

KING'S LEAP

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Sue Tompkins

Wanna

May 16 – July 31, 2026

Spanning work made over the last twenty years, *Wanna* surveys Tompkins' exploration of language as a form of potential: shifting, compressing, layering, modulating. Across spoken-word, painting, typewritten pages, and fabric works, Tompkins ecstatically pushes the boundaries of her mediums, wherein the flexibility of the performative word leads to material transformation.

Tompkins' performances began in the 1990s following her graduation from The Glasgow School of Art, and through the formation of the collective Elizabeth Go with her twin sister Haley Tompkins, as well as Cathy Wilkes, Sarah Tripp, and Victoria Morton in 1997. In 1999, she joined the Scottish indie rock band Life Without Buildings (active from 1999 through 2002) as their lead singer. Despite only being active for four years, the groundbreaking band amassed a cult following. A DIY and punk ethos is felt across all of Tompkins' work, a type of balancing act between austerity and beauty.

The physicality of Tompkins' performance practice, in which she moves inwards and outwards towards the audience and around the space, is felt in the active gestures of her paintings, whose glistening acrylic surfaces reveal saturated colors, dashed brushwork erupting into vowels, and even occasional stabs that tear into the canvas. Each carries a titular word, often monosyllabic and rendered in Tompkins's distinct capitalized lettering, that blurts out to the viewer. Her typewriter works contrast concrete approaches to the written form with alliterative phrases, whose elusive but hopeful messages are heightened as they spread in stuttering formations across the page. Tompkins's chiffon works flutter subtly when bodies shift in space, reinforcing her curiosity in the dialogue between movement and materiality.

In *Klove* (2015), a recorded audio performance work by Tompkins, she twists and turns phrases of the everyday: errands, problems, colors, love. In Tompkins verbiage, these words become physical, at once deftly humorous, and grounded in a stark reality. While Tompkins' use of language appears spontaneous, a precise score is at play that traces the modularity and expansiveness of syntax and tone. Her distinctive approach to meter and rhythm treats words as variable forms. Words tumble into one another until a certain phrase sticks, repeated and reiterated until it pulls away from meaning. The closer Tompkins attempts to get to a word, the more alienable that familiar subject becomes. The interplay of linguistic experimentation presented in *Wanna*, from voice to page to canvas, allows her to surrender to something more powerful, something that can't be said, that thing that can only be experienced through real life.

Sue Tompkins (b. 1971, Leighton Buzzard, UK) lives and works in Glasgow. Tompkins graduated from the Glasgow School of Art in 1994, and has been involved in exhibitions and performances worldwide including solo exhibitions at The Modern Institute (Glasgow, UK), Kunstraum am Schaubplatz (Vienna, AU), Torpedo Theatre, (Amsterdam, NL), Halle für Kunst (Lüneburg, DE), Inverleith House (Edinburgh, UK), Spike Island (Bristol, UK), and Contemporary Art Museum (St. Louis, MO). She has presented performances and been included in numerous group exhibitions including those at Kunsthalle Zurich (Zurich, CH), Midway Contemporary Art (Minneapolis, MN), Wysing Arts Centre (Cambridge, UK), the 29th São Paulo Biennale (São Paulo, BR), the British Art Show 7 at the Hayward Gallery, London and touring; MACBA (Barcelona, ES), ICA and the Tate Modern (London, UK); and Artists Space (New York, NY).