

Critical Moss

Art beyond the Bubble



editor

Aldobranti

Foreword

The focus of this book is timely: the commercial Art Market has never been larger, nor represented a smaller percentage of practicing artists. It continues to prop up an urban normative view, in which the rest of the world is regarded from the standpoint of the urban being the normal or accepted position. This results in less and less visibility for the work of the vast numbers of artists living in a rural environment. Even creating a definition of 'the Rural' is to make it seem 'the other', and reflects the urban normative stance of the self-described art world. It sees the rural as remote in both senses of the word, and there is a tendency to look down on it.

By contrast, the collection of work shown here is art from the pool of artists living and working outside the urban norm and in circumstances which result in feeling isolated. This isolation can be as a result of geographical location, singular experiences, or absence of others engaged in similar endeavour. This isolation is made more so by the perpetuated view of the urban normative art world.

While there is some funding support for such artists, it is available to very few. Art critics and historians may argue that the best is being supported; I would reply that they are allowing the best to be the enemy of the good. This collection shows that making good work really does not depend on living in London, or any city, nor any particular country. Nor is it dependent on being funded, represented by a gallery or awarded a prize.

What is striking about this collection of work is how much of it is rooted in the place it is made. It comes from the lived experience of the artist in their surroundings. It finds significance in the now, the elements, light and time. It makes a virtue out of necessity. It shows the contrast between the urban and the organic. It reminds us of the randomness of the natural world, of ephemerality, of being human, now. It is grounded in the components of existence, those constraints become a feature of the work. It happens every day, everywhere. Another way of looking is generated by the circumstances.

This work reminds us that we have only the self to experience and paradoxically that we are all one. What affects one affects all. To recognize this avoids cultural isolation. It shows the close relationship with our organic origins, and how we inhabit the earth and communicate with each other. It shows the human need to generate energy from creating.

All of us are a part of that world, wherever we live, whatever our circumstances. It is tempting to forget that we are a product of the earth, we are part of it. This is the forgetfulness underlying our unsustainable lifestyles.

Not only is the work shown here good, it is an important reminder of how far the urban normative art world has travelled from most people's normal lives, and how forgetful it has become of all our origins, place and importance.

Fiona Harvey

Petersfield, December 2019

Critical Moss

Art beyond the Bubble

Aldobranti

(editor)

2019

Working with the idea that art is not made in a vacuum this project began to look at how it is that artists can survive and thrive in rural settings, these circumstances being greatly different from a metropolitan environment both in the availability of facilities such as transport and materials supply together with a more sparse population of like-minded individuals. It seemed apparent that the making of art to explore ideas requires words and the exchange of a critical discourse.

Of necessity, the conversations needed for this purpose will be harder to maintain in a thinly spread population of artists and the absence of some *critical mass* of like-minded individuals to generate a regular flow of ideas, debate and critique. What is it that facilitates these conversations for an isolated artist?

A Mindset? A Point of View? simply Personal Style or Motivation?

The principal purpose of the Call for Contributions 'Critical Moss – Making Art Work outside the Metropolitan Bubble' was to identify respondents' various 'survival strategies' passed on here, *printed indented in italic script*. Beyond an initial enquiry centred on the rural experience, responses arrived from artists living lives set apart by many other factors, coping with chronic illness or disability; the strange places of depression or PTSD; poverty and deprivation, and or finding themselves in cultural settings beyond those in which they were raised. In this sense all become as stones, rolling to places where life slows down and moss grows underfoot. Over time the English proverb that 'a rolling stone gathers no moss' has shifted in meaning, previously referring to a rootless individual without background but now pointing to a need for firm action to prevent such vegetative processes. This project is firmly of this way of thinking.

Many respondents went through the excitement and stimulus of degree courses at Art School and then found that the reality of their daily lives challenged their intention to practice their art to the fullest extent. As artists, they have trained to think beyond the constraints of their condition and can take the decisive steps to adopt *mindsets, points of view, to maintain a personal style and other motivational processes* to start again each day with the affirmation that their artistic vision matters not just for themselves but for society.

Despite the feelings of isolation brought on by the factors identified above, the respondents made choices to enable themselves to maintain momentum and creative output and in particular to continue to self-affirm as

artists. No one was content to stay isolated in that place, for them making art is about achieving change and moving to a greater engagement with the surrounding society: to create a

...sense of belonging and of worthiness. This doesn't come from the art itself as much as from the connections and conversations it provokes

Many practitioners do perceive that there is equal value in silence, the need for a balance between action and thought

...I believe that for the artist solitude is important to understand and interpret reality from another perspective

...Isolation is a perception based on the sense of being alone, separate and excluded. But through a different lens, isolation is necessary to create, it is also hidden and its presence disguised. Isolation is the void, it is the distance we create from ourselves and some deeply hidden truth.

...Art itself is an outlet for what we hold in our heads, sometimes cradling our thoughts can be to our detriment, getting those thoughts out onto paper can be cathartic and speaking from personal experience, can improve low mood

This collection cannot claim that the strategies quoted here are complete or sufficient, but we share them as our thanks to the many respondents to the call, many more even than the small selection whose work appears here. Their words printed here are gleaned from those which our contributors supplied in support of their application and in an attempt to break up the mass of words, the editors have interspersed these between the images of the selected participants and their supporting text. The order in which the text falls in closeness to any artist's image is no implication of connection between the artist and any one suggested strategy, indeed the strategies may be mutually contradictory within themselves.

Analysis of the responses gathered divides this text into four parts. A first part are the responses seen above — the interior feelings, next are the boundary conditions, the rough edges, the discomfort experienced in the places and locations that we find ourselves in. Making connections should be a key and third concern with, fourthly the eventuality of a practice at ease with the situation.

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Bone Land

digital print

24 x 18 cm

Brighid Black

UK

This image encapsulates the essence of my experience as an artist in this location. Living here brings me close to the cycles of life and death: the dying back in autumn and winter followed by regrowth and resurgence in spring and summer. The image shows water collecting in a gully at the base of a hill. It was taken in October while walking through the Great Egglestone valley in Upper Teesdale. Dying bracken is submerged along with moss and other plants. This image communicates the way the eye is drawn beyond the surface of the water and through the layers of stones, bones and plants, suggesting the slow accumulation of matter. Walking on the fells and hills is a part of my life here and as such has become embedded in my working process as an artist. The looking through and into the layers has become an almost instinctive practice. As well as the visual there are the other elements of my embodied experience, such as the almost constant sound of water, wind, birds, animals and human activity, the smell of water, earth and plant life, damp that penetrates clothing and frizzes hair, the hardness of a stone underfoot. I immerse myself in this experience as a starting point for my work.

I am currently engaged in an exploration of place through sound, performance and interdisciplinary research.



Fire and Water Element

photograph, nr. 10 of series

40 x 60 cm

Joanna Bodzek

Sweden

Mind is going crazy! Doing nothing really is a delicate work. It has changed how I am, what I do and what I want, what I eat and how I dress. I seem to step on places that are communicating songs and stories in language I don't know but understand, changing me in time and space towards a new inspiration. An affirmation of the existence of free will is intertwined with a constant state of spiritual fear in the face of unlimited freedom. My art, my work is merely an observation, the wind is heavy and the sea is roaring seldom there is a silence here, in the storm I seem to hear the words- find your voice. I am stepping off at the last bus stop, at the end of the island, in front of me there is only the lighthouse, the land is small here, surrounded closely by the sea, powerful and mystical stones.. only stones and mystical sights.



...the things they carry with them

photograph on Loxley paper

30 x 30 cm

Lar MacGregor

Scotland

And I keep walking. I am miles from anywhere and so far into nowhere that I don't know where to turn. There seem to be more barriers as an older female emerging artist, than there are opportunities; funding streams are focussed on the young, urban artists of the south. As an emerging artist in these Northern climes, there are the usual barriers within the art world, but the lack of professional development opportunities and resources in terms of time and money needed to travel further, are a barrier too...the things I carry with me...

Walking, observing, writing, quality and tone, a conversation with the Anthropocene?

With the people I walk with acting as collaborators and using different methods of participatory and performance art to create the final outcomes, I use photographs to capture the memory behind the action of walking. I don't know why these ordinary moments are so special, or even if I want to put a 'why' behind the feelings I get when I think of them. Sometimes, it's enough to enjoy an experience without defining it.

Wellbeing and the worrying choices ahead of us and how we engage with each other, ourselves and our environment is the reason why I focus on the beauty of life instead of the devastation. I don't want to make people feel overwhelmed or disgusted or depressed. That's not empowering. I focus on the beauty and vulnerability of self and environment in order to empower viewers or participants to access hope; to have positive forward motion and to elicit change in their life, one tiny action at a time.



Bloom

still frame from digital video 'Bloom'
(2017)

Roland Buckingham

Taiwan

I have lived in Taiwan and China since 2008 and my work is informed by the forms and practices that surround me. It is common in China for example, to see people writing calligraphy in public squares with water and large brushes on the concrete. The ephemerality of the writing, as it reflects the light and slowly evaporates, is quite mesmerising. In other words the processes involved are as meaningful as the forms; indeed the writing of the calligraphy is itself performative, as manipulating the large brushes requires the exercise and coordination of the whole body and writing in a public space often attracts an informal audience. These ethnographic observations lead to the video Bloom (2015, re-made 2017). The video showed a series of flowers being drawn with water on concrete at various urban locations and their subsequent evaporation. By using water alone without pigment or dye, the process of drawing, and its transience, became the artwork, rather than the object or image produced. The work dealt with the relationship of nature to man (a preoccupation of Daoism) and the poetic potential of the fleeting (an important theme in Chinese poetry). The video was shown on a flat digital screen in a frame, as a kind of moving painting and is an example of the dialogue between western contemporary art and traditional eastern practices that I am interested in exploring.



When artists find themselves in an unfamiliar situation, it is they, themselves who must normalise themselves to the society around them. In an increasingly polarised world, the strange and the stranger become seen as a part of the Other, believed to be part of an elite with contempt for the ordinary and the day-to-day concerns of working people. Sometimes separateness even a sense of hostility is experienced, though usually short-lived.

...unless you've lived and grown up here, it can be a struggle to get to know fellow artists.

The Artist becomes the Other

From a metropolitan hub the Art Industry continues to construct a mythology around the artist. For simplicity, the media will report on what it sees as a selling story and these exaggerated views may become the accepted view of the artist and her art. Faced with this misunderstanding, it may feel more secure for the artist to retreat into ghettoised communities, either local or on-line, more creatively the artist can reintroduce their self into ordinary life at every turn, against this mythic, exaggerated view of art.

...sometimes it would be much less hard work to just say that I am retired. Personally, I choose to identify myself with a profession that I cannot retire from. And then I must explain that I do not paint or draw. And then I must explain what live art is. And then I must explain the naked body

The mythology of art can obscure the natural creativity already present in the neighbourhood.

...Once I had to join a car pimping group to learn the technique which later I adopted to make sculptures. What is the most fascinating thing the guys from the car service were helping me and after few months they became deeply involved and participated in the creative discussion. Knowing the fact that it was not the most friendly area I was amazed what a great collaboration it was.

So, engagement with a wider society is important but artists can see themselves in a position to challenge its conventions. In particular in a commercialised society, driven by price rather than value art can be seen as the one contradiction to the triumph of capitalism in mass-production and consumption.

...Nothing can be totally independent of society but [I] can work not to be an integral part of an economic process that has nothing creative about it.

The characterisation of the current society as consumerist may be unfair, a Western perspective, for this artist embedded in China

...one thing that interests me about calligraphy is the way it is generally appreciated by people of all social classes and does not adhere to the high – low art distinction too often affected in the west. Almost all homes, no matter how simple or grand, have some calligraphy on the wall.

The rural location has changed as traditional industries have faded and with the collapse of employment, housing costs fall behind cities. Artists who find that town centre studio space is beyond their means will move not just for the life-style values of the countryside but also for this simple economy.

...I mix with farmers and cafe owners, storytellers and folk musicians more than artists.

The same reasons will attract holiday makers, tourists and second-home owners. The areas are economically depressed and tourist spending money is valuable. Galleries and other outlets must concentrate on saleable artworks that represent this location in a form suitable for carrying back to the tourist's urban or weekend house.

...The art that does well here is landscape, it's a tourist destination,

...Feeling snippy about this, I would describe what sells as 'over the sofa art'

There is still however a tension here between *creating* access to art and *providing* access to art. In the UK, for example, a classist and very clear division is made between town and country. A distinction is to be made between local grass roots actions to develop an awareness of creativity and feelings of beauty, on the one hand and a top-down, funded approach to deliver Art and Aesthetics to the extra-urban populace. The one fosters a sense of community and place, the other risks programming an urban normative view of high culture—the two exacerbating a divide between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' arts, between Culture and demotic recreations.

Central government will try to minimise the cost of delivery of such programmes, seeking partner organisations who share their language and who may rarely afford the effort to understand local demand. The sustainability of the initiatives launched by these partner organisations is limited and as funding finishes will frequently close without permanent legacy. Strong parallels exist with social programmes launched for poverty relief in urban areas and the existence of a Poverty Industry has been remarked on in that context. In that setting, activists are hired on short-life contracts and must inevitably spend more time 'learning the ropes' and checking for their next post.

Additionally, the clients of central funding will develop ease in writing grant proposals and reserving the benefits to the coterie of their local contacts. Where the commonality of the language of the applicant and the funding source becomes more comfortable the net effect is to extend a metropolitan bubble into a safe part of the countryside — it becomes quite natural that Arts Council England in the UK supports black-tie opera in the regions from their Rural budget.

Clearly a change of mindset is in order. Reaffirming a common humanity can be our first step to our integration and the making of fresh connections outside of a social circle of fellow artists.

...I work with the elderly and I am inspired by their silent contemplation and clarity of their reality expressed in the small artworks which they produce.

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Look up

photograph

25.4 x 20.3 cm

J P Campbell

Canada

Wakefield, Quebec, Canada is a village established by the lumber industry and farming. Once a tiny bastion of Anglo immigrants it is now a bi-cultural English/French mix. The 1960's and 70's brought American draft dodgers, hippie craftspeople and those seeking an alternative lifestyle away from the eyes of the city. Today, Wakefield is a comfortable village but rather than thousands of logs floating down the Gatineau River to the mills tourists travel the autoroute and are a mainstay of the economy.

Two local venues, The Black Sheep Inn and Kaffe 1870, regularly support local musicians and those touring between the urban centers of Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal.

The building in this photo is home to Kaffe 1870 and Boutique Tulip Noir on the ground floor. Upstairs are a photographer's studio, an office, and Earl's Hall.

Built in 1870 there was a machinery shop downstairs and the hall above hosted traveling Vaudeville shows for the entertainment of the locals. Later, cinema projection would be added and a pianist would accompany silent films. Today it is home to an interdisciplinary arts co-operative.

This particular shot is me looking up at the side window of Earl's Hall. Is that music I hear? Do I recognize a friend's voice? What is going on?



Soda

photograph

dimensions variable

Omamah Alsadiq

Saudi Arabia

We are that one where we can all speak to one another and leave none,
and yeah definitely it's fun, don't run,
the imageries you grow up to will follow you whatever you go hun.
No it's not a stunt we're all one,
I tell you the world is getting smaller, there is no need for you to be a baller,
holler at everyone you know before it's too late, hug love them and cry over their shoulder.
oh, boy she is getting older. tiki's Tok the clock is ticking on all of us.
why all the fuss when beauty isn't only stuck in the eyes of its beholder.
Now can I drink my soda?



Lights Out

Duratron in LED panel

29.7 x 42.0 cm

Kate Green

I have become increasingly interested in *art as experience* in the context of the British countryside and in the creative communication of being as an artform. This includes finding my place in a landscape with a non-linear history where I can connect with the footprints of others in any time or space. Always ideas led, my choice of material is secondary and, although in the past I would have described myself as a problem solver and a maker, recently I am now willing to accept the inexplicable and allow myself to work in a more intuitive and kinder way.

Lights Out explores the friction between the immediacy of an action and the value of its recording to share a lifetime of feeling. I had been thinking of a past life when someone criticised my work, suggesting I would have been more authentic if I had simply scraped a hollow in the ground and lay down in it. This throwaway comment stayed with me for almost fifteen years and, after my illness, gained resonance. One morning, as the sun rose over the hill, I decided I needed to do what that person had suggested.



The Letter G

still frame from the film *Conversations with Myself*

Rachel Macmanus

Ireland

My live art practice is concerned with how people inhabit the earth, move around, take up space and communicate. Particularly how we converse with each other and ourselves. My work is a form of physical self expression- the body is both the site of practice and conduit for the action.

I was inspired to make the Body Alphabet, an alphabet of body shapes, from my past life as a fitness instructor. The need to express myself physically still colours all the work I make. Making live art using the body as the tool was for me a natural progression from using my body as a tool for physical fitness instruction. I am a mother and find myself expressing safe banalities with other parents at the school gates. I thought about inventing a different way to communicate these banalities. I liked the idea of using a physically arduous, complicated communication system to spell out pretty non-inspiring sentences. I am interested in the small disruption to the energy of a place that occurs when you carry out a 'non-normal' action, such as spelling out words using The Body Alphabet.

I talk to myself a lot, as I spend much of my working time alone. Therefore the act of spelling out a conversation with myself using my Body Alphabet is a natural progression. The work 'Conversations with Myself' is a short film which documents a conversation I have with myself as I walk through the town of Ennis, County Clare, Ireland, where I live.



The previous pages have hinted of a possibility of a self-inflicted sense of isolation. It is very likely that barriers to communication are set too high, asking that the dialogue that we are looking for is couched in our language, perhaps even that our work is evaluated on our terms. These expectations are unrealistic

Making fresh Connections

This then becomes an issue of expectation management, some respondents as Art School graduates reported missing the buzz and feeling the cultural divide mentioned previously.

...I joined a local art group, their work could not be more different to mine. To contradict this feeling, I serve on the committee. I must learn patience

...A musician invariably knows an artist, illustrator, photographer, or designer for their album cover or web site, for example. Being fully aware that invariably all involved are working on shoestring budgets these efforts are most often mutual support rather than money making ventures.

Paradoxically, working for others brings perspective through organising and hanging their shows, doing their publicity

...I have been involved with Solo Projects, a group of artists that was set up to organise exhibitions and publish a magazine. We have organised 3 exhibitions up to now and we have just published the first issue of the magazine which we are distributing to 150 galleries. I hope and I believe that some of the artists included will be signed by galleries.

...It seems like it is easier to ask for money for other artists' projects. I have helped write their grant proposals.

...the only expense is kindness

Getting out of the studio is a recurrent theme, beyond the obvious reason to freshen the mind and engage with nature, it becomes a way to meet other people and widen a social circle.

...I find both inspiration and motivation come at times when I am not thinking about myself as a practitioner but as a walker.

...a serendipitous conversation with a passing fellow walker can be pivotal.

Writing as an expressive act can make for growth in a practice and engage with a world outside the visual arts. The act of committing thoughts to text, writing as distinct to making some artwork engages a different brain function. Thinking about the needs of a reader is to turn outwards to their world, their perceptions.

...Writing about my art for myself is a profound contradiction to the silences of isolation.

...I get published in InterActive - Walking Art/Walking Aesthetics, with my Wayfaring project.

...I write a column called 'Wayfinding' for Art North Magazine.

It seems ironic that the Internet was heralded to bring in an age of co-operation and yet unsocial behaviour is rife. Respondents at best found very limited critical response to work posted on social media and often identified trolling activity within their networks. The art world is no exception to a wider polarisation and seems to have become more competitive and aggressive. The Internet and continuing education with remote access can be an exception though a good connection to the Internet is not assured in a remote location. These respondents found support and validation

... I recently completed a distance learning MA in Fine Art with the OCA [Open College of the Arts]. I studied for 3 years with students around the world who I met each week online, this online cohort of students became an invaluable and hugely important network to share ideas with and get feedback from.

... I undertook a single Art and Archaeology Masters level module by distance learning with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) in Orkney.

... I am about to begin a remote MA in Art and Social Practice at the UHI

In the analysis of the results of the call it became apparent that some respondents overcame their isolation by travelling and taking up Residencies abroad, often at their own expense. Though these responses were out of scope, this artist could make use of this behaviour and build a network.

...co-organised a village-based residency, now in its 4th year creating a temporary 2 week shared studio space within the streets of the village. Not only does this offer me as artist the opportunity to work and connect with other practitioners from various disciplines, it also provides me with a forum (outside of my comfort zone) to converse with village residents about contemporary art in my second and sometimes third language.

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Stella Mastorosteriou

Greece

I observe the world around me. Also, inside me.

I accept it as it is.

I try to identify the details, the rhythms and patterns that make up my reality and my everyday.

Then I question it:

I don't see deer is a choreographic study of the interrelations between the body and urban space. Creating ephemeral site-specific images that play with the boundary between the familiar and the unfamiliar, it attempts to highlight alternative ways of being in / thinking about the city.

What are the boundaries of these patterns? What does it mean to behave outside of the pattern? What is accepted and what is not? What is the limit between the regular and the irregular? How little is enough to be off pattern?

I live in a city where nothing blooms.

The seeds cannot grow, because the ground is covered with concrete.

And yet, sometimes, you can see wildflowers growing through the cracks.

I live in a city that sends her children away.

I chose to stay and plant my seeds here.

I try to find the cracks in the concrete and inject subtle flows of irregularity into the pattern.



The New Arcadians

digital composition from analog film images

Aldobranti

This image began life in a solo performance to reimagine Poussin's 1638 painting, *Et In Arcadia Ego* currently in the Louvre, Paris. As I began compositing the 4 images the 'players' stepped back into the frame and the work evolved into a commentary on the solipsisms, self-reflections and isolations of digital social media. Perhaps it is fortuitous that the reader of the text has pointed to the word 'EGO'

Poussin's picture had shown the wonder and curiosity of the shepherds of an earlier, more innocent time in finding a singular structure in a wide expanse of open country. He had returned to develop on his earlier work *Shepherds of Arcadia* (1627) which more engagingly shows the excitement of the young Arcadians as they rush from a distance to explore a similar monument.

I find delight in noting here a solitary oak tree in the middle of a open field; there, a single cloud scudding over a clear sky, its shadow a moving patch of darkness on the hillside opposite.



Dust to Dust

photograph

Sarah Misselbrook

Catalunya

This image is a result of a two week online project in which artists networked across a blog platform and instagram, responding to and challenging each other's imagery. Specifically, my contrast of situation with my partnered artist resulted in an interesting dialogue - Catalan mountains versus flat in Oxford. I continued to explore the differences in accessibility to materials, supplies and the idea of creating my own in the way of charcoal, fire, clay soil, all in abundant supply here in the olive farm. In an attempt to resolve an 'art as object' question, I continue to create works almost as a bi-product of living here which are either ephemeral or performative, documented digitally. Pushing further the idea of a circular practice of creating my own materials and then using the waste product, I burnt my drawings to keep warm, and then made paint from the resulting ash. This ash was then painted onto my face as some kind of beauty face mask in order to curb the aging process, to disguise the cracks in my face. These very cracks having been observed closely within this natural environment of mountain and moss.



Finding the words

jar, paper and ink

5.5 x 2.5 x 2.5 cm eachs

Catherine Wynne-Paton

Wales

That – feeling a little disconnected and outside the metropolitan cultural world – none of my words fit. Being a little isolated, and an outsider now, working outside art organisations and academia, I keep trying to find the right words, but never quite do. So the words within the bottles are mostly hidden from view.

I feel like I've lost the right words. I'm speaking a different language now to those in urban areas. I am forever trying to find a better way to say what I need to say, sometimes I attempt this in words, and with my Lost Library project, where I collect words from a performance area, ponder questions posed by new members through movement, then sift the words to issue a library loan of one word to each new member.

During the enrolment ritual I am mute and sometime later I expand on this by publishing my ponderings on questions posed, to my website blog. Not particularly trying to answer them, simply to hold the questions for longer, attempting to understand what is being asked in the question more deeply by using movement, extended time and forming stronger mind-body connections. The Lost Library was conceived in 2015 and has evolved gently from a notion into something I am becoming more and more curious to see unfold into the future.

The methodology I've developed is one that responds to where I do my thinking; in everyday life and, appropriately enough, involves archiving, physical training and attempting to pick up and use local language.



'Community' installation view

Aluminium, Perspex, ceramic magnets, wood

510(h) x 280 x 280 cm

Bob Spriggs

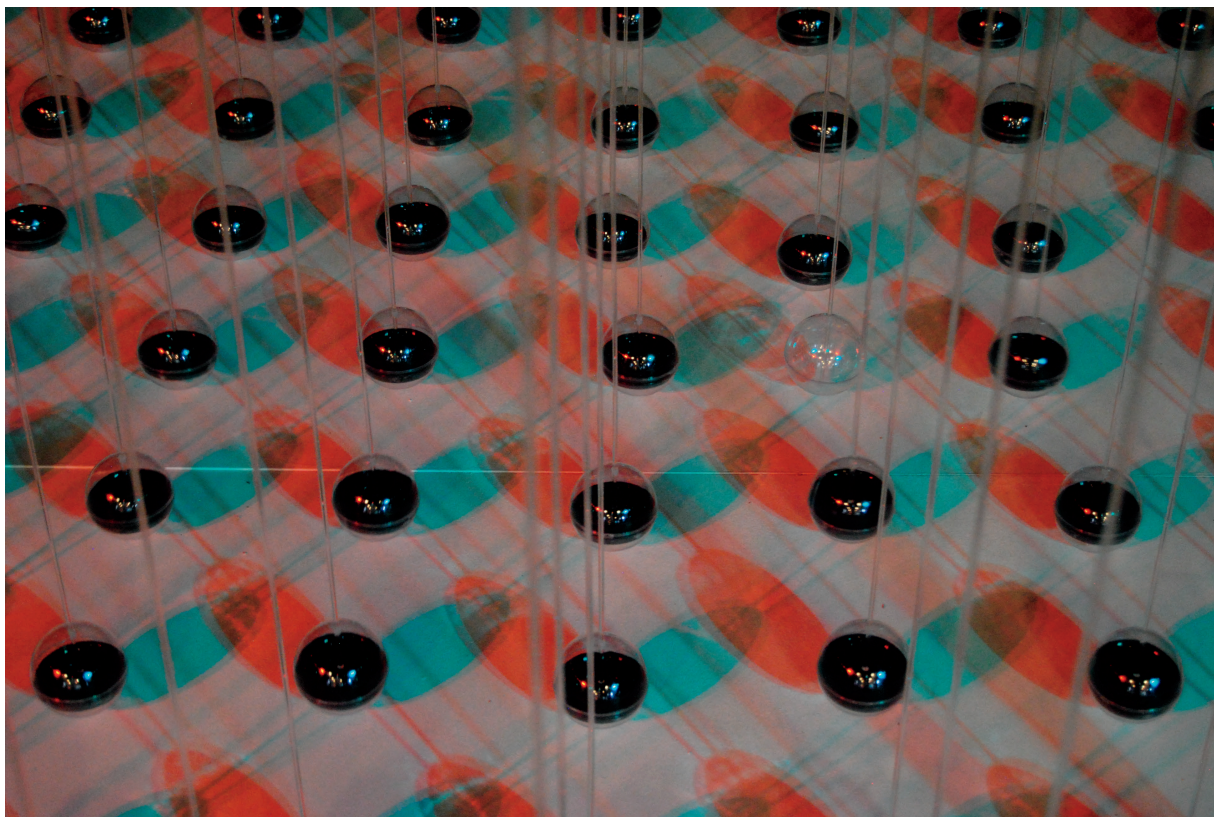
UK

The image shows an installation of my work 'Community' in a disused church in High Wycombe earlier this year. This is a large, 5m x 3m x 3m, kinetic sculpture. It is made up of 100 magnetic pendulums each 4m long. They are set up to repel one another, so, if one moves they all move. The whole array is in constant, hypnotically slow, motion driven by electromagnetic circuits underneath.

I called it 'Community' because I feel that it is like the way people interact. What affects us, affects everyone around us in some way. We are interdependent.

I am an artist working towards an aesthetic synthesis of art and science. I try and create interesting, beautiful work from scientific or mathematical ideas. Science is not the subject of my work, it is the raw material which I shape into three-dimensional, concrete, often kinetic objects. I know that beauty is found in art and in science. My aim is to make sculpture reflecting the beauty of both in a single form.

I decided to leave two pendulums without magnets. Whether these are in some way excluded, whether they choose to separate themselves from society or are in some way not able to join in with others, I leave to the viewers imagination.



Perceptions of Persephone

collage

48 x 48 cm

Amy Stevens

Time and titles separate myself from the Ancient Greek Goddess Persephone, Goddess of spring and Queen of the Underworld. There is a duality to her that I find comfort in, a humble soft side, but also chaos.

She, though ethereal, was not without her troubles and strifes. Though born of Olympian blood, she was never depicted amongst the other gods, such as her mother, father and half-siblings. Her origins saw her controlled, limited to what she could do, and it was only when according to the great tales, Hades took her to be his Queen, is when she truly blossomed. The collage represents this, various phases, a range of developing identities, always evolving, ever-changing. Sometimes greatness is born from despair, and prosperity through hardship. Through the cards of life, orchestrated by the fates, she would never have a full grasp of control, she worked with what she was dealt with. Like Persephone, I worked with what was provided and decided to make the best out of the situations I was presented with. If she never took a plunge, Persephone would never have flourished in her role as Queen, earning respect from not only her husband but also other gods, titans and mortals. Challenges shape you, after all a smooth sea never made a skilled sailor.



To riff with the idea of 'thinking outside the box', as artists we can work on the decoration of the box itself, first inside, then the outside and then the placement of the box in its scene, adding value to the world around it. We are given creativity to this end: to quote Josef Beuys (1992) as a major exponent of a unity of existence

"Art alone makes life possible – this is how radically I should like to formulate it. I would say that without art man is inconceivable in physiological terms... Even the act of peeling a potato can be a work of art if it is a conscious act."

Circular practice, circular process

Finding time to make that conscious step can be the challenge. Some practitioners find meditative or shamanistic wholeness of mind in repetitive acts in their process

...[making paper] selecting by the season suitable plants, preparing, cutting, shredding, cooking and rinsing before the act of soaking, lifting the frame and deckle from the swirling waters to form the strong bond between disparate fibres ... this ritual continues in silence. A shamanic ritual carried out completely alone

Slowing down, calming down — checking out one's excuses

... I live with chronic pain which limits my mobility and thereby my social interactions. Being a single parent has its own host of limitations, but with my daughter turning 18 this year that excuse has worn thin

... create works that will slowly decompose, disintegrate return to nature, to bring about a new definition of value, which lies within the act, the ritual and the process.

The recalibration of priorities. avoiding the desperation of endless submission, applications and rejections.

...competitions with only one juror? I eschew applications where I must pay to have my image looked at. I decline offers of shows where I will have to pay hundreds of dollars to ship my works. I don't want to appear in your catalog of emerging artists.

Referring back to their time in art school and the big city, artists have looked to the Exhibition as the format for building a wider audience for their work together with the opportunity for recognition and sustenance of their creativity. It may not be that simple

...the way I think about my art has definitely changed, moving away from a finished object that might easily be put into a completely different context. I am thinking particularly of the white cube gallery. ... to think more about alternative ways of sharing my work.

...curators have become the new gatekeepers, but in neo-liberalist fashion they have become the gang masters of artists, searching for the economies of scale, looking beyond the art to their own career progression and the block-buster show that will be their point of recognition.

Becoming aware of the ways we use time, slowing down to think, working more slowly. The cell phone camera is a beguiling convenience, it saves getting the note book out, it bypasses the use of recall and weakens the tool of memory. Many theorists have observed the tourist armed with a camera, "for the camera records in order to forget." John Berger (1992).

...an act of looking that prevents contemplation

...I take so few photographs these days. I was working in a big urban cemetery, inscriptions that read 'we will never forget you' on battered and ruined family crypts. I flirted with a title for a series 'Death of Memory'. I thought it best to let it lie.

...a simple act of seeing, a rainbow looks so beautiful over the English countryside, it's like medicine for the soul.

... photographs sleep in undeveloped rolls of film / in memory cards un-emptied / in hard drives crashed / in phones with dead batteries / in clouds with forgotten passwords / photographs sleep in undeveloped rolls of film

We are in Life for the long haul; art is like any other job or profession. It does not owe us a living and we get back what we put in. There will be times of drudgery but beware not to become the permanent intern

...Sometimes you therefore just have to be like a shadow, working away, till enough light comes your way.

...sometimes ideas remain unrealised, awaiting the chance to become real. This can be very frustrating and I can only keep plugging away

...I try to think of Louise Bourgeois who didn't hit [the] lime light until she was 71

...We must go back to our origins in order to be our parents' inheritance and our siblings' hope within this world, which gave us the opportunity to nourish. We owe our existence to the world.

§

Each breakfast, I trail a spoonful of blackstrap molasses on top of my oatmeal. I wonder at the black, crispness of the calligraphic stroke. The trace dissolves into my meal. I begin each day refreshed as an artist.

Holding it together

carved ostrich eggs

Cherie Lee

When you know you're alone and connection is out of reach, the cordial, ""How are you?"" is unanswerable.

So you politely reply, "I'm 'Holding It Together'.....while quietly feeling quite vulnerable.

If you want to know , I'm happy to talk. I would show you my work and beam!

Until you do, I'll be right here, voicing another silent scream.

(four-piece series shown here)

01. 'It's Just a Scratch', a little road rash. But I'm holding it together.

02. Don't mean to bitch, but I'm 'Slipping a Stitch'. I feel I could untether.

03. Won't lose it yet, but could use a 'Safety Net'. It's coming apart completely.

04. It's too late. 'Broken' by fate. How did it defeat me?

Each piece is entirely carved out of genuine ostrich eggshell. To emphasize the point, *there is no band-aid.*



not an isolated incident (2018)

photocopy/selotape/copper leaf

128 images 4 x 5 cm

dinahvagina

Wales

The image is of a box full of mini portraits I made of women murdered during 2018 before I applied them to a wearable piece. My isolation where I live and work helps to focus my work on my lived experience, my personal history.

I make work about femicide and female sexual agency. It is rarely direct, often witty, abstracted.



Symbiosis

plaster cast, flocking

23 x 23 x 18 cm

Egle Pilkauskaite

Lithuania

Symbiosis project had different stages. Even though the starting point was local kitsch aesthetics that were related to sensual expressions such as passion or admiration. I was also very interested in the direct physical contact between the object and the person. That was the main reason why I started noticing car decorating culture. In the area that I was exploring there was no public gathering places so lots of young people were spending their time in the car parking lots. It was important for me to adapt their unique aesthetic rules to the object that I was working on.

I try to find the delicate balance between respecting the found object and channeling my own creative input and artistic direction. The work in its various stages and mutations always preserves the quality of the direct touch and contact with the source material, yet simultaneously transgresses the constraints of mere mechanical reproduction, creating elaborate works of art which preserve the close relationship with their organic origins.

I am a mixed media artist based in Vilnius. My practice is rooted in conceptual investigations of themes such as: ruins, displacement, the anthropocene, or new materialism, and driven by exploration of various industrial, as well as craft-oriented, techniques and materials.



photo credit Stasys Maciulskas

Ogram I

Handmade paper, acrylic, minerals, pigment

40 x 50 cm

Jan Fairbairn-Edwards

France

Working in the untamed hills of the Cevennes in the South of France in the small valley where the river le Tel flows ceaselessly; surrounded by white mulberry, sweet chestnut, olive and green oak trees. Paper making using pure water from a spring and plant fibres growing on the land, seemed the obvious choice when relocating there 22years ago.

Coloured oxides seep from the rocks, yellow ochre, blue cobalt and red iron oxide. Rocks that contain mica, schist and quartz all mined in the past in this dry arid landscape where the sun in summer roasts everything to a dust and the torrential rain washes away all traces of the summer heat.

Where life and death hold hands, solitude and daily ritual combine and are essential to my creative ideology."On a conceptual and practical level, walking the paths in my valley each day, listening to the natural sounds of wind in the trees, birds song, leaves falling, water flowing becomes a meditative ritual in which I enter into a dialogue with the natural world.

all my senses come in to play when selecting according the season and weather conditions the plants suitable, preparing in the open air, cutting shredding, cooking and rinsing before the act of soaking in a vat of clear clean pure spring water, then lifting the frame and deckle from the swirling waters which form the strong bond between disparate fibres.

Silently this ritual continues. A shamanic act carried out completely alone.

Once the amalgamation of fibres is wind dried placed on the easel the final act commences.

The ancient language of the trees, the ogram appears as a motif, a strong powerful image which appears in different forms with different meanings magnetically attracted to the elements used, earth pigments, minerals and rock.



Cân Elenydd

earth, ink, charcoal, pastels, flowers

150 x 150 cm

Maria Hayes

Wales

We make opportunities to converse - so this piece is made by listening to Sianed Jones improvise on the Viol and with her astounding voice. The process is documented and witnessed by Jake Whittaker, Fine Art filmmaker. We have all traveled to be here to work together. None of us are being paid.

We need the work. We need to listen, to generate that particular type of energy that nourishes us as humans, as artists. The aim of my practice is to develop my human sensing system to create a humane art.

I am guided by the weather - go inside, go outside. Walk, collect items to draw, to use to draw, to touch. Take a sketchbook, look, hear, touch, draw.

Sometimes I work with digital technologies - I will draw on an iPad and use digital projection to assist my looking. However, it is the mark on paper I return to again and again. My eyes and ears transmit to my hand, and my hand touches the page with materials. The biofeedback from the surface informs the marks and a complex conversation is set up between my subject, my body, my emotional state and the materials I work with. It is an intensive, intimate process, and my job is to stay in it for the duration.

My work shifts and changes as I age, as my interests do. The constant is the desire to make the marks, to return to the page, whether the page is rock, paper or screen.

I work in performance and in the studio. You can commission work or view my stock of work at my studio or on my website.



Boat without a Mast

acrylic on canvas

54 x 71 cm

Nyulla Safi

Australia

I much rather go head against a rough wave in darkness of the unknown rather than stay in what everyone says is comfortable and safe. As an ex Soldier with PTSD, the night is my enemy and I go to war with it everytime that beautiful sun and blue sky bids me goodnight so, you fight at night and you paint in the day. Do not tell me what brush to use or what stroke or how to mix colours or where to put my canvas to paint because I will ask you what are you talking about? I don't understand your language nor do I want to. My location is my heart. My heart tells me how and where to paint. How to communicate with you through my art. I don't need to have a studio... I find this amusing because for me it seems you are only an artist if you say you have a studio and most will be impressed. My location is where ever my heart decides. In the open under blue sky or the blood colours of the night sky. It also what equipments it wants to use. I have used my tears on a paint brush simply because my location broke me. Now this is what painting means for me.



Curator's Notes

Although this project was set up and executed as a text based and verbal opportunity for the contributing artists, we could not leave their supporting visual contribution without any comment. It would be facile to simply tie their image back to their submissions and while the applicants were asked to address their isolation in their submitted image, there are other more interesting common threads to be found in these images.

JP Campbell wrote of his interest in recording the little details of his daily experience, his image here, an unremarkable window frame, set in a wall where the paint is crumbling away becomes eye-catching for the reasons of its ordinariness. For the wider world, camera owners seeking to make a name for themselves will micro-manage their image making with attention to production values. The other photographers who responded here go beyond these values, using the medium's control of time to give them space for slow reflection on the incidental and the transitory. **Joanna Bodzek** presents all the moments, looking into a fire on the hearth where time stands still through the hypnotic movement of the flames.

Brigid Black found the stark whiteness of a sheep's jawbone lying below the water of a mountain stream, the remains of the animal having passed on and through the relentless mill of the seasons and the environment, the elements leaching colour from the bracken. In passing, **Lar McGregor** catches the impact of clean and dry boots from beneath the all-important umbrella amid the dampness of a Scottish Highland day. And **Omamah Alsadiq** brings a rich variety of strong colours and textures, of textiles and ceramics through to the sun bleached stars and stripes of a US flag.

Others expose the nature of time and its adjunct narrative through their film making. **Roland Buckingham**'s work records the performative moment of public, street-calligraphy and a Western riposte in a medium where the mark fades in the same instant. From a small town in Ireland **Rachel Macmanus** highlights the complexities of making simple conversation in a code of movements, the articulation of each letter as a pose slows the rate of information flow to a standstill and forces attention to each and every moment.

Following in this vein, we find Performance Art is very well represented in this sample of artists, perhaps the difficulties of finding support and assistance to make this work in isolated settings will explain the tendency to solo performances. **Aldobranti** needing four figures must shoot the scene four times, enacting each part of a tableau vivant before compositing the final image. **Kate Green** decisively achieves the defusing of an aggressive critique of her work, reducing out the challenge to its own absurdity. **Sarah Misselbrook** in the same way can reply to the difference in her rural setting compared with an urban collaborator's comforts and ease by burning artwork to keep warm and using the ashes for a facial.

Although **Stella Mastorosteriou** is city based, her image drawn from performance photography captures the complex emptiness of urban life but where the natural world will encroach, cracking the concrete—bringing dust to dust. This complexity will be found again in the non-linear dynamics of **Bob Sprigg's** installations where small irregularities play out in time into wider and less foreseeable consequences. **Eglé Pilkauskaitė** uses the decorative techniques of the quintessentially urban art form of car pinking to render a softer, more organic form.

Cherie Lee carves ostrich egg shells, the medium offering startling beauty with dramatic moments of grief as the workpiece gives in to too much stress, we see comparable tensions in the furious drama of **Nyulla Safi's** boat journey, in hand to hand combat, palette knife to canvas. At this point, the Welsh artist, **dinavagina** necessarily brings our attention back to the statistics of domestic violence, 73% of homicide victims being female. **Amy Steven's** work around the person of Persephone is to see a different woman, not so much kidnapped by Hades but rather triumphant in her role as Queen of the natural world. This resonates with the quiet extent of **Maria Hayes'** circular artwork, circling around a central point of stasis, powered by sociable music and song. And a further resonance in **Jan Fairbairn-Edwards'** celebration of the plant kingdom in all its diversity preserved in handmade papers finds completion in the paper for **Catherine Wynne-Paton's** encapsulations of single words, in corked bottles to be washed ashore on some other beach.

It has been a pleasure to learn from and work with these artists, the project would not be so rich without their contribution. We wish them every success in the future.

Aldobranti

Hampshire, UK. December 2019

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Front Cover : South Downs Tree,Aldobranti 2016
Back Cover : the rural gaze, unidentified artist

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Aldobrandi



What is striking about this collection of work is how much of it is rooted in the place it is made. It comes from the lived experience of the artist in their surroundings. It finds significance in the now, the elements, light and time. It makes a virtue out of necessity. It shows the contrast between the urban and the organic. It reminds us of the randomness of the natural world, of ephemerality, of being human, now. It is grounded in the components of existence, those constraints become a feature of the work. It happens every day, everywhere.

Another way of looking is generated by circumstances

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