

SculptureCenter
Charlotte Prodger: Subtotal



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BRIDGIT
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Charlotte Prodger: Subtotal
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Curated by Ruba Katrib

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Cover: Charlotte Prodger, Still image from *BRIDGIT*, 2016. Single-channel HD video. 32 minutes. Courtesy the artist, Hollybush Gardens, London and Koppe Astner, Glasgow

Charlotte Prodger

Ruba Katrib

Opening with a monologue that guides us through its entirety, Charlotte Prodger's *BRIDGIT*, 2016, is a visual essay, a meandering of sorts. Shot entirely on Prodger's iPhone, the work turns inside out the highly subjective and increasingly ubiquitous form of the personal narrative created through handheld devices and social media. The immediacy and intimacy of iPhone footage makes it an expressive extension of the artist's movement through space. Her spoken narrative—in which her voice periodically switches with that of another female—takes us through specific moments related and unrelated to the more-or-less static images her gaze rests on. By sharing reflections on past events and recent encounters and connecting them to an ancient history, Prodger inflects her references and images with new meanings. As one scene leads to the next, the footage and spoken narrative fragments build on one another. The scenes each offer a pause, a momentary break, yet they accrue to form a journey through intersecting biological and geological existences.

The operations that unfold in *BRIDGIT* through the use of the moving image are central to the entire exhibition. The content and formal aspects of the video are mirrored throughout the other works Prodger includes. While *BRIDGIT* is contained within its own room, the adjacent space is engaged as an architectural foil to the film. There, Prodger has created a large-scale sculpture that connects the dimensions of the projection screen to those of the building's prominent steel doors. A powder-coated steel bar structure sits on the floor, forming three joined yet open rectangular sections that subtly redefine the dimensions of the room. Titled *Machrie Moor*, 2017, the work evokes the prehistoric standing stones on the Scottish island of Arran that appear in the film. The sculpture hinges the video to the building. It draws a line from the ancient manmade rock formations to the contemporary site of the exhibition. The sculpture works as a connective point, not unlike the transitional moments that comprise *BRIDGIT*. Physically, the sculpture carves the space and unravels its form. It reflects dimensions, shapes, and historical material in, and out of, the video and the institutional architecture.

New works on paper included in the exhibition take a cue from *BRIDGIT*: letterpress prints feature references extracted from the film, further slowing down perception of the work through even more static contemplation, as well as in the laborious process of making the print. In addition to the framed prints on view, Prodger includes a Risograph handout, with the entirety of the voiceover printed, so that viewers can read and access the text separately from the temporal experience of listening to speech within the film.

The title of one of the prints, *Brizo of Delos*, 2017, alludes to the name of the Neolithic deity that hovers over the video while breaking it down, suggesting possible original namesakes, reorderings, and hybrids in the word "Bridgit." An extract from Julian Cope's 1998 *Modern Antiquarian* is quoted on the print, a piece of text that is also read within the film. In it, Cope describes how Bridgit could not have been the deity's original name, since Neolithic names are all single syllables. He goes on to list all her names known to date—Brid, Brig, Brizo of Delos, the Cretan Britomartis, and others—confidently coming to rest on what he believes to be her true original

name, Bree. This slippage of namesakes for Bridgit evolves over centuries. The deity transforms over time, taking on new monikers and meanings in each cultural moment in which she is evoked. Though eternal, she is not safe from human interventions into her identity that fundamentally change her character. Her shifting status over the course of human history is contrasted with the biological scale of time and reflects its impact on the construction of self, a theme addressed throughout the film.

This aspect of identity transformation is also emphasized in the letterpress print *The Child Is Mother to the Adult*, 2017, where Prodger uses the name of another female figure, Allucquère Rosanne "Sandy" Stone. She repeats the varied iterations of the name of this pioneer of transgender theory, sound engineer, writer, and artist (a device she also uses in *Brizo of Delos*). Here Prodger includes text taken from Stone's 1995 book *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*, which is also read in the film's monologue. The extract obliquely explains one function of personal names—as identification—pointing to practices in which names change over a lifetime, reflecting stages of life and varying circumstances. As the works on paper and *BRIDGIT* emphasize, at each moment we are different people. How do we accommodate this instability?

Fluidity is an essential part of the structure of *BRIDGIT*, as layer upon layer of transitional moments chart a path through subjectivity and memory. Small details, instants, conversations, colors, and places collect to form a single identity. Each scene in the film conjures the sense of being in a unique moment. Coincidences and connections are later assimilated into a personal story that always remains incomplete. In one instance of scene fragments that intersect and split apart, the still camera captures a forest as Prodger remembers a time when she was working at a home for the elderly and on the verge of coming out. As she switches to a later memory in the next scene, the camera is focused on a solid ochre color as Prodger recalls that while being administered anesthesia, she was told to think of something nice to hold in her mind as she went under. She quickly decides to think of a field; trying to get the right one, she cycles through several not-so-right ones. The forest featured in the earlier scene suddenly changes its reference point. No longer representing the wilderness of the stone circle region of Aberdeenshire where Prodger grew up, it becomes a version of the lush green field she tries to evoke as a mental image. While transformed, it continues to relate to the earlier scene in which she describes the landscape of her hometown. The question of Prodger's search for the most pleasing landscape underscores the film's construction as a series of ideal and inevitably inaccurate images. Later, Prodger recounts anecdotes about various queer relationships being misperceived as mothers and daughters, aunts and nieces, or siblings. The subject of the film continues to slip. The perception of a single person further adjusts when it concerns relationships, also informed by social and cultural norms and biases. Who are we? And who are we when we are together?

Prodger ends *BRIDGIT* by returning to the subject of anesthesia, describing how patients, when they come to, are often unaware that time has passed. Mentioning a few of the reactions that emerge from going under, from aggressiveness to confusion, Prodger creates a metaphor for any period of time now elapsed. How do we account for it? What happens when it dawns on us that something has changed without our being able to pinpoint when and how? These central questions frame this exhibition. Using different forms, Prodger uses slight shifts of positioning and perspective to communicate that memory, identity, and reality itself, remains elusive and inconstant. Everything and everyone is caught up in the passage of time.





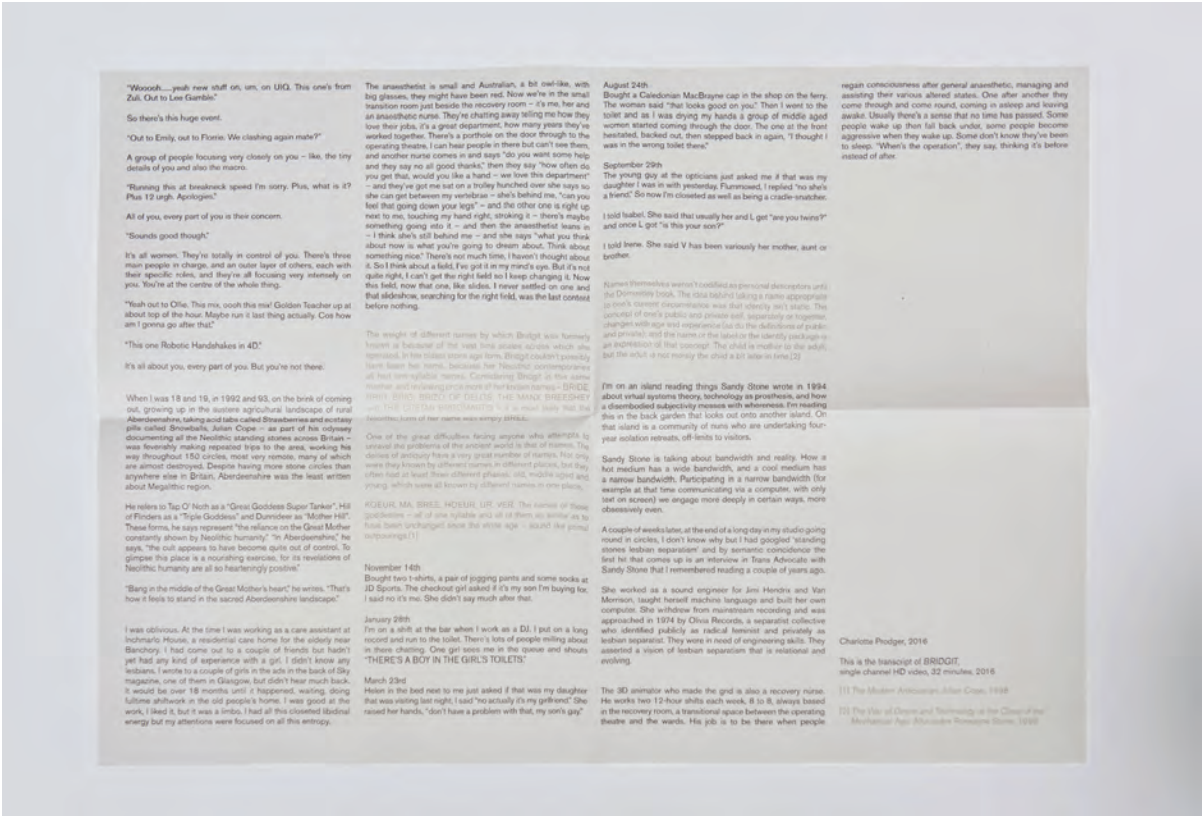
Installation view.



Installation view.



Risograph transcript of *BRIDGIT*, 2016.



Risograph transcript of *BRIDGIT*, 2016.

“Woooh.....yeah new stuff on, um, on UIQ. This one’s from Zuli. Out to Lee Gamble.”

So there’s this huge event.

“Out to Emily, out to Florrie. We clashing again mate?”

A group of people focusing very closely on you — like, the tiny details of you and also the macro.

“Running this at breakneck speed I’m sorry. Plus, what is it? Plus 12 urgh. Apologies.”

All of you, every part of you is their concern.

“Sounds good though.”

It’s all women. They’re totally in control of you. There’s three main people in charge, and an outer layer of others, each with their specific roles, and they’re all focusing very intensely on you. You’re at the centre of the whole thing.

“Yeah out to Ollie. This mix, oooh this mix! Golden Teacher up at about top of the hour. Maybe run it last thing actually. Cos how am I gonna go after that.”

“This one Robotic Handshakes in 4D.”

It’s all about you, every part of you. But you’re not there.

When I was 18 and 19, in 1992 and 93, on the brink of coming out, growing up in the austere agricultural landscape of rural Aberdeenshire, taking acid tabs called Strawberries and ecstasy pills called Snowballs, Julian Cope — as part of his odyssey documenting all the Neolithic standing stones across Britain — was feverishly making repeated trips to the area, working his way throughout 150 circles, most very remote, many of which are almost destroyed. Despite having more stone circles than anywhere else in Britain, Aberdeenshire was the least written about Megalithic region.

He refers to Tap O’ Noth as a “Great Goddess Super Tanker”, Hill of Flinders as a “Triple Goddess” and Dunnideer as “Mother Hill”. These forms, he says represent “the reliance on the Great Mother constantly shown by Neolithic humanity.” “In Aberdeenshire,” he says, “the cult appears to have become quite out of control. To glimpse this place is a nourishing exercise, for its revelations of Neolithic humanity are all so hearteningly positive.”

“Bang in the middle of the Great Mother’s heart,” he writes. “That’s how it feels to stand in the sacred Aberdeenshire landscape.”

I was oblivious. At the time I was working as a care assistant at Inchmarlo House, a residential care home for the elderly near Banchory. I had come out to a couple of friends but hadn’t yet had any kind of experience with a girl. I didn’t know any lesbians. I wrote to a couple of girls in the ads in the back of Sky magazine, one of them in Glasgow, but didn’t hear much back. It would be over 18 months until it happened, waiting, doing fulltime shiftwork in the old people’s home. I was good at the work, I liked it, but it was a limbo. I had all this closeted libidinal energy but my attentions were focused on all this entropy.

The anaesthetist is small and Australian, a bit owl-like, with big glasses, they might have been red. Now we’re in the small transition room just beside the recovery room — it’s me, her and an anaesthetic nurse. They’re chatting away telling me how they love their jobs, it’s a great department, how many years they’ve worked together. There’s a porthole on the door through to the operating theatre, I can hear people in there but can’t see them, and another nurse comes in and says “do you want some help and they say no all good thanks,” then they say “how often do you get that, would you like a hand — we love this department” — and they’ve got me sat on a trolley hunched over she says so she can get between my vertebrae — she’s behind me, “can you feel that going down your legs” — and the other one is right up next to me, touching my hand right, stroking it — there’s maybe something going into it — and then the anaesthetist leans in — I think she’s still behind me — and she says “what you think about now is what you’re going to dream about. Think about something nice.” There’s not much time, I haven’t thought about it. So I think about a field, I’ve got it in my mind’s eye. But it’s not quite right, I can’t get the right field so I keep changing it. Now this field, now that one, like slides. I never settled on one and that slideshow, searching for the right field, was the last content before nothing.

The weight of different names by which Bridgit was formerly known is because of the vast time scales across which she operated. In her oldest stone age form, Bridgit couldn’t possibly have been her name, because her Neolithic contemporaries all had one-syllable names. Considering Bridgit in this same manner, and reviewing once more all her known names — BRIDE, BRID, BRIG, BRIZO OF DELOS, THE MANX BRESHEY and THE CRETAN BRITOMARTIS — it is most likely that the Neolithic form of her name was simply BREE.

One of the great difficulties facing anyone who attempts to unravel the problems of the ancient world is that of names. The deities of antiquity have a very great number of names. Not only were they known by different names in different places, but they often had at least three different phases: old, middle aged and young, which were all known by different names in one place.

KOEUR, MA, BREE, HOEUR, UR, VER. The names of these goddesses — all of one syllable and all of them so similar as to have been unchanged since the stone age — sound like primal outpourings.[1]

November 14th

Bought two t-shirts, a pair of jogging pants and some socks at JD Sports. The checkout girl asked if it’s my son I’m buying for. I said no it’s me. She didn’t say much after that.

January 28th

I’m on a shift at the bar when I work as a DJ. I put on a long record and run to the toilet. There’s lots of people milling about in there chatting. One girl sees me in the queue and shouts “THERE’S A BOY IN THE GIRL’S TOILETS.”

March 23rd

Helen in the bed next to me just asked if that was my daughter that was visiting last night, I said “no actually it’s my girlfriend.” She raised her hands, “don’t have a problem with that, my son’s gay.”

August 24th

Bought a Caledonian MacBrayne cap in the shop on the ferry. The woman said “that looks good on you.” Then I went to the toilet and as I was drying my hands a group of middle aged women started coming through the door. The one at the front hesitated, backed out, then stepped back in again, “I thought I was in the wrong toilet there.”

September 29th

The young guy at the opticians just asked me if that was my daughter I was in with yesterday. Flummoxed, I replied “no she’s a friend.” So now I’m closeted as well as being a cradle-snatcher.

I told Isabel. She said that usually her and L get “are you twins?” and once L got “is this your son?”

I told Irene. She said V has been variously her mother, aunt or brother.

Names themselves weren’t codified as personal descriptors until the Domesday book. The idea behind taking a name appropriate to one’s current circumstance was that identity isn’t static. The concept of one’s public and private self, separately or together, changes with age and experience (as do the definitions of public and private); and the name or the label or the identity package is an expression of that concept. The child is mother to the adult, but the adult is not merely the child a bit later in time.[2]

I’m on an island reading things Sandy Stone wrote in 1994 about virtual systems theory, technology as prosthesis, and how a disembodied subjectivity messes with whereness. I’m reading this in the back garden that looks out onto another island. On that island is a community of nuns who are undertaking four-year isolation retreats, off-limits to visitors.

Sandy Stone is talking about bandwidth and reality. How a hot medium has a wide bandwidth, and a cool medium has a narrow bandwidth. Participating in a narrow bandwidth (for example at that time communicating via a computer, with only text on screen) we engage more deeply in certain ways, more obsessively even.

A couple of weeks later, at the end of a long day in my studio going round in circles, I don’t know why but I had googled ‘standing stones lesbian separatism’ and by semantic coincidence the first hit that comes up is an interview in Trans Advocate with Sandy Stone that I remembered reading a couple of years ago.

She worked as a sound engineer for Jimi Hendrix and Van Morrison, taught herself machine language and built her own computer. She withdrew from mainstream recording and was approached in 1974 by Olivia Records, a separatist collective who identified publicly as radical feminist and privately as lesbian separatist. They were in need of engineering skills. They asserted a vision of lesbian separatism that is relational and evolving.

The 3D animator who made the grid is also a recovery nurse. He works two 12-hour shifts each week, 8 to 8, always based in the recovery room, a transitional space between the operating theatre and the wards. His job is to be there when people

regain consciousness after general anaesthetic, managing and assisting their various altered states. One after another they come through and come round, coming in asleep and leaving awake. Usually there’s a sense that no time has passed. Some people wake up then fall back under, some people become aggressive when they wake up. Some don’t know they’ve been to sleep. “When’s the operation”, they say, thinking it’s before instead of after.

Charlotte Prodger, 2016

This is the transcript of *BRIDGIT*, single channel HD video, 32 minutes, 2016

[1] *The Modern Antiquarian*, Julian Cope, 1998

[2] *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*, Allucquère Rosanne Stone, 1996



BRIDGIT, 2016, installation view.



BRIDGIT, 2016, installation view.



Still image from *BRIDGIT*, 2016.



Still image from *BRIDGIT*, 2016.

Checklist of Works in the Exhibition

BRIDGIT, 2016
Single-channel HD video
32 minutes

Brizo of Delos, 2017
Letterpress print
13.8 x 16.9 inches (35 x 43 cm)

The Child is Mother to the Adult, 2017
Letterpress print
13.8 x 16.9 inches (35 x 43 cm)

Machrie Moor, 2017
Powder-coated steel
158.5 x 88.5 x 1.5 inches
(402.6 x 224.8 x 3.8 cm)

Risograph transcript of *BRIDGIT*, 2016
Risograph print
11.4 x 16.1 inches (29 x 41 cm)

All works courtesy the artist,
Hollybush Gardens, London, and
Koppe Astner, Glasgow

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