consume
- Cycle Friendly Campus Award from Cycling Scotland that recognises our commitment to encouraging and promoting cycling as a healthy, sustainable mode of transport for all

The RCS Sustainability Committee launched a new Sustainability Prize to celebrate student work which engaged with ideas, processes and outputs that foreground sustainability. The 2021-22 winner was MEd in Learning and Teaching student Penny Chivas who was awarded for her dance-theatre work *Burnt Out*, centred upon her experience of the deadly Australian Black Summer fires of 2019-2020 and an excerpt of her Master's dissertation which proposes ways in which ecopedagogy could be applied to dance improvisation: [www.rcs.ac.uk/news/penny-chivas](http://www.rcs.ac.uk/news/penny-chivas)







Royal Conservatoire  
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**Commissioned by Research and Knowledge Exchange at RCS**

Design by Fourtwentyseven

[0427.co.uk](http://0427.co.uk)

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