

The Subtle Body: A reader, an index

This project emerges out of a long term collaboration between Chorus and The Katy Dove Archive and a chance encounter we had with Lygia Clark's MoMA catalogue when browsing Dove's personal reference library. *The Subtle Body (1)* sets up a correspondence between the two artists to unfold a shared interest in the psychological - something which absorbed them both across the scope of their divergent practices. Marking three chronological signposts in the two archives where their ideas converge, the exhibition explores Clark and Dove's mutual occupation with relationality, bodily knowledge and the subconscious.

Katy Dove (1970–2015) grew up in the Black Isle, a peninsula in the Scottish Highlands, and through her artistic career became firmly embedded in the Glasgow arts community. Her expansive, collaborative approach to making art encompassed drawing, animation, sound, and movement and she had prominent exhibitions during her lifetime at Transmission, Platform and Tramway in Glasgow, and Talbot Rice Gallery in Edinburgh as well as international projects. Having studied psychology at the University of Glasgow before attending Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design in Dundee, her interest in the workings of the mind sustained her artistic work throughout her lifetime - perception, intuition and meditative states were all important touch points for Dove, while the question of how meaning emerges through gesture is one that she returned to often.

Her animations, which were central to her artistic language, were intentionally made as full body experiences, incorporating colour work with fluid shapes and kaleidoscopic landscapes, often accompanied by her own sound compositions; abstract, cosmic worlds to be inhabited and activated by the individual bodily and emotional reverberations of the audience. Dove worked with an embodied making process which included spontaneous drawing, improvisation, mantra and movement, transferring this multi-sensory practice, and its possibilities for learning, from the body of the artist to the receptive faculties of the viewer. Her work was relational at its core, always urging a response or a reflex, and she channeled this belief in the restorative power of shared experience into persistent collaborative and participatory work.

Make a Shape

In *The Subtle Body*, documentation is included from an early residency at Platform in Easterhouse (2006-08) in which Dove worked with dance practitioner Sheila Macdougall and sixty 8-10 year olds from Wellhouse Primary School. Together, they explored choreography, free gesture and ways of occupying space through a series of expressive movement and drawing workshops. *Make a Shape* and her wider work with community groups during the residency was influential in establishing Dove's thoughtful approach to engagement and educational work.

Now is the time

Another collection of work is included from a 2009 project that responded to the archive of Norman McLaren, commissioned by The Changing Room in Stirling. Digesting McLaren's work on the experience of sound and experimental musical notation, Dove made paintings and etchings visualising sound palettes in layered manuscripts and developed performance material with Muscles of Joy, an experimental Glasgow music group of which she was a member, with lyrics taken from McLaren's letter writing. Dove's paintings were animated using responsive software, developed by Simon Yuill, which generated improvised performance visuals that mirrored the band's unconscious synchronisation of movement and intuitive communication as they played together.

'I am listening to its fibres' (2)

Materials are also presented from Dove's last animation, which was commissioned for a solo exhibition at Duff House in Banff (2014), but was never completed due to the return of illness. Dove had been researching the site's former use as a sanatorium in the early 1900s, which pioneered treatments in which patients consumed food grown in the grounds and were prescribed with time spent in nature for recuperation. Dove's intention with the animation was to unfurl the therapeutic relationship between house and grounds and to offer a resonant, visceral experience of the properties of medicinal plants. The early rushes layer plants filmed on site with blooming animated pattern, field recordings, mantra and meditative music; a reflection of Dove's study of chakras and energy systems and her engagement with holistic practices at the time.

October, Meaning in Action

This research and visual language grew out of Dove's previous animations *October* (2011) and *Meaning in Action* (2013), which examined the dialogue between internal and external psychological landscapes, the function of free associative thought in the natural world and, in the artist's words, "the capacity the mind has to transform our physical reality and the capacity for the mind to be transformed by our environment and experience."⁽³⁾ These animations are projected in a screening space on the 2nd floor; an invitation to join the work in a dance.

In order to expand the tactile presence of Dove's creative process within the archive, the exhibition includes drawing and painting componentry for animations, soundtrack fragments, tests, sketches and research materials alongside performance documentation and resolved work.

Lygia Clark (1920-1988) was born and spent most of her working life in Brazil which was marked, in the early years of her practice, by a time of progressive optimism. As a member of the Neo-Concrete group, who were proponents of a more sensual approach to abstraction, she made geometric painting concerned with deconstructing the divide between inside and outside. As her work became more three-dimensional, she became increasingly preoccupied with her principle of the *Linha Orgânica* (Organic Line) - the gap between fields which reveals the painting's interior - and the notion that the artwork must be completed by the viewer. Clark's *Bichos* (Critters) series - hinged metal sculptures designed to be manipulated - introduced the idea of the artwork as a relational organism, whose meaning would only emerge with participation, and this was continually elaborated through the three later phases of her practice which are included in *The Subtle Body*.

Nostalgia del Corpo

Clark produced a suite of *Objetos Sensoriais* (Sensorial Objects) between 1964-68, eventually united under the title *Nostalgia del Corpo* (Nostalgia of the Body). Made against the backdrop of the military dictatorship imposed in 1964 in Brazil, she wanted these so-called *Proposições* (Propositions) to prompt a state of transformation in the body; a way to see the world differently. She intended these object-tools, made from quotidian materials invested with texture, sound and scent, to intensify the user's focus on their own sensations in unpredictable ways. Clark's first *Proposição*, *Pedra E Ar* (Stone and Air) (1966), was devised as a rehabilitation device for herself when she broke her wrist in a car accident, repurposing the plastic wrap given to her at the hospital - the gesture of pulsing the stone through this pillow of air became a remedy for her bodily awareness after this rupture in her health.

In the context of increasing violence and censorship from the oppressive regime, Clark saw these *Proposições* as a tonic for restoring a fragmented whole. ⁽⁴⁾ In *Camisa de Força* (Straitjacket) (1966), the participant is wrapped in a net with stones attached to the ends, appropriating a disciplinary instrument in

an effort to reconnect the participant's body parts - simultaneously destabilising and expanding the senses. Clark did not consider any of her later work as performance - an event devised for an audience - but rather as personal invitations to rediscover the self through an inward perceptual experience; that the idea, or the event, happens inside the body of the participant.

Corpo Coletivo

Clark began working on the series *Corpo Coletivo* (Collective Body) in the late 1960's when, fleeing the dictatorship, she moved to Paris. Here she developed communal experiences and participatory rituals, which were later incorporated into student exercises for her seminars at the Sorbonne Université between 1972-76, intended to have a therapeutic effect through corporeal dialogue, shared emotional states, and the formation of an intricate psycho-social fabric. In the *Arquiteturas Biológicas* (Biological Architectures) series, groups constructed flexible living architectural structures around their bodies, using cheap ephemeral materials, which would dissolve as soon as the experience was over. In *Canibalismo* (Cannibalism) (1969) - which references *anthropophagy*, a term used in 1960s Brazilian visual culture for the post-colonial practice of devouring and metabolising external influences - the group eat fruit taken from the suit of a person lying on the floor; symbolically ingesting the "psychic contents" (5) of the other and turning oneself inside out.

Estruturação do Self

In 1976 Clark moved back to Rio de Janeiro and started offering individual healing sessions from her Copacabana apartment. Throughout this phase, titled *Estruturação do Self* (Structuring the Self), Clark still saw herself as an artist rather than a therapist despite her engagement with psychoanalytic practices to develop her methods. During the sessions, unprocessed materials like stone, shell and flowers and her earlier *Objetos Sensoriais* were applied to the clients skin, faces and limbs. Sensation was stimulated in order to generate inner imagery, access a prelinguistic, liminal state and produce a heightened state of perception in the body. She kept extensive reports on the sessions, which included clients' experiences of navigating identity crises, gender fluidity and sexuality, addressing traumatic memories and often producing out-of-body transcendence.

Although they were working in vastly different contexts, Clark and Dove had in common a sustained and careful focus on restoring something absent in the sensate experience of their respective environments; studying the relationships between inner and outer landscapes, between self and world. They each paid forensic attention to how their artwork might act upon, and even transform, the body of the spectator and their own bodies in the process. It is significant that both artists' interests in the remedial qualities of their work intensified with the flux of their own physical health - coming with this, perhaps, a desire to transcend conventional approaches to the wellbeing of the mind and body.

In their archives we can also trace a shared interest in the healing potential of acting, moving and making in community - the euphoria and "organic power"(6) accessible through the collective body. Their joint concern for participation extended beyond mere interaction between artwork and viewer and was closer to a form of *cathexis* - the psychoanalytic term for the investment of mental or emotional energy.(7) It was crucial to both artists that their work would cultivate reciprocity; that meaning could *only* emerge in concert with the active gestural, cerebral or felt input of the audience.

When displayed in companionship, Clark and Dove's works and materials yield a conversation between the two archives which speaks to the synchronicity of their conceptual priorities and locates formal connections. Considering the archive as a living, fertile, shape-shifting entity that holds countless possible readings, the exhibition is an invitation to read the two collections through one another.

Present in the exhibition is a third archive - Kinning Park Complex's history as a former school and radical community space. Throughout June 2026, the organisation hosts an expansive programme to mark the 30 year anniversary since the fifty-five day occupation of the building, led by local mothers demanding childcare provision, that brought about its community ownership. As a place that's seen decades of educational work and collective action, and was once a rehearsal space for Muscles of Joy, the KPC building provides a resonant home for the project, underpinning both artists' commitment to embodied learning, participation and communality.

During the exhibition we'll work with KPC volunteers to plant a bed in their herbal medicine garden with a number of therapeutic species from Dove's Duff House research for future visitors to use.

Laura Plant

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Organised by Chorus & The Katy Dove Archive as part of Glasgow International 2026.

Chorus is an exhibition project based in Glasgow / gallerychorus.co.uk / @chorus.glasgow

The Katy Dove Archive is run by custodian Emma Dove in Dumfries / katydove.com / @katydove.archive.
A number of prints and editions by Katy Dove are for sale during the exhibition - please enquire.

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Footnotes:

1. The exhibition's title is taken from a list of title ideas by Katy Dove, from the development of her 2013 exhibition at Spacex, Exeter.
2. Excerpt hand written by Dove on a page of phrases likely collected during the research for her Duff House animation. For the purposes of this exhibition, the phrase has been used as a point of reference for this group of archive materials.
3. Katy Dove, Artist statement, July 2014
4. Felipe Scovino, *The Fragmented Body: On the Political Aspects of Lygia Clark's Sensorial Objects*, exhibition catalogue for 'Retrospective' at Neue Nationalgalerie, 2025.
5. Lygia Clark, quoted in Irina Hiebert Grun, *Work on the Self: Lygia Clark's Therapeutic Late Work*, exhibition catalogue for 'Retrospective' at Neue Nationalgalerie, 2025.
6. Frederico Coelho, *An Experimental Community: Lygia Clark and Tropicalismo*, exhibition catalogue for 'Retrospective' at Neue Nationalgalerie, 2025.
7. Felipe Scovino, *The Fragmented Body: On the Political Aspects of Lygia Clark's Sensorial Objects*, exhibition catalogue for 'Retrospective' at Neue Nationalgalerie, 2025.