

Manifesto for Sustainable Experimentation 21 May-9 August 2025

Reading Groups for Sustainable Experimentation

Curated by writer and curator Fran Painter-Fleming in response to the exhibition *Manifesto for Sustainable Experimentation*, this reading group series draws on Beaconsfield Contemporary's 30 years of production. Each session is anchored by a particular exhibition or performance, with each signalling different strategies for thinking otherwise.

Working with film, performance and installation, each of the selected archival projects use these artistic mediums to challenge the often-hostile environments we find ourselves within, and to cultivate more compassionate ways of existing in the contemporary moment.

In opposition to dominant, capitalist or colonial constructions of time, each of these sessions also posits more elastic readings of time, bringing in scholars and artists who unpick how landscape, memory, language and gender each leave their own temporal markings.

Bringing together archival materials from the selected projects with critical texts, this series fosters dialogue between the recent history and the now, encouraging participants to continue to wield tools of rebellion against dogma or oppression.

Practical notes on each session:

*For those who want to read in advance, the selected extracts for each session will be made available to attendees ahead of each session. We will read the texts out loud together however, so no reading ahead is not compulsory. (Reading aloud is also not compulsory during the session).

Part One: Filmic Landscapes, Ruptures in Time Saturday 14th June, 2:30-4:30pm

'Lightsilver explores the physical, conceptual and historical impact of the landscape tradition on the ideas of contemporary artists. An evolving montage of projections links the cinematic tradition of vista-making with the metaphoric potential of an age-old genre: 'the appearance of that portion of land which the eye can view at once'. Territory that has been conventionally explored through other mediums is here broadly extended to the moving image as a result of the digital revolution.' Beaconsfield. 2005. *Lightsilver* [Press Release].

The first reading group is in dialogue with the exhibition *Lightsilver*, 24 February-8 May 2005, which explored the impact of the landscape tradition via the moving image. through bringing together nine different artists working with video.

Taking the form of a cinematic relay, *Lightsilver* took place across Beaconsfield's three gallery spaces. Each week the films would rotate onto another screen, mimicking tidal sequences, or rolling sand dunes — giving each artist three different vantage points or environments to present their work within, before making way for a new artist to enter the sequence.

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Building on the expansive, cyclical makeup of *Lightsilver*, the selected texts unpick the pliable potential of time within cinematic and natural environments. Dwelling in film history and specific cinematic techniques, Elwes's essay draws out the 'trickster' temporal character of cameras and moving image. Jenny Odell's conversation with Emmanuel Vaughn-Lee encourages readers to challenge their understandings of time in broader strokes, digesting the history of timekeeping in relation to extractive land practices, technology and social relations.

Archival materials from *Lightsilver* will be on display for participants to sift through and return to after collectively reading the texts from Elwes and Odell.

TEXTS

Catherine Elwes. 'Talking Pictures: Narrative, Time, Colour and Sound.' *Landscape and the Moving Image*, NED-New edition, Intellect, 2022.

Jenny Odell 'Another Kind of Time'. *Emergence Magazine*, Vol 5: Time, May 2024.

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Part Two: Language in Live Contexts, Acts of Public Memory **Saturday 5th July 2:30-4:30pm**

This second session draws on two large-scale works from Beaconsfield's history, the late Monica Ross's performance *rightsrepeated* (2005) which developed into the ongoing project Acts of Memory (2008-) and Shane Cullen's *The Agreement* (2002). Both works pull at the threads of language, resituating quite lengthy, dense texts into performative, embodied, and sculptural contexts.

For Ross, the repositioned text was The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which was originally recited in its entirety by the artist as part of 'rights repeated' (2005) in the Beaconsfield exhibition *Chronic Epoch*, 14 September-20 November 2005, and went on to be collectively recited by different groups, across multiple languages 60 times as part of *Acts of Memory* (2008-) before the artist's death in 2013.

'Commissioned by Beaconsfield in 2000: 'The Agreement' is a sculptural work by Dublin-based artist Shane Cullen, conceived to commemorate the signing of the Anglo-Irish Peace Agreement of 1998. The work presents the full text of the document known as the 'Good Friday' or 'Belfast' Agreement, in a clear and comprehensible manner: 11,500 words digitally routed into 55 HDU panels, each panel 3.5m x 1.22m, total length 67m.' Beaconsfield. 2002. *The Agreement*. [Press Release].

For both projects language becomes a palpable, sculptural matter, to be shared collectively to oppose abuses of power. The selected texts for this session draw on the porous relationships between language, art, collective experience and memory, analysing how creatives concoct these elements together to create solid pathways for tackling the present moment.

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The selected readings mirror the layering and repurposing of language that runs throughout the work of Ross and Cullen. Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik's text introduces different performative approaches to cultural memory by various artists, filmmakers and authors. Yve Lomax's essay heralds the importance of 'now time' within Monica Ross's practice, bridging together correspondence from Monica, with Lomax's own reflections on narrative capsules and prose from Benjamin, The Bible and Giorgio Agamben. Short passages from Guillermo Gómez-Peña's 'In Defence of Performance' will also lay out the vigour of embodied knowledge and its capacity to transcend political borders, generating 'more inclusive systems of political thought and aesthetic praxis'.

Archival materials from *rightsrepeated* (2005) and *The Agreement* (2002) will be on display for participants to sift through and return to after collectively reading the texts.

TEXTS

Extract from 'Introduction' Liedeke Plate, and Anneke Smelik. *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Yve Lomax "'Vocation" in Monica Ross'. *Ethical Actions : A Critical Fine Art Practice*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016.

Selected passages from Guillermo Gómez-Peña's 'In Defence of Performance', in Gómez-Peña, G. *Ethno-Techno : Writings on Performance, Activism and Pedagogy*. New York ; London: Routledge, 2005.

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Part Three: 'Act of Creation', Tackling Gendered Time Saturday 2nd August 2:30-4:30pm

'At the beginning of her life, she did not know how old she was ... But gradually, the word punctuality, meaning exactness to the minute, comes to rule her life ... Now, everything around her is designed to save time so she can squeeze more and more into her day ... She invests in a modem, a food-processor, a CD-ROM drive, a TV remote-control, voice-mail, e-mail, fax, home-shopping service, a remote-diagnosis machine, voice conferencing, video-on-demand, the Daily Me, home-banking, virtual education and an electronic camera ... Living so perpetually in the present, she wonders where her past and future went ...' Bush, K. 1995. *Cottage Industry* Beaconsfield 4 November-3 December 1995. [Exhibition catalogue]. London: Beaconsfield.

This third session responds to one of the first exhibitions held at Beaconsfield's current site, *Cottage Industry* (1995). Bringing together seven female artists, (Sonia Boyce, Kate Bush, Mikey Cuddihy, Siobhan Davies, Elsie Mitchell, Clare Palmier and Naomi Siderfin) Curated by the female member of Beaconsfield, this group show invited artists to share their experiences of navigating gendered domestic and economic

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constraints within the art world, looking at how invisible labour and care was often paralleled or blurred within professional settings.

Whether tackling curatorial positions alongside fine art practices, supporting children or, students, this emphasis on hosting or guidance often slips into the workload of female creatives. Held across four sites, the gallery space, the exterior walls of Beaconsfield and two private homes of the featured artists, *Cottage Industry* broadened the scope of how exhibition making could be conceived and received, evolving in tandem with individual artists' capacities and needs.

30 years on, this reading group looks at how the experience of female artists has changed, reflecting on radical histories of collective action, as well as carving space for generous ways of working. How can the art world create sustainable ways of working for its female artists and how can we tackle the realities of gendered time?

Hettie Judah's text surveys key art historical examples of art and motherhood, pulling from both canonical art history of mother and child imagery and socially engaged projects. Irmeli Kokko and Nina Möntmann's conversation champions communal residencies which provide necessary childcare and foster meaningful collective exchange as a fertile antidote to the fast-paced world of contemporary art. Finally, an excerpt from Camille Henrot's *Milkways* brings a raw, first-person perspective to the challenges of being an artist-mother.

Archival materials from *Cottage Industry* (1995) will be on display for participants to sift through and return to after collectively reading the texts.

TEXTS

Extract from Hettie Judah, 'Maintenance', in Judah, H., and Hayward Gallery, associated with work. *Acts of Creation : On Art and Motherhood*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2024.

'Residencies as Programmatic Spaces for Community: An Interview with Nina Möntmann, Irmeli Kokko' *Contemporary Artist Residencies* interview

Excerpt from *Milkways*, Camille Henrot, Hatje Cantz, 2023.

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BIO

This series has been conceived by Fran Painter-Fleming, a curator, writer and researcher based in London. Her curatorial research hinges on social memory, geopolitics, translation and myth, working primarily with live art and moving image. Her curatorial practice is grounded in slower methods of curating, working with artists or fields of research over extended periods of time.