

## **Sharing Little Sparta and the Little Sparta Residency Programme, 2017**

### **Introduction**

Ian Hamilton Finlay's Little Sparta is widely acknowledged as one of the most distinctive gardens in Europe. Developed by Finlay between 1966 and 2006 (and initially in collaboration with his wife Sue Finlay), the garden at Dunsyre contains almost 300 individual works by the poet and artist. The Little Sparta Trust was established in 2005 with the aim of preserving Little Sparta and maintaining access to what has become one of Scotland's most influential public artworks.

In February 2016, the Little Sparta Trust, working in partnership with the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS), the Scottish Poetry Library (SPL) and the University of Edinburgh, received an Open Project Fund award from Creative Scotland. This award, coupled with support from the Monument Trust, made possible Sharing Little Sparta: a new project designed to improve and enhance access to Little Sparta, both for the public and for artists.

Over an 18 month period, Sharing Little Sparta will develop new ways for the public and artists to engage with the garden, enhancing intellectual, creative and virtual access through a wide variety of means. This pilot project will bring a new openness to Little Sparta, whilst maintaining the vital balance between what is an enjoyably secluded place and a work of international cultural influence. The project will also develop the range and number of ways in which the garden can be accessed, employing innovative digital technologies (developed in collaboration with the Design Informatics department of Edinburgh College of Art) in formats which are appropriate to this exceptional context. In this way, Sharing Little Sparta will ensure the public and artists can engage with the garden fully both on site and remotely.

### **Little Sparta Residency Programme**

As part of this project, the Little Sparta Trust is launching a new programme of funded research residencies for visual artists, poets and writers based in Scotland.

This programme will create opportunities for artists to engage fully with Finlay's work and the ideas that informed and were generated by it. The residencies will enable the participating artists to take full advantage of supported access to Little Sparta and to the extensive collections of Finlay's work held at both the NGS and the SPL. Although these opportunities are non-residential (accommodation is not provided at Little Sparta), the artists will be given access to the garden and also to the Research Centre and Library located within Finlay's house (not currently open to the public). Through these means, the residencies will provide the participating artists with a period of focused time for research and the development of new ideas.

### **The Participating Artists, 2017**

Following an open call for applications, residencies of three weeks each have been awarded to: **Gerry Loose** (poet), **Martin Parker** (sound artist) and **Sarah Tripp** (visual artist). The artists share a longstanding interest in Little Sparta and the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay and the residencies, which will begin in June this year, will allow them to explore Finlay's work further in relation to their own practices.

## Gerry Loose

Gerry Loose is interested in the key role Sue Finlay played in the development of Little Sparta and has stated that '(her) plants are crucial to place and poem, informed by both.' During his residency he will explore Sue's approach to planting in the garden and consider the ways this was done in relation to both the reality of the landscape itself and to the essential interplay between the plants, poems and the site. Gerry will refer to documentation in the library at Little Sparta and to archival material held in Edinburgh, focusing upon the ideas that informed this collaborative project and led to the creation of what he describes as 'Scotland's ultimate site specific artwork as a whole; neither plant nor poem may be removed from place without irreparable damage to that whole; a syntax of landscape not met elsewhere.'

Gerry Loose lives on the Isle of Bute. He is a poet, editor and gardener and has been poet-in-residence at the Botanic Gardens, Glasgow, and at the Jardin des Plantes, Montpellier. His poetry is informed by his extensive knowledge of agriculture, horticulture and his experience of designing and making gardens; he has written that 'My poetry is as likely to appear in these (and ungardened landscapes) as on the page.'



Principal publications include: *The Elementary Particles* (Taranis Books, 1993), *Tongues of Stone* (Mariscat Press, 1998), *Eitgal* (Mariscat Press, 2001) *Printed on Water: new and selected poems* (Shearsman Books, 2007), *Ten Seasons* (SPL & Luath, 2007), *the deer path to my door* (Oystercatcher, 2009), *that person himself* (Shearsman Books, 2009), *Fault Line* (Vagabond Poets, 2014) and *An Oakwoods Almanac* (Shearsman Books, 2015).

Image: Gerry Loose

[Gerry Loose](#)

[Gerry Loose, Scottish Poetry Library](#)

## Martin Parker

Martin Parker's interest in Little Sparta revolves around the idea of cultivation and the parallels between the practices of a gardener and a musician. The gardener works *with* nature by controlling it and thereby encouraging it to be itself. Musicians work in a similar domain where the wild and the practiced make a necessary partnership.

Parker's work at Little Sparta will begin with the development of a series of short film loops: 'Images of organic matter, gently activated by wind, rain and heat (will be) accompanied by entirely synthesised sound that is shaped by the small movements we see. In doing this I expect a poetic resonance to emerge between two seemingly opposing words.' These works will be shared via social media and, ultimately, will occupy a dedicated website where visitors can pause and resume the films to create a unique audiovisual pattern.

The final stage of this project, beyond the residency itself, will take the form of a sound installation where visitors can freely arrange different kinds of loudspeakers with different sounds growing within them. The careful arrangement and shaping of a landscape of speakers is analogous to Finlay's work in creating and cultivating his garden and Parker has stated that 'I regard the deep knowledge that is embedded in computing technology and expressed in digital art as making a powerful connection with the references to human history and knowledge that Finlay's garden reveals.'



A composer, improviser and soloist with laptop, Parker's work focuses on encounters between computers, people and places. Based in Edinburgh, he has performed and collaborated internationally with theatre companies, symphony orchestras, visual artists and ensembles; recent projects include 'Songs for an airless room', an 'opera' for cinemas performed by Joby Burgess and Phil Minton. Martin has been Artistic Director of Edinburgh's [Dialogues Festival](#) for over 10 years and is one third of free improvisation trio [Lapslap](#). He is Academic

Director of the University of Edinburgh's MSc in Sound Design.

Image: Martin Parker  
[Juanjo Ripalda](#)

## **Sarah Tripp**

During her residency, Sarah Tripp will focus upon Finlay's desire to maintain the garden as an artwork by caring for its temporal as well as spatial boundaries: the Little Sparta Trust preserves this by opening the garden to visitors between June and September only, when the plants and trees are flourishing and in full leaf. In this way, Tripp will approach Little Sparta 'as a work composed from poetry and framed by a narrative of seasonal changes.' She will draw upon Finlay's library at Little Sparta, and archives held elsewhere in Scotland, to explore the potential for events - created and delivered by herself and other artists - synchronised to the opening and closing of the garden.

Sarah's artworks have taken multiple forms including: publications, solo performances, public events and films. Often they take more than one form simultaneously or evolve through a number of forms moving from text to public event to film. She writes highly compressed prose works intentionally keeping dénouement suspended in order to invite a reader to imagine, and reimagine, endings. Customs, gestures and moods are reoccurring themes in her artworks which draw from literature and psychoanalysis. Tripp often uses an eclectic mix of materials and sources, seeking out people to interview and undertaking in-depth research.



Sarah completed a BA in Fine Art at The Glasgow School of Art in 1994 and an MA in Fine Art at Chelsea College of Art in 1996 before returning to Glasgow to practice as an artist, writer and curator, and join the committee of the Transmission Gallery. In 2016 she completed her practice-led PhD at Edinburgh University in writing character studies using a cyclical, reflective methodology. Recent projects include: Selected recent projects include: 'Making People Up', Artists Moving Image Festival 2016, LUX Scotland, Tramway (Glasgow); 'Listening to Strangers', Eavesdropper, CCA (Glasgow), 2015; 'Dr Sinclair's Drawer', Flat Time House (London) and Book Works (London) 2014;

'You Are of Vital Importance to the Art Community, CCA (Glasgow) and Book Works (London), 2014; '24 Stops', Camden Arts Centre (London) with UCLH Arts, 2013 and 'Adaptation', Collective (Edinburgh), 2012. She is currently developing a new work of fiction with Book Works (London) and a collaborative publication of lectures with Dr Kate Briggs (Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam) exploring forms as they appear in writing.

Image: Sarah Tripp  
[Sarah Tripp](#)

**For further information on Sharing Little Sparta, please contact:  
Alexia Holt  
Project Coordinator, Sharing Little Sparta  
[alexia@littlesparta.co.uk](mailto:alexia@littlesparta.co.uk)**



Scottish  
**Poetry  
Library**  
Bringing people  
and poems together



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
*Edinburgh College of Art*