

THE HILLSIDE

—  
Kirsty Hendry

*Navel Gazing*

24.10.20 — 22.11.20

COLLECTIVE

*...There are more bacteria in your gut than there are stars in the galaxy*

*... Always a 'we' little body, never an 'I'!*

The term 'navel gazing' is now used as a pejorative term – suggesting self-involvement – but has roots as a form of meditation (*omphaloskepsis*) used to draw focus on both our inner worlds and to push outwards, expanding our perception.

This new exhibition from Glasgow-based artist Kirsty Hendry features a new film, *Navel Gazing*, that centres on the articulate and fractious character of The Gut. The script and character study were developed through Kirsty's archival research and then explored through a collaboration with sound designer and musician Joe Howe, and performer Aby Watson.

*Navel Gazing* considers how the body is used as metaphor, or sometimes as a storyteller to make political systems seem 'natural'. The 17th century philosopher René Descartes famously stated "I think therefore I am", establishing the primacy of the logical brain at the centre of European philosophy. But recent research into the gut and the gut microbiome has firmly established that the colonies of micro-organisms that live inside our stomachs play a vital part in how we experience the world. Not only do they help us to digest and draw the nutrients we need from our food, they are also essential to our emotional and mental well-being and help shape our perceptions. As neuroscientist and microbiome expert John Cryan says; "neuroscience doesn't stop at the neck".

This new film explores the inherent contradictions in our relationship to our bodies: between how they communicate 'essential truths' in our 'gut feelings' and at the same time are also considered to be suspect in their rhythms and changes. *Navel Gazing* expands this question to consider why we conceive of *my-self* as something distinct from *my-body*. In a heightened and inflamed performance, the character of The Gut embraces all the criticisms that have been levelled at her for being "too raw, too needy, too sensitive, too emotional". She reminds us that we can no longer rely on the idea of a fixed or singular 'I' at the centre of ourselves when science has shown that we depend on the millions of organisms (the *many* microbiomes that make up our bodies) who help shape our existence.

Through improvisation and collaboration, Kirsty and Aby devised an embodied no-holds-barred, in-your-face performance for *Navel Gazing*. The excess in this performance recalls the analysis of melodrama (in theatre, film and television) led by scholars Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams. Excess in performance is recognised as a distinctive feature of melodrama: But rather than being dismissed, theory around melodrama posits this excess as a critique of the underlying social and political ideologies, manifesting through gender, class and race relations. This work is continued by Debra Pribam who focuses her research on our emotions suggesting that "taking emotions seriously means undoing the binary that opposes emotions to reason and feeling to thinking".

There will be an online discussion with artist Kirsty Hendry and performer Aby Watson hosted by Collective, on Wednesday 11 November at 6pm. Please visit our website for details.

Kirsty Hendry (b.1988 Perth, Scotland) is an artist and facilitator living in Glasgow who develops projects exploring labour, work, and the body.

Selected projects include: *Reader's Digest* commissioned by Market Gallery Glasgow as part of *Reproductive Technologies* (2019); *Self-Service*, publication and events programme in collaboration with Ilona Sagar at Centre for Contemporary Art and GoMA for Glasgow International 2018; *So You See Me* at Cooper Gallery, Dundee (2017); *Colourless Green Ideas Sleep Furiously* (organised by Kati Kärki, with Jude Browning, Jake Watts and Magda Buczek), Figure 4 at Baltic 39, Newcastle, UK (2017) and *Tenderpixel*:

1. Kirsty Hendry, *Navel Gazing*, 2020. Film time: 20 minutes.

Please ask the member of staff at the front desk if you require alternative seating to the beanbag.

Captions for the film are available on request.

With thanks to Luke Collins, Siobhan Carroll and everyone at Collective; Alison Scott, Sulaiman Majali, Holly McLean, Becky Šik, and James Hutichison; Jake Watts, Joe Howe & Emma Balkind, Aby Watson, Kim O'Neill, Ross Cameron, Neil McGuire & Fiona Hunter; Alex Misick and the team at CCA; Mhairi Sawyer and Glasgow Sculpture Studios; and to Freda's sewing machine.

