



**HANNA TUULIKKI**  
Ruth Barker

*SING SIGN* by Hanna Tuulikki articulates twin threads of poetic exploration within the architectural and associative structures of Edinburgh's Royal Mile. The performance is both a mapping of the communicating body in relation to the city; and a reading of the dialectical relationship between the languages we use to speak to one another. Through the complex interchange of song and gesture, Tuulikki weaves a wordless dialogue of playful Baroque mediation.

Two performers, one male and one female, stand within the arterial architecture of one of Edinburgh's vessel-like closes. Framed by the close mouths, the performers face one another and offer a greeting. Then, in choreographed motions, their hands punctuate the air with gestures drawn from British Sign Language and other less defined forms of bodily lexigraphy. Opening their mouths they sing, uttering the precise and lyrical lexemes of a wordless language that reverberates around the close walls.

*SING SIGN* borrows the structure of a *hocket*, a musical device used since the 13th century, in which the melodic line is split between two voices. This then, is communication. As cantillating voices call in fluting recognition, and fingers conjure silent dialogue, we see the back and forth of transmission and reception danced before us. And yet the performers do not 'speak' only to each other, but resonate through the lines of the city itself. Their score is literally the map of Edinburgh's streets, with the rhythms of inhabited pavements concatenating the step and the breath. Here, to sing the city is to speak to it, to listen to it, to walk it, to sign it and to sign *with* it, translating street names into eloquent gesture. Tuulikki's previous work has located voices (her own and others') in rural, windblown landscapes of open skies and ululating birdcall. Stepping into the city she sites her work with the same attention to both poetry and place.

The music that underpins the language of *SING SIGN*'s sung hocket has its origins in a European Baroque suite of dances. Movement one: Allemande; Movement two: Courante; Movement

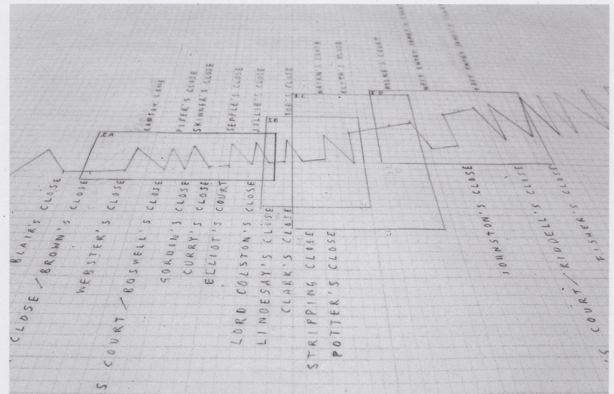
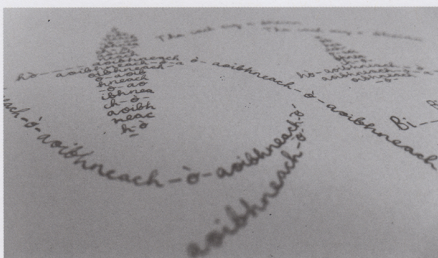
Hanna Tuulikki, *SING SIGN: a close duet*, 2015. Courtesy of the Artist. Photograph by Robin Gillanders



Hanna Tuulikki, *Away with the Birds*, 2014. Courtesy of the Artist. Photograph by Alex Boyd

Hanna Tuulikki, *Away with the Birds*, Isle of Canna, 2014, performance still. Courtesy of the Artist. Film still by Daniel Warren

Hanna Tuulikki, *Gut an Eòin | Voice of the Bird*, visual score for *Away with the Birds*, 2013, detail, pen and ink on paper, 84 cm x 275.6 cm. Courtesy of the Artist



three: Sarabande; Movement four: Gigue. The four movements, uttered as tumbling and ascending vocal peals, are punctuated by the exaggerated physical poetry of BSL. These incarnate gestures, choreographed as both dance and dialogue, tie the performer's colloquy back into the body of closes and alleyways that perforate the city's Old Town. Tuulikki has described this hocket as a "golden thread of conversation" and as such it stitches through the Royal Mile's spine as a sinuous golden cord. But the hocket is also mimetic. At its purest level it gives musical structure to the act of conversation itself, embodying as well as representing the interchange of discourse. Tuulikki's interrogation is implicit: who are we when we speak? Who are we when we sign? What can we ever read of one another if all the languages we speak are partial? Our intercourse is always provisional, and we know this. And yet Tuulikki's work asks us afresh to consider the wordless voice, the speaking arms, as adumbrated and articulate poetry.

Hanna Tuulikki, *SING SIGN: a close duet*, 2015, pencil on paper. Courtesy of the Artist