

Group exhibition

# Landscapes of the Future

HC Guest Curator Beaconsfield Gallery Vauxhall, London

30.11–21.12.2018

*Landscapes of the Future* refers to a range of physical and metaphorical landscapes that open up in a globalized, knowledge economy. Bringing together some of the artists currently depicting the new lie of the land, our landscape is one of uncertainty and mistrust of the future. All the works in this exhibition have evolved from long periods of research and some have been specifically commissioned for this exhibition, but all the British works have been produced in the climate of events surrounding 23 June, 2016. Brexit, may be the equivalent to the quiver of a butterfly's wing in the global context: as we know small changes in the ecosystem can eventually be catastrophic.

The concept of 'landscape' is one of culturally appropriated territory – the found environment or 'nature' territorialized. Landscapes combine the geological features of a particular place – country or continent – with the trace of the humans that live in that place, helping to define the identity of peoples as much as they define, and have defined, the land. In the contemporary moment, an addictive dependency on natural resources is key to a post-industrial lifestyle and generates imbalances; of geology, economy and political power. It is also the moment in which accelerated climate change, triggered by human excess, is shifting our relationship with the seasons, with the land and the way we consume it. Vast numbers of people flee the land of their birth to find refuge in unfamiliar landscapes and there are few places where these human shifts are more apparent than in London – where most of these artists work.

In art, the landscape tradition is not only one of claiming nature through its depiction, but of imaginary future landscapes. Beaconsfield invites a group of British artists who touch on the theme in diverse ways, contextualised by one Finnish artist who is passionately engaged with narratives relating to her homeland.

The scene is set at the entrance of the gallery with *Gravid: plan*, **Ioana Marinescu's** hand-printed photograph of a pregnant human belly poised to give birth.

The perfect sphere of the belly is picked up in form by a fictionary 'eye' installed at foot-level by **David Burrows**. *Diagram of .... Event horizon* is a disorientated landscape where everyday objects become distorted by the force and vortex of an imagined Black Hole. Burrows works with the mathematical concept of an unseen, lawless zone, drawing his own diagram on the floor of the gallery. Personal objects have become unfamiliar, stretched and deformed by a force over which we have no control, suggesting a violent and anarchic end to everyday life. A pulsing audio composition emanating from the work can occasionally be discerned within the soundscape of the exhibition.

More insistent is the electronic sound by **BAW & Bruce Gilbert**, composed in response to a research trip to Beara. *Famine Pass* draws on a wild landscape in Ireland with the highest density of Neolithic standing stones in Europe, that was also used as an IRA training ground. Video footage captures the mountainous pass that connects two counties, through which people returned their dead home during the historic Irish potato famine that caused mass migration. The talismanic mirror sends a circular image around the room: the earth or another moon in orbit.

The reflected image passes over **Onya McCausland's** Minimalist, ochre wall painting, *Saltburn; Helsinki*

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literally brings a part of the British landscape to Finland. Saltburn is the site of a disused iron mine in Cleveland that continues to discharge tonnes of iron-oxide, along with other redundant mines in Britain. McCausland discovered these local sources of colour in the 'waste' flood water and is now working with the British Coal Authority and a paint manufacturer to collect and recycle these naturally occurring pigments: out of industrial waste this artist is now registering new colours in the spectrum.

The gallery soundscape is enriched by the spoken word, as **Keith Piper** draws attention to the microphone as a symbol of technological power. *Mic Drop* was produced from early conversations between the artist and Beaconsfield about Jet Black Futures, a body of work that engages in futurological speculation in the context of racial politics. *Mic Drop* responds to Barack Obama's final public gesture as the first black President of the US. Observing the potency of the outgoing leader's use of a device from popular rap culture to signal the end of a progressive era, Piper reflects on the linguistic shift that took place – 'the end of discourse' – and the ripple effect on his own British identity. Piper's work here alludes to racist fears of the potential menace implied by empowerment through technology.

Language and science fiction is also a subject for **Anna Bunting-Branch** whose animation with text (on headphones) draws on imagery from witchcraft, séance and female glamour. *The Linguists* explores the feminist constructed language Láadan, developed by Suzette Haden Elgin in her science fiction trilogy *Native Tongue* (1984-1994). Bunting-Branch visually expands from the text, suggesting a subversive form of communication and alternative way of being to dominant, patriarchal capitalism.

**Outi Pieski**'s work is deeply invested in the images, issues and land of Saami culture. In these new paintings, made in direct response to the title of the exhibition but also as part of an ongoing series, Pieski explores an anthropomorphic concept. In certain parts of the world where indigenous peoples are still living according to ancient customs, local people understand their identity as being directly descended from a particular mountain or river. In this tradition, an ancestral place has the potential to acquire human rights (as in the case of two Maori sites in New Zealand) and therefore, legal protection.

*Sacred Mountain Rástegáisa as a Legal Person I and II* depict a contested area where local people are currently defending burial land from the intrusion of a Green initiative, proposing to site a wind farm. Pieski depicts the mountain wearing traditional elements of Saami costume, with reflective gild for protection. The work points to battles around the world to decolonise our relationship to the land and points to the way that such relationships might be further disrupted in a time of global climate change.

The undulating form of Pieski's painted mountain is echoed in *Gravid: elevation*, a large-scale side view of the pregnant belly at the entrance. **Ioana Marinescu**'s titles for the two photographs reflect the origins of this work, when, earlier this year, the images were printed to the architectural scale of a classical portico. The work arises from the conflicts of nature and culture in an academic setting, but here serves as a defining image for this exhibition: what is the landscape of the future for our descendents?

**Thomas Yeomans** catapults us into the chaos of digital clamour that is a response to his rapidly changing landscape over the past two years. *Eventide* snatches sound, video, text and other imagery online and meticulously re-edits the material into an arrangement that expresses the artist's feelings of rage about the current political moment. A theme running throughout the work is of private spaces for contemplation being punctured by the technologies that surround us.

'5.5538103-0.2264087.net' is a video using footage from Abogbloshie in Accra, taken by **Phil Thompson** in February 2016. This area in Ghana contains a large scrap metal dump and recycling area that processes a range of materials from large trucks to mobile phones. A 360 degree view of the dump can be accessed

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on an Android phone, held in the hand whilst turning around in a circle. As viewers of our own technological waste and the human misery at the other end of our consumerism, we are implicated by the device in our own hands.

The curatorial vision for this exhibition expands the concept of landscape to shed light upon the changing ways in which we relate to particular spaces, places and the ongoing trace of humanity. The exhibition suggests a role for artists in supporting a sustainable future; through reflection and a disciplined application of the imagination.

Beaconsfield, November 2018

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