

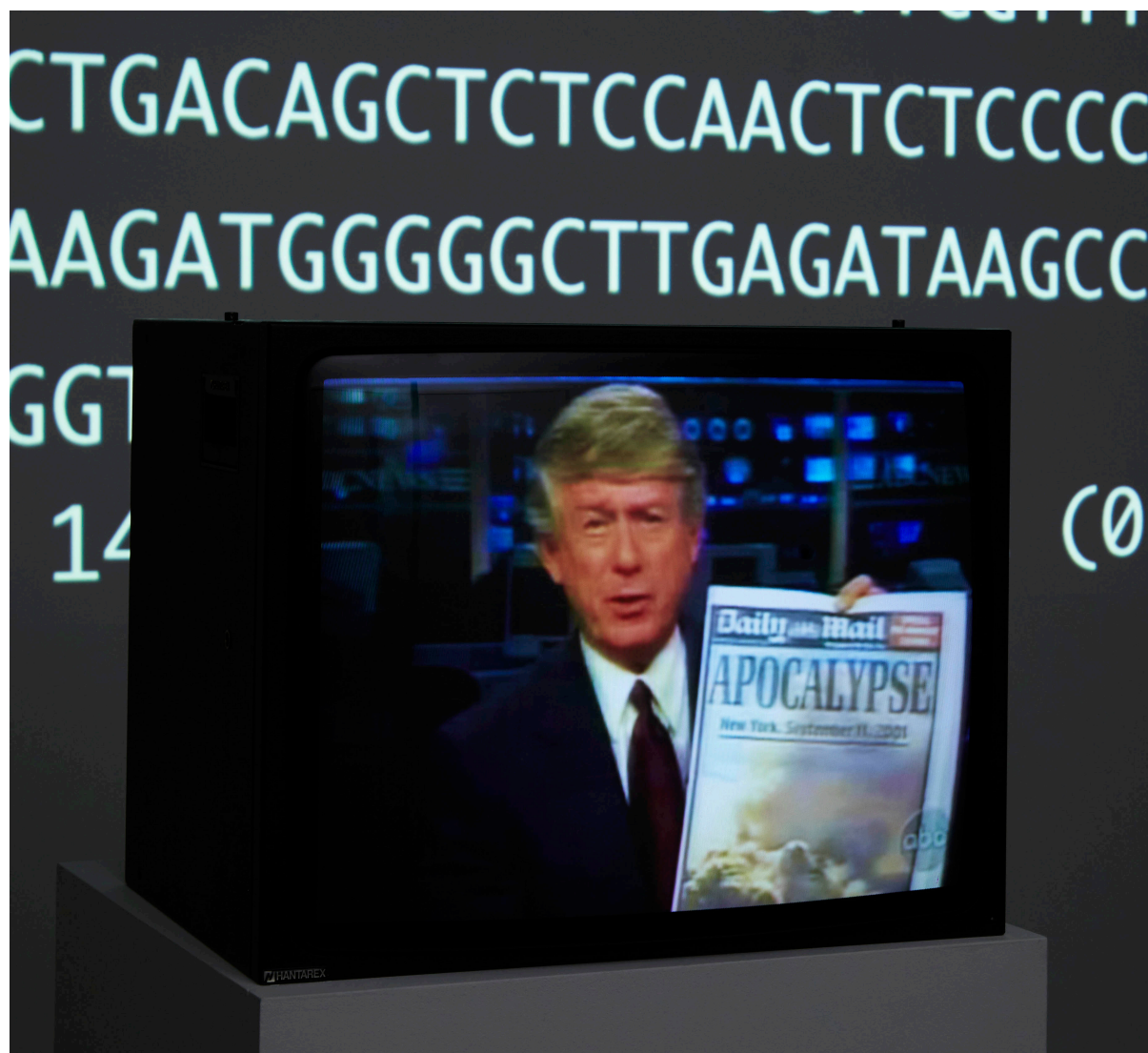
# Carroll / Fletcher

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Thomson & Craighead  
*Party Booby Trap*

14 April - 25 May 2016

Private View: Wednesday 13 April, 6-8pm



Thomson & Craighead, *Stutterer* (2014) [detail], Two-channel moving images, generative software

Thomson & Craighead present their first fragrance *Apocalypse* (2016) in *Party Booby Trap*, the duo's second solo show at Carroll / Fletcher. The scent will be showcased alongside a series of major new works inspired by sources ranging from nuclear waste to self-help literature and genetics.

The late 20th century saw one of the most significant scientific advances to date, with the first mapping of a human genome (an individual's complete DNA set) by the international Human Genome Project. It took thirteen years and twenty universities to reference over three billion base pairs of nucleotides (DNA molecules) that compose one single genome. This process has inspired Thomson & Craighead's *Stutterer* (2014), a video installation the artists describe as a "poetry machine."

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There are four types of DNA: adenine, cytosine, guanine, and thymine, commonly referred to as A, C, G, and T. The artists seized the creative opportunity afforded by the combination of a sequence of letters and a crucial tranche of recent history. The time it took to complete the Human Genome Project spanned the liberation of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the fall of Baghdad to the allied military coalition in 2003. Supported by the Wellcome Trust, *Stutterer* (2014) pairs each letter of the first human genome with a word beginning with the same letter, spoken in television footage from the period. The result is a televisual portrait of an era which encompassed not only the First and the Second Gulf Wars, but also the collapse of the Soviet Union, the deaths of Yitzhak Rabin and Princess Diana, the first cloned sheep Dolly, the launch of Viagra and the shootings at Columbine High School.

In October 2002, then-President George W. Bush declared that Iraq was in possession of chemical and biological weapons which “threatened America and the world” – an allegation which is now widely acknowledged as one of the main triggers for the Second Gulf War (2003-11). “Confronting the threat posed by Iraq,” he said, “is crucial to winning the War on Terror.” Thomson & Craighead’s print *the war on terror* (2016) plays with the phrase in a series of Oulipo-esque anagrams: “the rot narrower”, “tarot hewn error”, “rare tower thorn.” Made with a typewriter on a white sheet of paper like a piece of experimental poetry, these hint at the absurdity of the chain of events that led to the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians in less than a decade. Multi-coloured balloons bearing the names of military operations from “Desert Storm” to “Urgent Fury” crowd the floor. These innocuous presences – absent-mindedly kicked about by visitors as they progress through the exhibition – function as gentle reminders of the pervasive nature of warfare. On a TV screen, some women dutifully pop the balloons after a corporate party, as if trying to contain a reality that could overwhelm them.

Created in collaboration with perfumer Euan McCall, the fragrance *Apocalypse* combines the scents of olfactory elements described in The Book of Revelation, including burnt flesh, incense and blood. Presented in a velvet-lined box, it turns a central tenet of the Western imaginary, and a canonical representation of End Times, into a luxury, limited edition item. At once highly desirable and sickening, the piece is the product of a time in which both consumerism and politics feed on fear, mysticism and fallacies of all stripes.

With the series of posters *Common Era* (2016), Thomson & Craighead gather a collection of predictions for the end of the world: from Nostradamus – who famously declared that all would be over in 1999 – to Canadian philosopher John A. Leslie, who more optimistically estimated it would be by the year 11120. The soft palette and hand-made feel of these text pieces stands in stark contrast with their sensationalist content. They almost recall the mindfulness colouring books that topped the best-selling charts in 2015. While broadcasting collective anxiety about the destruction of humanity and “the world as we know it,” they bring the viewers towards something much more intimate, to do with personal angst and the quest for happiness.

*Help Yourself* and *A Temporary Index* (both 2016), articulate this push-and-pull between concern for the common good and individual fulfilment. The first piece combines found digital video material, originally designed to prevent the on-screen accumulation of dead pixels, and a series of self-improvement tapes. Viewers can navigate them – going from, say, “how to attract money” to “weight loss” or, “sales motivation” by plugging headphones into different sockets. Meanwhile, on a large free-standing screen, *A Temporary Index* gives, in seconds, the estimated time it will take for sites storing entombed radioactive waste to be safe again for humans. These range from a few decades to a million years. The numbers are presented vertically and doubled up, standing like totems. Thus abstracted, they are almost as incomprehensible as the durations they represent.

*Party Booby Trap* (the title is a palindrome, like most of Thomson & Craighead’s exhibition titles) splices these temporalities: the deep time of nuclear decay and apocalyptic visions is put side by side with the dizzying brevity of the human lifespan (or a political career). The exhibition harks back to a seminal religious text, and links it to belief systems of all kinds, arguably including democracy, science and art itself.

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## NOTES TO THE EDITORS

**Thomson & Craighead** have shown extensively at galleries, film festivals and for site-specific commissions in the UK and internationally. Solo shows include *Maps DNA and Spam*, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee, UK (2014); *Not Even the Sky*, MEWO Kunsthalle, Memmingen, Germany; and *Never Odd or Even*, Carroll / Fletcher, London, UK (both 2013). Recent group exhibitions include *Electronic Superhighway*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2016); *Big Bang Data*, Somerset House, London, UK; *Right Here, Right Now*, The Lowry, Manchester, UK; *Art In The Age Of...Asymmetrical Warfare*, Witte de With, Rotterdam, Netherlands; *How to Construct a Time Machine*, MK Gallery, Milton Keynes, UK (all 2015) and the Nam June Paik Award, Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany (2014). They live and work between London and the Scottish Highlands.

**Carroll / Fletcher** supports established and emerging artists whose work transcends traditional categorisation, using diverse media in order to explore socio-political or technological themes. From rising talents such as Constant Dullaart, Mishka Henner, and Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, to interactive installation artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, and computer art pioneer Manfred Mohr, the gallery represents an international range of artists who use interdisciplinary research and broad means to produce work that reflects on and provides insight into contemporary culture.

**The Wellcome Trust** is a global charitable foundation dedicated to improving health. We provide more than £700 million a year to support bright minds in science, the humanities and the social sciences, as well as education, public engagement and the application of research to medicine. Our £18 billion investment portfolio gives us the independence to support such transformative work as the sequencing and understanding of the human genome, research that established front-line drugs for malaria, and Wellcome Collection, our free venue for the incurably curious that explores medicine, life and art.

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Image credits:

Thomson & Craighead, *Stutterer* (2014) [detail], Two-channel moving images, generative software  
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