seven x seven

Mother Tongue

1 The etymological roots of the number '7' are diverse and historic, spanning ancient Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and Hebrew, amongst other tongues. These roots append various meanings to the number; such as sève in Old French, referring to the sap of a plant, sêven in Old Dutch, meaning to sift and sieve, and sev·en in Turkish, meaning to love. It is a hugely significant number – the Genesis creation narrative of both Judaism and Christianity cites that God created the world in seven days, hence there are seven days in a week. There are seven sins, seven heavenly sisters, seven seas, seven continents, seven layers to our skin, seven notes in music, and seven colours in the rainbow. Prior to the invention of the telescope, only seven planets were visible in the sky, and correspondingly, many ancient religions adopted seven deities. Beyond religion, there are many superstitions attached to the number seven – generally thought to be lucky, conversely breaking a mirror brings seven years bad luck, and in Chinese traditions, seven symbolises death through association with the 'ghost month' of July.

2 Medieval Glasgow ran from the river Clyde, up through the Saltmarket, along High Street and up to the Cathedral. The Saltmarket meets the High Street at a junction with the Gallowgate in which the remnants of the Glasgow Cross – a tall clocktower with a blue face and tolbooth – sits on a traffic island. Known locally as a historic execution site for those accused of witchcraft and other crimes, it is therefore appropriate that the Gallowgate arrives at its doorstep: with '-gate' in a Scottish context meaning 'the way to.' Continuing an etymological enquiry, 'gallows' are understood now to mean a structure or scaffold, constructed for the purpose of execution. Its roots originate via Proto-Germanic from the Proto-Indo-European 'ghalgh' meaning branch or rod. Before the actual construction of specific apparatus as gallows, the Old English 'galg-treow' demonstrates that trees as the site and means of execution were intertwined from ancient times – most notably through cruxification. In Scots, such trees were referred to as 'gallowstree' but also as 'dule trees' – 'dule' inferring lamentation, misery and grief. Such trees were often selected for their position atop of a hill (gallows-hill), and at busy junctions: prominent sites where justice could be seen to be done and warnings served. Sycamore and oak trees appear to have been a frequent choice – perhaps for their strength. However it is also worth noting that fabric can be dyed black using oak bark and acorns. Many trees sited nearby historic Highland chieftain households continue to carry this name.

3 There were other trees and plants equally associated with witches and thought to aid their practice. As historian Julian Goodare notes, under the Castle Esplanade on the Royal Mile sits a now-dry drinking fountain, a rare memorial to those historically persecuted for witchcraft.[1] Commissioned by Sir Patrick Geddes, it includes the dates 1479–1722, the period which saw the most active witchcraft persecutions. Healing hands, a foxglove, and a snake curled around the heads of Hygeia (the Greek goddess of good health) and her father Aesculapius (god of medicine) adorn the bronze work. Foxgloves have long been associated with witchcraft and medicine – when burned, its liquid or inhaled smoke can cause irritation, it is a cardiac toxin – however, it has also been used as a medicine for heart issues in its dried, powdered form. Whilst the rowan tree historically was thought to protect against enchantment, alder was said to be a good wood with which to make wands, and also provided a secret passage used by the fairy folk to pass from one realm to another. Trees are often the backdrop to historical depictions of witches – whether full of life or lifeless – and of course their branches form the brooms on which we imagine witches to fly. In terms of archival records, one inscribed aspect of this persecution, at times in detail, is the cost of wood for burning witches, an often substantial bill.

4 susan pui san lok's work *Sister O Sister* (2019, Firstsite) draws upon the folklore and history of Old Knobbley, an ancient oak tree located in Essex, its sprawling form and the surrounding Mistley Green area remembered as a place where witches sought to hide from Matthew Hopkins (the 'Witchfinder General') and his associate John Stearne, during the East Anglian witch hunts of 1645–47. *Sister O Sister* developed from 3D-scans of Old Knobbley – contorted, inverted, scaled up and divided into around 200 segments, then lasercut from recycled cardboard material. The subsequent piecing together of the sculptural installation at Firstsite branches out across the space, reaching into far corners, a poetic reminder that to remember those persecuted for witchcraft requires moving beyond re-articulating what we think we already know, and that much further learning, un-learning and recontextualising is required. The literal distortions and inversions of Old Knobbley's image as rendered in sculptural form recall the information often recounted of witchcraft, versus the facts that can be evidenced. The Scottish Survey of Witchcraft undertaken by the University of Edinburgh between 2001 and 2003 through extensive research in archives and records, identifies a total number of 3,837 people who were accused of witchcraft in Scotland: 3,212 named and 625 unnamed people or groups (of variable sizes, known and unknown).[2] Of those accused, 84% were women, 15% men, and a final 1% whose gender is not recorded. The majority of records do not indicate the age of the accused, however for the instances where this is recorded, over half were aged over 40 years, when life expectancies were markedly shorter than the present.[3] Equally, the survey research indicates that many of those accused of witchcraft lived with their reputation – gained through quarrels, disagreements, etc – for many years, even decades.[4] Overall, the research highlights that Scotland has a notably vicious history concerning witchcraft. Nevertheless, in terms of holistic records, many pieces of the puzzle remain absent.

5 Working with the artist on her forthcoming exhibition *seven x seven* for Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art 2021, and thinking about ways of seeing and knowing, we return frequently to the question of how to memorialise or remember with such absences in mind. For example, on the use of the 'swimming test' or 'drowning ponds,' there is a single recorded instance in 1597 of this method being deployed, with the Scottish survey noting that 'it seems to have been discredited on that occasion, and we have found no evidence that it was ever used again.'[5] On site visits to the Drowning Ponds at Mugdock Park, the historic home of Clan Graham, we gaze upon the surface of the water and trace its outline, wonder of its depth, and look at its reflections. In lieu of actual memorials to those persecuted of witchcraft in Scotland, we wonder about the potentiality of the Drowning Ponds as an evocative site of remembrance – despite the inaccuracy of its name according to available historical records, and perhaps, precisely 'to disturb the watery surface of visible evidence, and value that which is lost or unknown or unproven'.[6] This question of how to remember and memorialise historic persecution lies at the core of lok's body of work across the two exhibitions, *A COVEN A GROVE A STAND* and *seven x seven*,[7] and brings to mind philosopher Hannah Arendt's writing on forgiveness: defined by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl as the 'human faculty for undoing – reversing – deeds and words that have been done and spoken, or, to cite another formulation [from Arendt], "the necessary corrective for the inevitable damages resulting from action."'[8]

6 Given the intersection of this persecution with oppressive relations of gender and power, there can be no disputing that this was a persecution that violated the physical boundaries of the body, and equally, that there is an glaring lack of public memorials to this extraordinary violence. St. Mungo is known as the founder and patron saint of Glasgow – a patronage which he shares with his mother Saint Teneu. The city's crest, under the motto 'Let Glasgow Flourish,' features the four 'miracles' of St. Mungo, one being the tale that having been left in charge of the fire in the Saint Serf's monastery as a boy, he fell asleep in the refectory. Other boys in the congregation exterminated the fire out of jealousy, however taking a hazel branch (the hazel tree being a wood of wisdom), Mungo restarted it. Such a happening seems to take place at a fine line, by today's judgement, between witchcraft and miracle. St. Mungo is buried at Glasgow Cathedral, in walking distance from the area known as St Enoch, thought to be the historic site of his mothers' burial or that of a chapel erected in her honour – both sites at the fringes of medieval Glasgow's parameters. There are numerous variants and discussions surrounding her name, and the same can be said for her life-story. Born a Brittonic princess of the ancient kingdom of Gododdin (in the area later known as Lothian), she was raped by her cousin, the Welsh prince Owain mab Urien, whilst he was dressed as a woman. The resulting pregnancy caused her to be sentenced to death by her father, King Lleuddun, and she was hurled from the hill of Traprain Law. Miraculously, both she and her unborn child survived the fall, but she was now suspected of being a witch and set adrift in a small coracle.[9] Arriving on the opposite shore of the Firth of Forth in Culross, she was sheltered by the community of Saint Serf, where she gave birth to her son Kentigern, on whom Serf later bestowed the nickname 'Mungo.' Historian Elspeth King has noted that she is 'on record as Scotland's first recorded rape victim, battered woman and unmarried mother.'[10] Jumping forward in time, a prominent case locally is that of the Paisley witches, which resulted in the prosecution of seven people (four women and three men) in June 1697. Their prosecution rested on the accusations made by Christian Shaw, the eleven-year-old daughter of the Laird of Bargarran, who after reporting to her mother the name of a servant who had stolen a glass of milk, experienced a variety of symptoms and fits. The burial site was marked by a horseshoe, with those hanged said to be buried upside down beneath, and with the curse of one, Agnes Naismith, blamed for misfortunes in the town since. It is a noteworthy anecdote to the interlacing of witchcraft, persecution and needlework at play here, in that Christian Shaw went on to become a successful businesswoman in the thread industry, introducing the fabrication of fine linen thread to the local area and building a recognised brand under the 'Barragan' name.

7 In the collision between the female body under persecution and the history of witchcraft in Scotland, the search for the 'Devil's Mark' is prominent – in reality a visible bodily blemish or an insensitive area. So-called 'pricking needles' were adapted needles, pins and bodkins that witch-hunters and prosecutors used during interrogation, sometimes publicly, to prove the accused had the mark, a signifier of being an initiate of the Devil. Whilst the presence of pricking needles in museum collections appears to be uneven, there is evidence that these contained a trick mechanism – retracting needles for example, which would give the false impression of the flesh being unmarked despite pricking, when the needle, in truth, would never have come into contact with the skin. Given the domestic and feminine associations of needlework, and the fact that it is women who are overwhelmingly represented in the statistics of the accused, it seems particularly ironic that the needle as a minute instrument of often invisible female labour would be weaponised against them. Yet the needle can also be an instrument of subversion, as Parker suggested in *The Subversive Stitch* (1984). susan pui san lok's work *One/Hundreds* (2019, Firstsite) featured two hundred ribbons hung from the ceiling in a double garland, for the unnamed persecuted as witches across the East of England over two centuries, while an adjacent wall was adorned with unique and intricately embroidered hoops for the named, stitched by various local community groups. The gesture of memorialising through stitch the names of those persecuted for witchcraft (which were also repeated through *A COVEN A GROVE A STAND* as spoken, handwritten and printed words), with a tool similar to those that may have been used to cement their 'guilt', is both intimate and powerful. The artist's work highlights the unresolved nature of the historical and folk narratives we have to hand, whilst weaving across the disciplinary and imaginary boundaries enforced: between sanctified and heretical forms of beliefs; between benign and malign forms of magic and witchcraft; between powerful bodies and those without agency, across gender; and between the body's own physical flesh and embodied memories.

1. Julian Goodare, 'Remembering Scottish Witches', *The Bottle Imp*, Issue 14, November 2013, Available: https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2013/11/remembering-scottish-witches/. 2. Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller, Louise Yeoman, *The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft 1563–1736: An Introduction*, January 2003, Available: http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/Research/witches/introduction.html 3. Ibid. 4. Ibid. 5. Ibid. 6. Email correspondence with the artist, June 2020 7. *A COVEN A GROVE A STAND* took place at Firstsite, Colchester, as part of 'New Geographies,' from 8 February – 22 April 2019. *seven x seven* is being commissioned and curated by Mother Tongue for the Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art 'Across the City' programme, initially due to take place in spring 2020, now postponed to 2021 due to Covid-19. 8. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl with reference to Arendt, in: Aleksandra Wagner, Carin Kuoni, Matthew Buckingham (eds.); *Considering Forgiveness*, New York: Vera List Center for Art and Politics, 2009, pg. 52 9. A small, lightweight boat. 10. Elspeth King, *The Hidden History Of Glasgow's Women: The THENEW Factor*, Mainstream Publishing; UK, 1993.

On reverse: Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller and Louise Yeoman, *The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft*, www.shc.ed.ac.uk/witches/ (archived January 2003, accessed 07 July 2019)

A WALLIS
ABBOT
ABEL
ABERNETHY
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ADDIE
ADDISON
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PROFET
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RANDALL
RANK
RANKIN
RANNICK
RANNIE
RASS
RATTER
RATTRAY
RAY
RAYMOND
REDFORD
REDMOND
REDPATH
§
REID
REMY
RHIND
RIACH
RICHARD
RICHARDSON
RICHIESON
RIDDALL
RITCHIE
ROBB
ROBBIE
ROBERT
ROBERTSON
ROBESON
ROBINSON
ROGERS
ROGIE
RONALD
RONALDSON
ROSS
ROSSIE
ROWAN
ROY
RUDGE
RULE
RUSSEL
RUTHERFORD
SADDLER
SAMSON
SAMUEL
SAMUELSTON (HOME)
SANDERSON
SANDIE
SANDIESON
SANDS
SAWYER
SAYTHE
SCHAILER
SCHEIL
SCOBIE
SCOGIAN
SCORD
SCOTLAND
SCOTT
SCOTTIE
SCOUGAL
SCROGGES
SCROGGIE
SEAMAN
SELKIRK
SEMPLE
SESBIE
SETON
SEWEIS
SHAND
SHANKS
SHANNAN
SHARP
SHAW
SHAYME
SHEARER
SHEDDEN
SHEPHERD
SHERWOOD
SHIEL
SHILLINGTON
SHIRE
SHORT
SHORTHOUSE
SIBBALD
SIMBEARD
SIMPSON
SINCLAIR
SKAIR
SKAITSON
SKEBISTER
SKENE
SLATER
SLEIGH
SLOAN
SMALL
SMART
SMEATON
SMILLIE
SMITH
SOMERVILLE
SOUNESS
SOUTER
SPAE WIFE
SPALDARGE
SPARK
SPEED
SPEIRS
SPENCE
SPITTAL
SPREULL
SPROTT
STAIG
STARK
STEEDMAN
STEEL
STEIN
STENHOUSE
STEVEN
STEVENSON
STEWART
STILLCART
STILLIE
STIRK
STIRT
STITH
STOBIE
STODDART
STONEHOUSE
STOUT
STOWANE
STRACHAN
STRATH
STRATTON
STRAUGHAN
STUDGEON
STURROK
SUMMER
SUNDERLAND
SUPP
SUTHERLAND
SUTIE
SWAN
SWINTON
SYDSERF
SYME
SYRIE
TAIS
TAIT
TAME
TARBET
TASK
TASKER
TAYLOR
TEMPLE
THOM
THOMAS' DAUGHTER
§
THOMSON
THORBRAND
THYNE
TODD
TODRICK
TODRY
TORR
TORRIE
TOYES
TRAILL
TRAYE
TROTTER
TROTTON
TUCIDIE
TULLIE
TULLOCH
TURNBULL
TURNER
TWEEDIE
TWICH
UDNY
UMPHERSTOUN
UMPHRAY
UNCHACH
UNES
UNKNOWN
URE
URICH
VALLANCE
VANE
VASS
VAYNE
VEITCH
VELENE
VERTIE
VIKKER
VOE
WADDIE
WALDEN
WALKER
WALLACE
WANDERSON
WANTON
WARK
WARRICK
WATEN
WATERSON
WATSON
WATT
WAUGH
WEBSTER
WEIR
WELCH
WELL
WEMYSS
WENTON
WEST
WHARRIE
WHITE
WHITELAW
WHITEMAN
WICK
WIKEAN
WILKIE
WILKIN
WILKINSON
WILLIAM
WILLIAMSON
WILSON
WINSTER
WISHART
WOOD
WOODROW
WOODSIDE
WRIGHT
WYLIE
WYND
YERKIN
YESTER
YOUNG
YOURSTON
YRASCHT
YULE