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**Kaya Fraser**  
***Give us a Smile***

**10 August – 29 September 2024**

2 channel video installation, 12 mins 55 secs.

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Kaya Fraser's new exhibition, *Give us a Smile*, contains a variety of materials that unpack the experience of grief from different positions. It is titled after a recurring phrase spoken by her late stepfather, Steve, which he used when he was recording family occasions on his video-8 camcorder in the mid-2000s.

Kaya's practice is underpinned by a desire to document and catalogue working-class lives, but to do so from within the lives themselves, offering a voice – and the opportunity for self-determination – to those represented. She does this primarily by focussing on, and working in collaboration with, her own family; often referring to common activities that are undertaken by all of us in our own homes using museological words such as 'archiving' or 'curating'. She uses the term 'Scheme Sublime' to describe her methodology, which seeks to redress historical representations of working-class lives that are mostly produced from the outside, and which often focus on poverty and hardship rather than community and joy.

For *Give us a Smile*, Kaya has constructed a reflection of grief (in all its emotional complexity) through personal objects drawn from her Perth family home and footage from Steve's video-8 tapes. The objects represent an image of Steve as seen by Kaya's mother, Shona, and the footage represents family life as seen through Steve's eyes. With his camcorder, Steve scanned the private spaces of the family home during a party to celebrate his engagement to Shona, or shot panoramas of the Scottish Highlands during their honeymoon; always requesting that those who appear smile for the camera as if they were posing for a photograph.

Kaya often utilises the tools left behind by the subjects of her work. In the past, she learned to use her late grandfather's Rolleiflex camera to produce new photographs of his neighbourhood, and for *Give us a Smile* she has made new work using Steve's camcorder. Kaya notes that both her mother and her grandmother were widowed in their forties, so her work tends towards the representation of grief from a female perspective. She attempts to

trouble this notion by revisiting the sites, and the gaze, of the now passed male family members, placing her own footage alongside theirs in richly-worked videos that represent loss, but also communicate the pleasure, the joy and the love that remain at the heart of any consideration of grief.

In one video, she re-scans the same rooms that Steve once did, now empty of people but filled with objects that represent a life together; her replication of Steve's movements paying homage to his teaching her how to use the camcorder. Some of the featured objects have been brought into the gallery, forming a kind of 'bricolage' representation of the internal dynamic and narratives of the family. Although we do not have direct access to these narratives, they invite us to consider how we 'curate' and 'archive' our own memories, and how we find ways to address and articulate our own personal grief.

Elsewhere, she juxtaposes Steve's images of the Highlands with her own panorama of Calton Hill, a site that draws the gaze

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of the contemporary tourist and also contains the objects of Edinburgh's collective memory, through its many monuments and follies. Kaya's use of the panorama is both a reference to Laura Mulvey's 1977 film, *The Riddles of the Sphinx*, which showed 360-degree views of her own family's living environment, and Calton Hill being the site from which the first known panoramic drawing was made in 1787 by the Irish painter, Robert Barker.

Directly opposite the installation, Kaya's close family members are evoked through an intervention in the gallery windows, each of which have been blanked out, but for four small rectangular openings through which we can look out from (or into) the exhibition. The four openings are placed at heights that indicate the viewpoint of each family member – including Kaya's younger brother, James – as they were in 2004, when Steve's first video was made. The ratio of the rectangles match that of the camcorder's viewfinder, 4:3, and hence the format of the videos that document the years the four spent together.

Although *Give us a Smile* is a portrayal of the grief of one family, it is an exhibition

about community and collectivity, about tiny moments and grand narratives. It is about the griefs we feel immediately and personally, and those we share with people we do not yet - and may never - know. It is about Steve, Shona, James and Kaya; but ultimately it is about all of us.

*James N. Hutchinson, Satellites Facilitator*

### About the Artist

Kaya Fraser (she/her/they/them) is a multi-disciplinary artist from Perth, currently based in Glasgow. Kaya works with analogue photography, film, video, writing and sound to embrace collective memories within small communities. She graduated from DJCAD in 2020 in Art and Philosophy.

Since graduating Kaya has developed a socially engaged practice. She was Mount Stuart's Emerging Socially Engaged Artist in Residence in 2021. Kaya's freelance facilitation work has developed workshops for projects and spaces such as Loom in Large, Clifftop Projects, Birnam Arts, Taigh Chearsabhagh, Raise the Roof and Tÿ Pawb. *Give us a Smile* is Kaya's first solo exhibition.

**Satellites** is Collective's development programme for emergent practitioners based in Scotland. Satellites aims to support diverse practitioners to produce a new commission and provides a critical development programme of retreats, workshops, studio visits and group discussions, public exhibitions, events and publishing. Practitioners are selected from an open submission by a new panel for each iteration. The 2022/23 participants are Thomas Abercromby, Rabindranath X Bhose, Kaya Fraser and Matty Rimmer.

### The Artist wishes to thank:

Shona Alexander, James Fraser, Ross Alexander, Gordy Duncan Jr, John Harcus, James N. Hutchinson, Jane Connarty, Thomas Abercromby, Rabindranath X Bhose, Matty Rimmer, Sorcha Carey, Hayley Dawson, Rob Kennedy, Steve Lawrie, Meg Gray, Rachael Simpson, Siobhan Carroll, Collective Staff, 2024 Satellites cohort, Art Workers for Palestine, previous Satellites cohorts and Collective workers, Gary and Jenny Fraser, Alanna Jamieson, The Bastardos, Morven Gregor, Gerry Loose, Joanne Maras, Cooper Gallery, Adam Lockhart, Stills, Edinburgh Art Festival and The Gannet team.