

Sally Madge: *Traces*

A selection of artist's statements, exhibition texts, records, and reviews

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Sally Madge

Ars Longa, Vita Brevis

Performance, part of 'Flare 2: Body Works, Excavating the In/visible',
Gallery North, University of Northumbria, May 2015



A 30-minute performance where I test run my newly acquired exercise bike. During the ride, I demonstrate its value as an aid to enjoyment and creativity, drawing on a range of subjects from colour theory to American rappers, philosophy, feminism and fashion. On completion of the ride, I elicit responses from the audience as to how I can improve my performance.

"Newton's first law of motion states a body will remain at rest or continue with motion in a straight line unless acted on by a force. Yesterday I met someone who changed my life, today we put down a sound that made our aim accurate. Tomorrow is yesterday's history and art will still be there, even if life terminates."

Sally Madge

Avant Guard

Performance. Part of 'The Dream of Fluxus',
Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, February 2009.



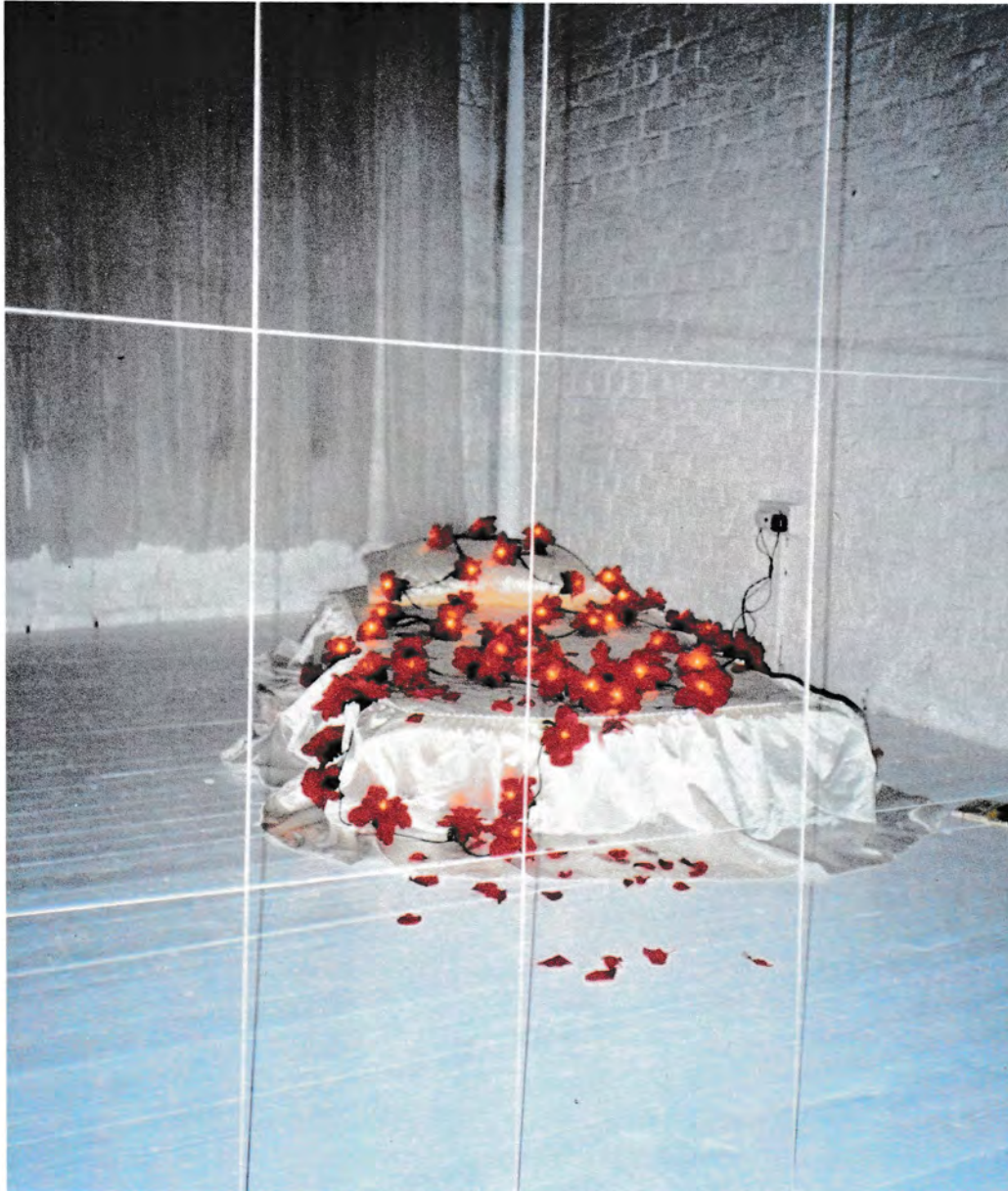
This interactive performance draws attention to some of the ironies thrown up by the official art world's recognition of Fluxus. Its original manifestos aimed for a 'living art', an 'anti-art' – valuing the creativity of ordinary everyday activities rather than unique artefacts made by special individuals – but now these revolutionary efforts are fossilised in museum showcases. So, appropriately dressed and accredited in her 'Fluxuniform', the artist patrols the gallery and tends to the exhibits, inviting the participation of viewers as a gentle reminder of the movement's early collective ethos and intention to dissolve artificial hierarchies separating artists from audiences.



Sally Madge

Bed of Roses

Installation, group exhibition, The Workhaus, Liverpool, NXN Film and Arts Festival,
part of 'Tracey', Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, 1999.



Artist's statement:

"I like the profoundness of clichés."

Sally Madge

Bird In Hand

Site-specific interactive performance, Freud Museum, London, February 2011



A sign placed next to the box requests visitors to:
'Open the box and follow the instructions'

Inside the box lid, the text reads:

Put on the gloves
Carefully lift out the bird
Examine it closely
Consider its beauty
Be sad at its demise

Tell it a secret
Return it to the box
Take off the gloves
Close the lid
Your secret is safe

The work engages with the context of the Freud Museum as a site of display as well as referencing psychoanalytic notions of free association and confidential disclosure. First staged during *The Dream of Fluxus* as part of *Three Star A La Carte* at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, the bird* is transformed in this travelling performance by the weight of its secrets while the attendant remains vigilant.

*A redshank. This shoreline wading bird was found on the North East coast and was freeze-dried at a local museum in the exact state in which it was found.

Sally Madge

Fictions

Installation and sculpture. Group exhibition, 'Returning to the Philosophers' Table',
Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle upon Tyne, June 2013.
Includes *Surface Matters*. Limited edition dust packs from the library's 'Ethics' section.



The work consists of nine sculptural assemblages entitled *Fictions* which incorporate elements of my own archive and constitute a taxonomy of personal responses to the task set, acting as reference points for a performance lecture: *Stuff of Dreams* as part of the event 'Mapping the Return' to take place on 26th June 2013.

Along with a study of objects gifted to the early Literary and Philosophical Society, the following ideas have fuelled my research:

"The collection is a form of art as play, a form involving the reframing of objects within a world of attention and manipulation of context. Like other forms of art, its function is not the restoration of context of origin but rather the creation of a new context, a context standing in a metaphorical, rather than a contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life".

Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*.
Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1993.

"It is because he feels alienated and disconnected from the social discourse whose rules elude him that the collector seeks to reconstitute a discourse which he understands, because he is then in the possession of the signifiers, and the signified is within his own experience".

Jean Baudrillard, *Les Systemes des Objets*, Gallimard, Paris, 1984.

Excerpt from diary, May 7th, 2013, Lit. and Phil.:

"12.30– 2.00: Swept gallery walkway for an hour, sometimes on hands and knees but mainly squatting so as not to get splinters in my knees. Wore face mask, apron and rubber gloves, got very hot and dusty. Interesting to think I have actually ingested some of this ancient and erudite dust, it has become part of the fabric of my being – if only temporarily, it does however make me feel quite sick and I have a headache coming on. As I sweep, I note that Greek Mythology and the Biblical section are dustier than other sections, there is a damp stain on the floor near Social Sciences, Ethics gets a lot of sun and there are large gaps in the floorboards along the Spanish, French and German Literature sections.

I am developing an affection for dust balls and also note there are some tiny book cover shreds in my dustpan".

FREE AS A BIRD

Sally Madge

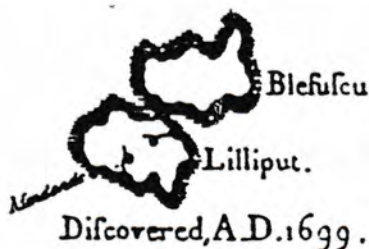
"I asked once more to be set free, and at last the emperor agreed, as long as I would obey his rules. I said that I would, and my chains were taken off".

Jonathan Swift, *Gullivers Travels*. Ladybird Classics Edition (as retold by Marie Stuart). Ladybird Books, 1995, p.21.

"Animal lives are routinely reduced to function ... almost as if an animal were the quintessence of the enlightened self-interested individual ... Nature ends up purely as a zone of scarcity requiring astute management ...

"The playful is the most important, and only the pressure of managed lives could have led us to impose our own miserable conception of life on what is so stunningly and blatantly without purpose".

Peter Porcupine, 'Watching Birds', *Here & Now* 18, 1998, pp.6-7 (PO Box 109, Leeds LS5 3AA).



RED-BREASTED MERGANSER

Mergus serrator (male)

Fish-eating diving duck with a saw-toothed bill. Breeds late on coastal and inland waters across Northern Europe, and winters on the coast. Has become much less common in many areas due to disturbance and pollution.

GUILLEMOT

Uria aalge

The most common of the auks - ocean-going fishing birds with short tails and narrow wings. Nests in huge colonies on vertical cliffs. Always restricted by lack of suitable nesting sites, they are also very vulnerable to pollution.

HERRING GULL

Larus argentatus

Common gull eating fish and offal, also a predator of birds eggs and young. Breeds in colonies, which may be very large. Over recent years has moved extensively inland, into towns and onto rubbish tips and sewage works.

WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO TYNE AND WEAR MUSEUM SERVICES FOR THE LOAN OF THE STUFFED BIRDS, AND TO KEVIN ANDERSON AND MATTHEW PEARCE FOR THEIR INSPIRATION AND THE LOAN OF THE TOY SOLDIERS.



Sally Madge

Galata Landscapes

from *Stuff Happening*, performance at international performance event, 'GalataPerform', Istanbul, March 2008; exhibited in 'What is Drawing?', Customs House Gallery, South Shields, South Tyneside, September-November 2013.



steps, Galata Square	fox fur	bed curtains, Apartment 43	llana	Mava	floorboards, GalataPerform studio
coconut	carpet, Apartment 43	Yessim	internal wall	Afghan rug	David's suitcase
Hassan	rocking horse	sofa, Apartment 43	feral dog	props cupboard, GalataPerform studio	rusting lamppost
tree, Galata Square	bedspread, Apartment 43	feral cat	Galata Tower	domestic cat	Carole's bed
young boy shining shoes	curtains, Apartment 43	sofa, GalataPerform studio	poster	doormat, GalataPerform studio	external wall

I used a sticky lint clothes-roller to lift dust and debris off multiple surfaces in the Galata (Karaköy) district of the city: people, animals, plants, furniture, buildings. Each encounter required an active engagement with the subject or object, a conversation, a manoeuvre. The most daunting encounter: a large feral dog sunning itself on an Istanbul street. I approached it with great caution and managed to stroke it with my lint roller without injury.

I displayed the peel-off sheets with their intricate surface patterns as drawings, landscapes, and portraits. I was intrigued by the way that marks emerged as traces of encounters. Time and place were registered when vestiges of events were deposited on receptive surfaces – where every presence, in order to know itself as present, bore the trace of an absence which defined it. Shades of Freud's mystic writing pad ...

Sally Madge

The Gerbil's Guide to the Galaxy

Installation, Bookville and Waygood Gallery, High Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, July 2005

In the main space there is a cage on a plinth. The cage houses a pet gerbil* and a large encyclopedia: a 1933 first edition of the *New Illustrated Universal Reference Book*. This is a compendium of carefully compiled, alphabetically organised facts where, to quote from the editor's introduction, "the reader has a mine of information at his fingertips". Within the confines of her restricted living space, this small rodent goes about the business of 'mining' the data for her own purposes. Prior to arriving in the gallery, over a period of several weeks in various locations, the gerbil has 'edited' the book, translating the carefully constructed text into an unruly mass of dislocated fragments, recycling it as material for building a warm and secure nest. Reminiscent of the surrealist technique of automatism, which involves the surrender of conscious control in the production of works of art, the fate of the book dissolves the architecture of knowledge into that of action. Likewise, the physical object diminishes in size as its shape mutates and disintegrates and its architecture is demolished. Yet the gerbil as architect works to reconstruct its environment according to its own design – not unlike, in some respects, the redesign, redevelopment and renovation work that lies ahead for Waygood.

We may think about rodents collectively in terms of the feral masses gnawing away at and polluting our social and built environment – as opposed to the regimented labour required to build the latter in the first place. But rodents can become acceptable, and even cute. Once isolated, domesticated and controlled as part of the culturally sanctioned phenomenon of pet ownership, animals contribute to everyday life, providing companionship and pleasure and having affection and care lavished on them in return. This gerbil's cage is regularly cleaned out and reordered as part of the routine of looking after a pet. When the book is completely transformed, the heap of shredded page fragments will be reconstituted as a revised edition in a subsequent artwork.

* The RSPCA were contacted well in advance of this exhibition, and no animal welfare issues were envisaged. However, on 5th July (the day before the preview), a local RSPCA officer advised that there were now serious ethical concerns over the use of an animal 'performing' in the gallery. Therefore a webcam video of the gerbil in its domestic environment replaces its presence here, and live broadcasts are planned during the course of the exhibition.

original source: *The New Illustrated Universal Reference Book*, Oldhams Press, First Edition, 1933.

revised edition: *The Gerbil's Guide to the Galaxy*, Sally Madge, Waygood Gallery, High Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, July 2005.

activity	emotion	narrative	security
architecture	excrement	nest	site
art	fabrication	nurturance	space
automatism	fragment	omnipotence	structure
bed	function	play	surface
book	gallery	power	text
building	history	process	trace
cage	housing	purpose	transition
container	imagination	questioning	unconscious
content	institution	reconstruction	universe
demolition	knowledge	redevelopment	viewer
dirt	labour	reference	word
discourse	language	renovation	work
dislocation	mass	restriction	writing
dream	material	rodent	Waygood

Drawings for a Revised Illustrated Reference Book

Sally Madge

These drawings are part of an ongoing project which started with a pet gerbil and a 1930s illustrated encyclopaedia. The book was placed in the gerbil's cage where she chewed at the pages producing tiny fragments of shredded paper for her bedding. I liked this disregard for the authority of words and the recycling of knowledge for the purpose of creating a warm and comfortable nest.

Following the gerbil's cue I decided to continue the recycling process and produce new paper from her bedding. To make the drawings displayed here I selected fragments of illustrations which were unrecognisable as representations of anything specific. I made these fragments into drawings via an intuitive process somewhat akin to the surrealist technique of automatism, where the aim of the writer or artist is to relinquish conscious intention in the creation of text or image.

My long term aim is to produce a revised illustrated reference book where it is up to the reader/viewer to create their own meanings or classifications for the contents rather than fitting them into preconceived categories.

The Guardian

UK news

Artist enlists aid of gerbil

Rebecca Martin

Friday 15 July 2005 00.02 BST

Never mind pickling animals and slicing them up to be your next work of modern art, why not let the put-upon animals slice something up and then use it as art instead?

One industrious gerbil is busily doing just that for the Waygood Gallery in Newcastle after the artist Sally Madge used a pet to create "A gerbil's guide to the galaxy". The gerbil is contributing to her artwork by gnawing through deliberately chosen pages of *The New Illustrated Universal Reference Book* from 1933. When Ms Madge cleans up the cage, she takes out the ripped paper to use in her work. It is thought that her furry friend will be the first animal editor in the world.

The 72-year-old book's original editor boasts that the book enables the reader to have "a mine of



A Gerbil's Guide To The Galaxy
Detail from video installation at Bookville/Waygood
Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, March-June 2005

information at their fingertips". The gerbil is mining sections from the encyclopedia to make its nest. The pet remains nameless because it does not belong to Madge, but it is staying at her home to create its masterpiece.

Madge has set up a display at the gallery in Newcastle which includes a live webcam feed of the animal, the empty nest and cage, and carefully selected remnants of the book. The gerbil was originally going to be housed in the gallery but the RSPCA advised against it. The book was checked to ensure that it did not contain any poisonous inks; the act of shredding the book is similar to the process of a gerbil building a nest from newspaper.

Nicola Veitch of Waygood Gallery & Studios said: "Waygood is in a unique position of being able to provide artists with both facilities and the opportunity to exhibit work in one of the creative capitals of Europe."

□ For more information visit waygood.org. The exhibition runs until Saturday July 30 and is open free between 11am and 5pm at the gallery in High Bridge Street, Newcastle.



Handmaiden (1998)

Mixed media sculpture/photocollage. Isis Arts group exhibition for International Women's Day, 'Hand: Women on Women': Buddle Arts Centre, Wallsend, North Tyneside; Woodhorn Colliery Museum, Ashington, and Queensgate Art Gallery, Alnwick, Northumberland.

ISIS ARTS Catalogue for "Hand" Exhibition.

It would be preferable for an art work to speak for itself. The viewer's response is what counts, even if it differs from the artist's intention. Perhaps the art object can be seen as part of a conversation between artist and viewer - a conversation where meanings often lie in the space between words.

Most of my work entails gathering, selecting and reassembling elements - ideas, objects, images and words. In this case the process was sparked off by the invitation to take part in an exhibition for International Women's Day. Its theme, 'Hand', has many possible aesthetic and material connotations. This multiplicity of possibilities led me to the surrealist merging of conscious and unconscious processes, and the creation of unexpected qualities and associations - especially in the mundane and everyday world.

Much contemporary women's art practice focuses on the problematic issues surrounding women's relationship with the body and its representation. Questions I ask myself here include: 'How do I locate myself within my work without merely reproducing the conventional tendencies to objectify and fetishise women's bodies?' And since I do not advocate the notion of *biology as destiny*, I prefer to operate in the space between the *natural* and the *cultural*. By representing parts of the body as merging, I wanted to question traditional cultural meanings. So here the hand is implicated in women's desire and pleasure, while women's sexuality may itself be seen as an active and empowering force. Meanwhile the unexpected resonance of the merged images is suggestive of the potency of creative energy wherever it is employed.

Sally Madge



is an artist living in Newcastle. Sally has been involved in initiating innovative multi-disciplinary events and in 1997 she received a major Northern Arts award. Recent exhibitions include a Live Art Performance (commissioned by Northern Stage) at the Gulbenkian Studio Theatre, and 'Towards A Place for Art: Works on Paper 1' at the Surikov Institute in Moscow.

From introduction to catalogue by Stephanie Brown.

Sally Madge's *Handmaiden* works are - paradoxically perhaps - amongst the least obviously hand-made in terms of expressive surface, and the most closely related to the theory-based practice of reappraising those traditional (male) representations of women's bodies which reinforce cultural norms in power relationships and sexual behaviour. In merging images of 'public' and visible, and 'private' and hidden body parts, she questions those norms and suggests one of the ways in which women, literally, take their sexuality into their own hands.

Sally Madge

Heart of the City

Site-specific installation, group exhibition, 'Sale', Blue Cowboys, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1995

The installation is a product of my physical and emotional response to the structure and fabric of the site. The particular space I have chosen occupies and marks the boundary between the bright clean public space of the converted gallery/shop front and the derelict territory hidden deep inside the building.

Traces of the building's previous occupants lurk in a hinterland between the mundane everyday and deeper unconscious states. Ghosts of a dry cleaning business flock at the ceiling, while bodily debris lodges along the skirting. Detritus from a colony of feral pigeons is now presided over by an overstuffed museum specimen. Cleanliness and dirt, and life and death mingle – healthy growth flowering in the wasteland. The strains of dawn chorus birdsong overlay distantly heard city centre noises. Even more poignantly, shit cradles eggs dislodged from unseen nests. I hope these resonances can do justice to the ambivalence, pleasure and anxiety of our experiences of the heart of the city.



Sally Madge

Hot Charcoal Drawings

In group exhibition, 'What Is Drawing?' Customs House Gallery,
South Shields, South Tyneside, September-November 2013.



Drawings were made by rubbing, pulling, stroking and dragging sheets of paper over the hot embers of a driftwood fire. In effect, the paper was used as the drawing tool and the charcoal as the surface or ground. Varying levels of heat and different arrangements, shapes and types of burning wood, as well as the pressure, direction, speed and duration of each action applied to the movement of the paper, determined the nature of the outcome.

As it was not possible to see or guide the mark making process, the final outcome was based not so much on aesthetic decisions as on serendipity and various pragmatic factors, like rescuing the paper before it burned and dealing with sudden gusts of wind.

Isis Gallery

Melmerby, Penrith
Cumbria. CA10 1HN

0768 881508

HOT HOUSE COLD STORAGE

"Nature never did betray the heart that loved her"

Wordsworth

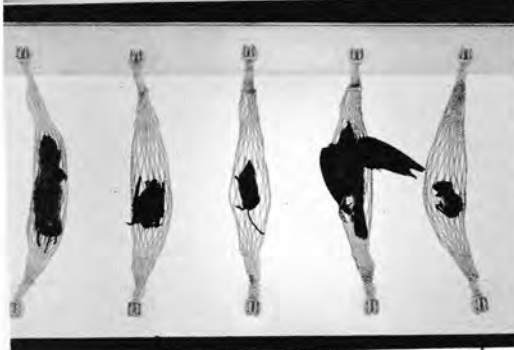
Museums and art galleries operate as filters, encouraging a particular view of knowledge and history. The glass cases, frames, and the empty white space serve to isolate, categorise and fragment the products of culture, and to invest them with authority. The cabinet of curiosities was once part of the rich landowner's domestic paraphernalia: a symbol of ownership of nature and culture. During the nineteenth century this was transformed into the public museum, for purposes of education and enlightenment.

More recently, 'heritage' further distorts and dislocates the continuity of the past with the present. The sense of place and of 'being there' are lost, making viewers passive, anaesthetising the pain and pleasure of personal experience along the way.

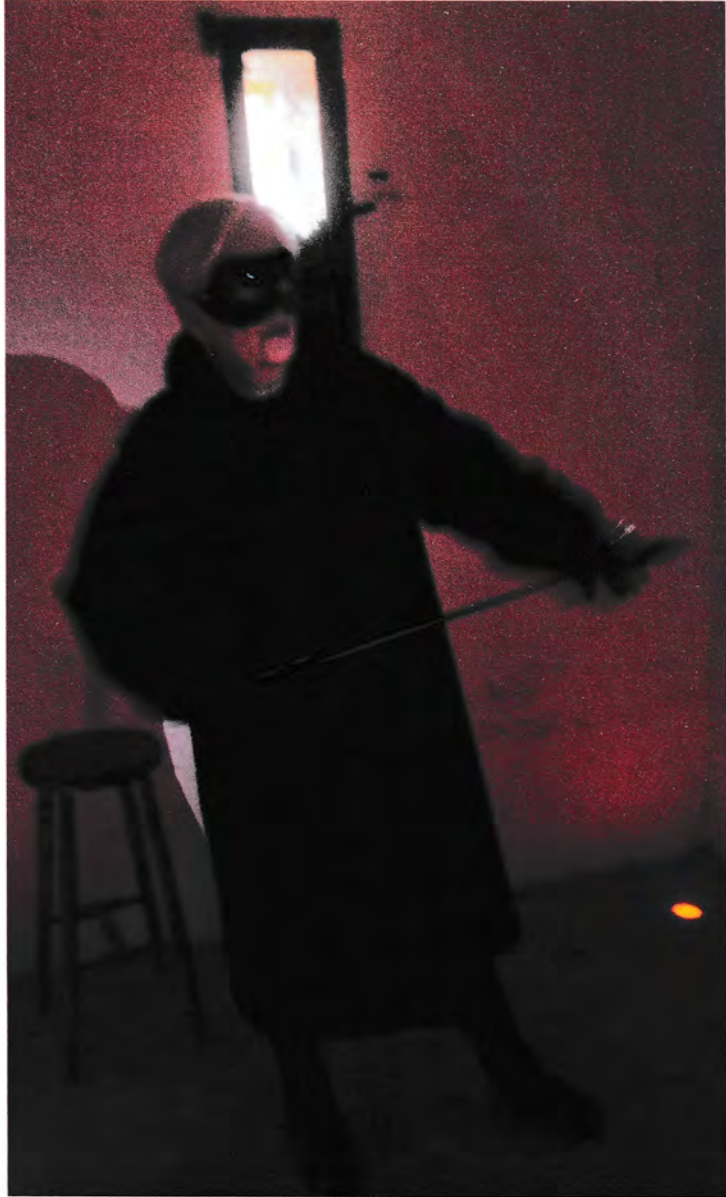
Visual information is displayed so that there is no opportunity for the free play of the imagination. Information is commodified and consumed, presented as if it was complete and uncomplicated. For example, boundaries between nature and culture blur when myths of a rural idyll play on fake nostalgia and a sense of problem-free wholesomeness which never really existed. Ignoring historical conflict makes it difficult to understand the contemporary problems of the countryside, and of the environment in general. No longer aiming to educate, the heritage perspective instead entertains, or diverts - trivialising the objects of its gaze.

After which the viewer can take away souvenirs - which become the most 'real' aspects of the whole experience. Ironically, the private souvenir is a faint echo of the increasing privatisation and degradation of the countryside, forgotten amid theme park celebrations of its wonders. The passage to heritage seems to represent an acknowledgement that the nature and culture we value have somehow lost their presence and relevance in our life-world.

In the light of all this I wanted to disrupt the formal boundaries between art galleries, museums and heritage displays of the products of nature and culture, so as to evoke unexpected emotional resonances through the interplay of objects, sound, images and text. In doing so the installation aims to explore the effects of symbolising such experiences through the mediation of cultural codes and institutions.



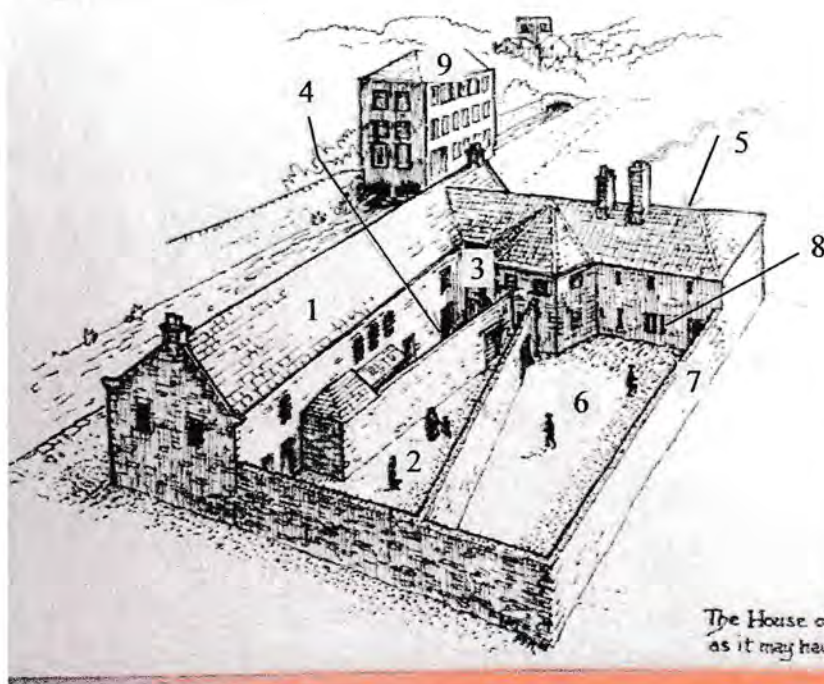
Sally Madge, September 1994



Sally Madge

House of Correction

Performance and installation. Part of 'Inhabit', Performance Art programme curated by Neon Arts, Moothall Gallery, Hexham, Northumberland, February 2017.



1. Women's cells: days cells on the ground floor, night cells on the first floor. This was the original 18th century building converted into a house of correction in 1783.
2. Women's exercise yard; with high wall preventing contact with the men.
3. Governor's house.
4. Governor's yard (with privy).
5. Remaining part of the House of Correction; 1820s extension used as men's day and night cells.
6. Men's exercise yard.
7. Remaining part of exercise yard wall.
8. Narrow windows to prevent escape; protected by sharp barbs.
9. Tannery.

The House of Correction,
as it may have appeared c. 1870

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1832 led those unable to make a living to be criminalised, stripped of the last vestiges of freedom, autonomy, dignity, and family and social relationships, and forced into imprisonment and hard labour in a 'house of correction' with inadequate physical and emotional sustenance and a litany of petty rules and degradations apparently designed to humiliate them even further.

These days, of course, we're much more civilised and would never treat the poor in such a cruel and inhuman manner ... Plus, by the mid-19th century, it wasn't long since their misdemeanours had been punished by hanging or transportation as convict labour to Australia – and that's quite apart from the horrors of the colonies and the African slave trade, let alone appalling conditions in British slums and factories. Suffice it to say, these were barbaric times. Yet the new regime was purportedly a response to abuses of previous welfare arrangements, where poor relief had been organised locally so that those temporarily unemployed or homeless wouldn't become destitute. But employers were responsible for the vast majority of abuses – in particular, larger and more rapacious profiteers who arbitrarily cut wages below subsistence levels in the knowledge that someone else would pay to prevent their workers from starving. No one was holding them to account, or questioning their treatment of seasonal staff. It seems that the poor were supposed to be reformed, or 'corrected', but never the circumstances causing such poverty.

Finally, to add grievous insult to considerable injury, the deliberate and planned creation of so much misery was presented to public opinion as motivated by a desire to help the destitute, to do the right thing by them. The great and the good lined up to express their benevolence and love for those more unfortunate than themselves – even while these allegedly liberal, caring, progressive proponents of Poor Law reform also made it a civil offence for friends, neighbours and other genuinely altruistic locals to offer people a bed so as to avoid the dreaded workhouse. We must ask ourselves, therefore, what twisted logic, what perverse thinking, could possibly delude presumably well-meaning, intelligent people into subscribing to such a travesty of humanity – and to claim that it was all in the interests of the victims. Whose gratifications were being served, and how?

Sally Madge

How Can I Tell What I Think Till I See What I Say?

Installation, Customs House Gallery, South Shields, South Tyneside, September-October 2015.



The title for this exhibition is taken from *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), a treatise on writing by English novelist E.M. Forster. I came across it when reading Marion Milner's 1950s classic study of the nature of creativity and the forces which prevent its expression, *On Not Being Able to Paint*. The quotation has been used as part of a discussion of Milner's ideas about the interplay of inner and outer reality in art and everyday life. Taking my inspiration from a child's drawing of a house, my aim is to weave a series of visual narratives through the space of the gallery, and so this is less an exhibition of my drawings or an exercise in drawing virtuosity than an installation about drawing. The intention is to explore the nature and potential of the medium, the way being able to do it or not being able to do it is indicative of received cultural norms and practices (as in "I can't draw a straight line", and the notion of 'genius'), as well as how the defining principles of drawing might be reformulated to fit a range of creative needs and aims.

So, the main gallery becomes the site for an experiment in 'interior design', and the walls are marked, papered and hung with a selection of artist-produced, found and collected drawings. A large, sculptural piece which takes centre stage engages with the child's drawing and references various art historical precedents. 'How To Draw' manuals spanning several decades are laid out for reference, and the small anteroom off the gallery operates as a more intimate and informal 'studio' space. The installation might thus be interpreted as part museum, part personal archive and part 'design for living'.

Sally Madge

Just Visiting

Live Installation, in group exhibition/intervention, 'The Hearing Trumpet',
curated by Natalie Gale and Rachael Macarthur, West Dean, West Sussex.



This *tableau vivant* is inspired by the Surrealist artist and close friend of Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and her painting *Creation of the Birds*. Whereas Varo's delicate owl woman pumps primary-coloured pigments through her Bosch-like apparatus, paints with a brush string of her heart-violin, and refracts star-/moonlight through her Newtonian magnifier, setting her birds free from their two dimensionality, Madge's birds lie on an old medical trolley alongside assorted paraphernalia – real creatures of death and demolition, part objects awaiting reconstruction and freedom through the viewer's imaginative conjecture.

The artist-physician has a dishevelled appearance, wearing a stained lab coat, makeshift bird mask and grubby white cotton gloves. Making occasional eye contact with viewers, she guards her collection of fetish objects as a kind of surrealist bag lady, her presence in complete antithesis to the grandiose surroundings. Reference is made here to the objectification of the female artist as gifted child woman, as represented by Marian, the principal character in Carrington's novel. Like Madge, Marian rejects the ideals of youth and beauty that dominate contemporary culture and Western painting. Instead, she opines that her beard is gallant, and emerges as a crone from Celtic mythology – a wise old woman whose witchcraft is key to fertility and creativity throughout the ages.

Sally Madge

Labour Intensive

Performance, collaboration with Carole Luby, Saltburn Artists Projects,
Saltburn by the Sea, Teesside, October 2008.

Review published in *Freedom* magazine.

Denatured Nurture Debate

This performance artwork powerfully evokes the blood, sweat and tears of the nurturance underpinning social reproduction.

For over an hour in the Saltburn Gallery, two women methodically undertake what appear to be food-processing operations, struggling up stepladders, pouring red fruit-mash and cream into gigantic hanging muslin bags, kneading and squeezing the strained residues into jugs and buckets. This onerous task yields increasing quantities of liquids then refiltered through the system and, as time passes, the products accidentally splatter across the floor and walls and the artists themselves who become more and more bedraggled – occasionally even rinsing their heads and mouths with the juices – until the entire scene suggests a horror movie shoot. When their discomfort at the smell and feel of the sticky substances mingling and stinging eyes, filling hair and covering bodies becomes too much, the visibly tiring women abandon their travails – leaving a random mosaic of bright purples, reds and pinks among discarded containers in the once-clean white space. Nevertheless, they soon reappear with only the worst of the mess washed off, in an adjacent room holding tables set with massed ranks of delicate china. Preparing cuppas and scones with blackberry and apple jam and clotted cream, they serve the audience afternoon tea.

Initiating Saltburn Artists Project's live art programme, Carole Luby and Sally Madge's *Labour Intensive* (12th October) condenses a whole gamut of traditional 'women's work' into a simple installation. Starting from deeply personal resonances of specific domestic rituals harnessing wild food into cottage economics, the exhausting routines of housework and family sustenance take their toll inscribed on bodies and souls – the gradual saturation with vivid blood-red and off-white rotting, festering excretions connoting menstruation, maturation and childbirth, breast milk, bodily care, damage and ageing, in cycles of biological and social reproduction. Pleasure and fulfilment arise from the sheer sensuality of visceral engagement and commitment to motherly objectives, but the overriding sense here is ambivalence – visually, in the grotesque beauty; and emotionally, in the artists' abjection, pain and melancholy, wrung-out of energy from lifetimes of loving care. The manipulation of raw environmental and bodily material thus threatens to overwhelm human capacities to cope with the flow and distil the boundless potential of the world into useful, nourishing essence – with the monstrous jam-manufacturing machinery hinting at industrial alienation, and the subsequent tea-party completing the fragmentation of integrated productive activity in service-sector commodification.

The themes tackled signal the influence of feminist art since the 1960s such as Judy Chicago's celebratory *The Dinner Party* and Bobby Baker's deranged renderings of respectable housewifery. Whereas if later conceptual explorations of the ideologies and stereotypes of womanhood are only implicit, another blatant precursor would be the macho provocations of the Vienna Actionists, transgressing acceptable bounds of public behaviour and encouraging extremes of fascination and disgust. Meanwhile the exaggerated dysfunctional apparatus reinforces the artifice of the situation – militating against interpretations of gender essentialism – and the art gallery setting further frames the performance within institutional discourses rather than 'natural' activity. The structure of the space itself prompts voyeuristic peering through a narrow doorway, placing centre-stage endeavours normally culturally hidden, socially taken for granted and politically undervalued.

Thus, the concealed 'internal' effects of this everyday hard labour are symbolically transposed: first onto the performers' bodies; then the building's surfaces; and, finally, into the reactions of viewers – who were clearly moved, even though some accepted the gift of nourishment while others preferred to pass.



Beyond its expressive sophistication and effectiveness, *Labour Intensive* neatly brings together production and consumption – both in the artistic process, challenging the objectifying gaze of detached contemplation, and the culmination of its circuit of social relations implicating 'customers' directly in preceding events. And, of course – contrary to conservative rhetoric sanctifying isolated nuclear families and regulating and rewarding individual conduct – the complex rhythms and rites surrounding food and care-giving always were collective. Communal traditions involving highly-skilled craft originated, developed and were transmitted at the grass-roots, largely outside centralised control yet a constant source of anxiety and interference.

Such stubbornly persistent patterns of basic human sociality need taming, breaking down and reconstituting if their potential utility for elite interests is to be mobilised, regimented and exploited – from the enclosures of the commons and the destruction of tribal and subsistence cultures, through mass industrial incarceration, to the soulless colonisation of 'affective labour' in the 'social factory', and now in biotechnology's rapacious invasion of cellular life. Prevailing modes of production, reproduction and domination seem consistently to intersect most crucially and fruitfully precisely where women's wisdom and bodily practices loom largest, and Sally Madge and Carole Luby manage artfully to expose some of the intimate resonances of this mysterious process without falling victim to its otherwise almost universal mystification.

Tom Jennings

Sally Madge

Land Army

Site intervention, in 'Artists Challenge the Armouries', Crystal Clear artists initiative, Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds, October 1996.



Land



Army



In response to Crystal Clear's invitation to produce some work for their October show, I travelled from Newcastle to Leeds to visit the Royal Armouries. On the same day I met up with Mary Humby who had served in the Woman's Land Army and had agreed to talk to me about her wartime experience.

The resulting postcard is both a document of my visits and a souvenir of events. Rather than purchasing a postcard in the museum shop I preferred the idea of producing my own and adding it to the existing collection. Whilst most of the Royal Armouries postcards represent objects on display in the museum, this postcard contains more personal elements and is, in effect a representation of the experience of the visitor/viewer (myself).

My concern is with how the past is represented through the medium of museum display; which elements are presented and packaged for public consumption and how personal experience connects with official history. Images and objects of war seldom make reference to women's experience and neither have women had much of a part to play in the official narrative concerning our pasts.

Sally Madge

Late Shift

Late Shift. Performance. Collaboration with Carole Luby, Waygood Art Boutique, Newcastle upon Tyne, June 2009.



Bread is used as a locus for playful interaction including elements of domestic, labour, art production and personal ritual, underpinned by the sense of a conveyor belt driving the machinery forward to its absurd end.



Sally Madge

Listen With Mother

Mixed media installation, University of Northumbria, September 1991

“There is no trace without resistance and there is no etching on a surface without pain.”



A child's drawing of a house. A neat and orderly arrangement of fixtures and furniture seen from a range of viewpoints, hinting at the child's fantasies of omnipotence over her world, like moving items around in a doll's house at whim. Only the bath seems to offer the possibility of containment. There are no people in this house. A corner, a part-room, neither an inside nor an outside. A space for reflection? Traces of narrative on fragmented surfaces. The chair image, rather like the flattened furniture in the child's drawing, floats on the wall tilted forwards or perhaps held back by the arm – an unreal arm. The body is absent. A different body reference is conveyed through the X-ray image of the artist's fractured arm. The body's internal, damaged structure is exposed for the purpose of examination. The space is clinical, sanitised, neat, empty of action and suffused with a sense of loss. A loss of omnipotence?

'I am a daughter.' I can feel the perfection of the illusion, the times of loss of anxiety, the comfort of containment when I am lost in the artwork. At one point I am interchangeable with the medium. I experience the artwork taking me over, directing me what to do next.

'I am a teacher.' Any work of art functions like another person having independent life of its own. The creative process can be divided into three parts: an initial stage of projecting fragmented parts of the self into the work.

'I am a mother.' The second phase integrates art's substructure, but may not necessarily heal the fragmentation of the surface.

'She is an artist.' In the third stage of reintegration, part of the work's substructure is taken back into the artist. The independent existence of the work of art is felt most strongly, acting like another living person with whom we are conversing.

Sally Madge

Making a Mess and Clearing Up

Performance, Garage Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010. Film of performance edited by Adam Phillips shortlisted for the Jerwood Prize for Drawing, Jerwood Space, London and touring



A site-responsive durational drawing event at 25SG Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, March 2010.

A seven-hour performance in which the blindfolded artist draws on the walls of a small, domestic gallery space (in a converted outhouse) with handmade charcoal. She then removes the blindfold, washes down the walls, sweeps the floor and repaints the space. Viewers can watch the event through the windows or enter the space.

Throughout the day marks are made by various methods, both through artistic intent as conventionally understood and as a trace of the more mundane processes involved in making a mess and clearing it up. As a result, the drawing overflows onto windows, doors, floor, body and clothing, and the sounds of the art-making mingle with those of adjoining household activities. The event's actions and outcomes thereby signify phenomena as diverse as childhood scribbling, graffiti, surrealist automatism, and Freud's mystic writing pad.

By the end of the day no apparent trace of the artist's presence is left; the space seems restored to its original state with all the stages of mark-making sealed into the fabric of the building and preserved behind a screen of white. This minimalist outcome privileges the expressive process by refusing a final fetishised art object.

Sally Madge is a Newcastle-based artist whose multidisciplinary practice places a particular focus on ideas surrounding contemporary performance. She has recently exhibited and performed at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art as part of The Dream of Fluxus (2009).

Video: Adam Phillips (duration: 6 minutes)

Sally Madge

Moving In

Site-specific installation, guest of honour in the 'a-cross-the-board' programme, Departure Foundation, New Curators North East, Tower House, Sunderland, October-November 2012.

"A concept is a brick. It can be used to build a courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window." Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.



An installation constructed over a period of several weeks in a partially empty office block located in an industrial estate in Sunderland. The work was created on site with discarded materials from the surrounding vicinity. In one sense an architectural construction – a temporary dwelling space within a bleak empty office space with connotations of squatting, the type of ad hoc construction found in marginal urban spaces to accommodate the disenfranchised. In another sense an installation referencing the formal elements of sculpture and on view as an art work. And, further, an exploration, a performative piece where the work starts and continues with the process of selection, collection, placement, arrangement, use and dialogue.

Excerpt from diary, October 2013: "As I 'map' the area - cruise the car parks, look through skips and encounter passersby, I gather lots of anecdotal and photographic research. It has become a fascinating compulsion and the room in which I am building my structure is also filling with photographs, charts, maps, books, tea, coffee, mugs, kettle, radio ... It's gradually turning into a temporary office cubicle, a studio and research base. I hear doors banging somewhere in the building and watch from the window as people leave work. It feels quite lonely. I had hoped to sleep here (there's a shower downstairs), but the organisers have been told they can't allow it".

Sally Madge

Our Natural History

Mixed media collage. Group exhibition, 'Open Art '95', Middlesbrough Art Gallery, Teesside.



Most of the materials used in this work have been found in junk shops, flea markets and on walks in the country. They were collected not necessarily with art in mind, but more for their intrinsic visual qualities or personal associations, or as souvenirs of particular events. This flotsam of the everyday is boxed, packaged and framed using methods reminiscent of shops, museums and galleries – a repository of chance encounters, dreams and nightmares, mounted in the language of other art forms and institutions.

I wanted to explore the tension between the nature of creative exploratory processes, and the effortless fetishisation of packaged products. I have tried to do this by finding unexpected qualities and associations in the ordinary and everyday, and investing them with some of the mythic power of both cultural and institutional symbolism.

Sally Madge

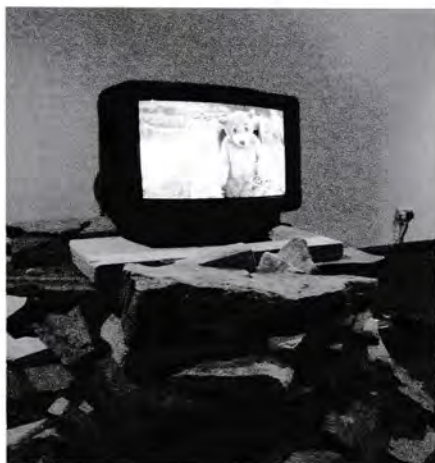
Out of Place

Installation, including the film 'Bear in the Borders'. Group exhibition, 'Borderlands', Gallery North, University of Northumbria, Newcastle upon Tyne, April-May 2015.



This installation presents an alternative monument (or 'un-monument') to Wojtek, a Syrian brown bear and mascot of a World War Two Polish military unit stationed after demobilisation in 1946 at Winfield in the Scottish Borders. Here, rather than the usual heroic effigy and snapshot biography, attention is drawn to the disjunctures, absurdities and inconvenient disorder of history, which often involves the official or unofficial transgression of boundaries and rules. The physical traces left by unruly forces persist in the form of ruins, whose reality of mess, detritus, entropy and decay but also vitality and potential can – if not fetishised, aestheticised or otherwise tidied up – resist simplistic understanding. Conventional public memorials are also problematised, as they tend to freeze a range of conflicting and contradictory experiences into an authoritative, solid, static structure – reinforcing the fiction of a single shared narrative we are all expected to subscribe to. An overall aim, therefore, is to complicate the uniformity and conformity of mediated, ritualised remembrance.

A bulky small-screen video monitor sits on what looks like a pile of rubble or perhaps a waymarker cairn made of broken and partly dressed masonry. These remnants and rejects were sourced from the Hutton Stone Company Ltd – also based at the disused Winfield airstrip, near Berwick upon Tweed – where material from quarries across the region and further afield is processed for use in construction, including for the restoration and repair of historic buildings and sites, and doubtless also new developments simulating traditional architectural vernaculars. The monitor, meanwhile, hosts a short film of a man in a bear suit wandering around the derelict airfield buildings. Carefully composed, lingering shots show the ruins and the pantomime bear peering into doorways and out of windows, stamping on rubbish, and banging metal on wood – engaged in apparently aimless, rather melancholy play or perhaps some kind of hopeless quest, and hinting at a story which is not quite evident other than as an uncanny juxtaposition of incongruous elements.



Wild Syrian bears are now extinct throughout much of their range thanks to persecution and habitat loss, but Wojtek was adopted as a cub in Persia in 1942 by the 22nd Artillery Supply Company of the Polish 11 Corps, who then travelled through Iraq, Syria and Palestine to Egypt. Formally drafted with the rank of Private, complete with paybook and serial number so as to be allowed to ship with the soldiers to Italy, Wojtek is said to have carried artillery shells during the decisive Battle of Monte Cassino in 1944 before passage to the displacement camp in Scotland. The Polish have themselves been no strangers to exile and diaspora: their homeland annexed by Nazi Germany and then given away to the USSR in the postwar settlement; more recently suffering the imposition of neoliberal austerity as a condition of purported liberation and independence.

So, the parallel fates of troops and mascot are overlain with slippage across biological borders, where the bear was afforded (sub-)human credentials, encouraged to learn tricks and attributed human traits for domesticated performance while viewed as dangerous pet, workhorse and cabaret act. The shoddy treatment of the Poles by the authorities at the time, before and since hints at a more sinister analogy in terms of visualisations of human or non-human animals; redolent of the long grisly traditions of exploiting captive bears as well as disposable people. The film's reversed species-crossing invokes humour, pathos and poignancy on a number of levels, as the bear-man haunts a former home (itself busy being reclaimed by the local wildlife and vegetation) – unable to escape, but still trying to make sense of the circumstances that have trapped him there.



(Text by Tom Jennings and Sally Madge; Bear in the Borders filmed by Adam Phillips, with Donald Gunn as the bear; photograph reproduced courtesy of Jadwiga Maria Makowski, showing her mother and uncle with Wojtek in Palestine in 1943.)

Sally Madge

Putting My Foot In It

Open Art '94, Middlesborough Art Gallery, November 1994 – January 1995



Like the surrealists, my aim is to create unexpected qualities and associations in the ordinary and the everyday, to merge dreaming (the unconscious) and the real (conscious). My use of shoes has many personal connotations, as well as their broader references to fashion, fairy tales and femininity. In one piece the child's tap-dancing shoe is both hidden and visible. Lined with soft fleece and clad with feathers it is unwearable and unusable, a *memento mori* perhaps? Cinderella's lost slipper was described in the original story as made of fur (French: "vair"), only later becoming glass (French: "verre"). I preferred the archaic reference as a basis for my pieces, because it hints at both threat and sensuality. I also find that if I look closely at the shoe/object, it appears to outgrow and escape the boundaries of its container – a bit like those uncannily persistent but fleeting memories which one can never quite bring into focus. A second shoe is also in hiding. It is not left on the shelf, as would be a commodity or an ornament. Instead, it lurks on the underside of any such status, resisting containment, almost in limbo. The visual and tactile qualities of the shoes are intended to fascinate and simultaneously to unnerve – an ambivalence echoed in the way they are framed. Finally, this tension and interplay between repulsion and attraction speaks more generally of the pain and pleasure of creative exploratory processes, as well as the effortless fetishisation of packaged products.

Sally Madge

Recipe

Installation, in group exhibition, 'Resist: Protest Art', Crescent Arts, Scarborough, May-June 2003.

Recipe

Take blood from right arm
Take oil from car engine
Mix ingredients
Observe reaction

Take country with large oil reserves
Take global capitalism
Mix ingredients
Observe reaction

Take untenable situation
Maintain in artificial state
Mix ingredients
Observe reaction



Review: '**Blood Curdling**' by Tom Jennings, *Variant* magazine, No. 18, September 2003.

A contemporary art exhibition entitled *Resist: Protest Art* might sound like a surprising proposition in this postmodern age of cynicism, Young British Art and the death of grand narratives. And whether or not the obituaries are premature, for me the title of this show (and the clenched fist on the poster) raised the spectre of the heroic pose either as a safe veneer on liberalism, or concealing the kind of prescriptive moralising beloved of many political groups and parties on the left over the last few decades. However, this might only worry those of us jaded by the manipulation, dishonesty and/or downright betrayal by vanguards, central committees and other 'conscious minorities' – whereas perhaps concepts such as resistance and protest are more innocent for the younger anti-globalisation generations. Plus of course there is always the possibility of reclaiming the symbols and language of rebellion from the dead hands of reformist, bureaucratic, institutional or even corporate sequestration – as in the anarchist movement's persistent attempts to realign Mayday with its revolutionary grass roots origins. In any case, these vague misgivings – in particular, the likelihood of yet another worthy middle-class trendy-leftie political-correctness-fest, somehow left over from the 1980s – proved unfounded here.

Instead, Scarborough's Crescent Arts mounted an interesting and varied collection of mainly small-scale pieces in painting, collage, photography, mixed media, sculpture and installation. The relationship of the work to either protest or resistance was tenuous, but then an exhibition entitled 'Critical reflections on what politics in art might entail these days' probably wouldn't have cut any promotional mustard. Certainly, there was little sense of any politics in the formal qualities of the exhibits (beyond the ambiguities of referentiality and irony, along with texts signalling a problematisation of discourse), which dealt with current real-world concerns such as the right to publicly organise, war, technology, environmentalism and consumerism. For example, while backing away from the wall-based work, viewers risked tripping over Yoke & Zoom's ammunition box (*Not In Our Name*) in the centre of the main space – a more subtle and effective message about the debris and detritus of war (landmines, etc) and its mediated portrayal than any number of celebrity charity galas could achieve. More oblique were Catherine Graham's double electrical socket and plugs joined with a short cable (*F**k The System*) – implying the possibility of short-circuiting the rapidly closing nature of present power (and technological) relations – and George Heslop's *Chocolate Crucifix* hinting at the religious overtones of commodity valorisation and fetishisation. Most potent was Sally Madge's installation, *Recipe*, consisting of small clinical specimen bottles containing blood and oil on a glass shelf, accompanied by short verses in the form of cookery notes.

'Blood and oil' has been a potent metaphor in the context of the invasion of Iraq, as demonstrated well by the *Recipe* text. Public outrage made an intuitive connection between powerful corporate vested interests and the actions of the governments such interests support. And it can hardly be denied that since early last century there have been consistent links between the directions followed by international politics and control over petrochemicals. The slogan 'No blood for oil' captures the widespread sense of revulsion at the cynicism and duplicity of the New World Order, even though it is generally understood that rather more is at stake than a few years-worth of cheap crude. Importantly, the commonplace laments of the complacent classes about the political apathy of ordinary people are exposed as lies by the unprecedented levels of protest against this Iraq 'war' – before it had even started, and irrespective of the media circus grinding into gear and spinning the vacuous demagoguery of freedom and democracy where none is (or will be, in any meaningful sense) apparent.

So, despite their oversimplifications, slogans can be very effective in mobilising people to contemplate and take action; and *Recipe* could be interpreted as effective sloganeering in the form of a small art installation. But whether intended or not, it also mobilised many more layers and levels of meaning and resonance than such a function would suggest. Contributing to and wholeheartedly echoing the exhortation to 'Resist'; more difficult issues were also raised – of complicity, the relationship between subversion and containment, and the problem of tackling symptoms rather than causes. Deeper philosophical questions loomed underneath, of the exploitation, destruction and future of all *resources* (as perceived by our rulers; encapsulated in the concept of 'collateral damage') – including human bodies, consciousnesses and lifeworlds, and the material and biological environment. Most of all, implicit in this work was the challenge of where we locate ourselves in these complex processes – as viewers or makers of art, citizens or consumers in the West, and/or as subjects and objects of political or other discourses. This challenge surely started as humble and local (e.g. 'Where do I, where does my life, my art, *figure* here and now in this situation?'); but on reflection could hardly avoid expanding into the historical, universal and global.

In practice, the blood and oil *resisted* being mixed; they could be juxtaposed, but remained separate. Just as seawater is hidden from the sun underneath oil slicks, this mammalian blood (a phylogenetic analogue of seawater) was sealed in from the atmosphere by exhaust oil rendered thicker and darker with immersed particles picked up from the internal surface of the ailing engine. The veinous blood was itself heavy with waste products and exhausted of oxygen and nutrients after its passage around the tired body's machine. Over its lifetime as an exhibit, the components sedimented into plasma and corpuscles; and the engine oil's components might do something comparable given geological time. And, come to think of it, fossil fuels do represent prehistoric generations of lifeforms fixed in their strata by the natural disasters of planetary biography. Many millennia later they become instrumental in cycles just as arbitrary and destructive, but made to appear similarly inevitable by the rhetoric of neo-liberal economics – which also conveniently offers a revisionist Darwinism in which biological entities compete as capitalists, and only the most evolutionarily profitable survive. If the destiny of the losers is to become the ideological fossil fuel of the future, then blood and oil are both biologically and discursively related, but dislocated in time; and time is running out for both. Extracted from their natural habitats, they enjoyed here the temporary reprieve of suspended artistic animation in an exhibition which was their memorial service.

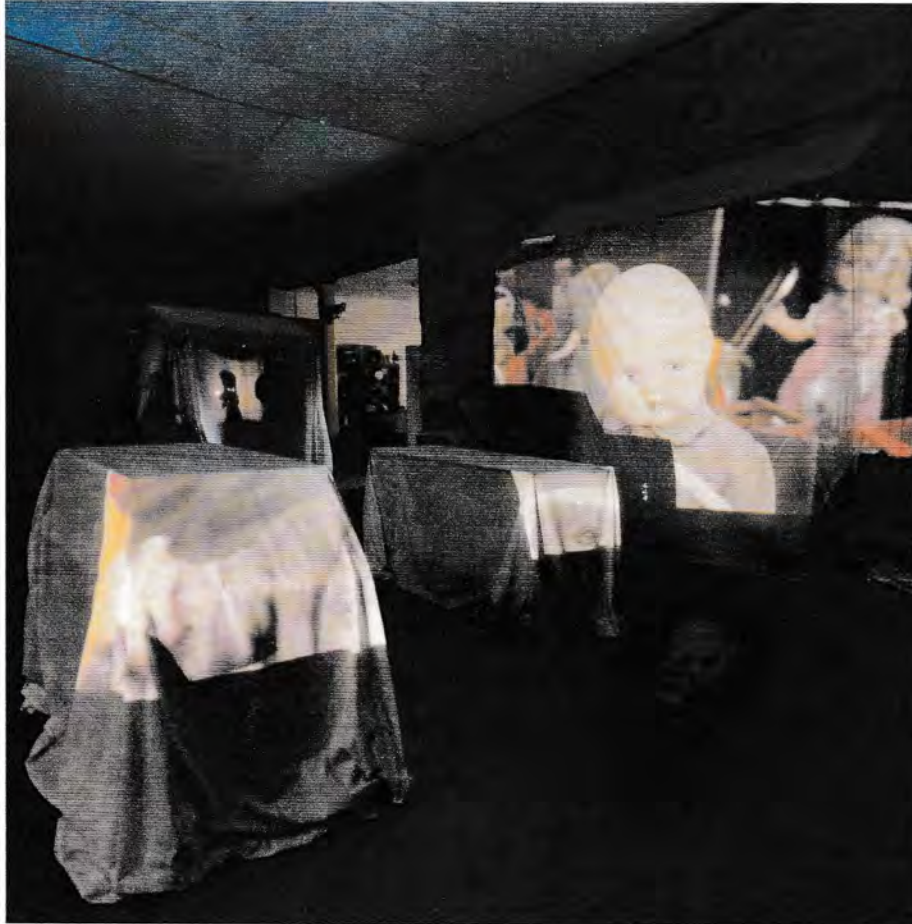
However, this was not just any old blood and oil, but that which had circulated around the body and accoutrements of the artist in the service of her life. To keep us all in the lifestyles to which we have become accustomed, oil and human bodies are likewise basic raw materials of the lifeblood of the global machinery of capitalism. Both must be produced and reproduced for money to flow. We imagine and contrive our integrity and our purposes in life – including our freewill, individuality, expressivity and desire – according to and in between the demands this system makes upon us, in the interstices of its networks of subjugation, seduction and sedation. And the 'good life', for those who have one, has always required the devastation, exploitation and destruction of colonised lands and dominated peoples – now, it seems, more than ever (that's progress). What, then, does it mean to 'resist' one isolated symptom of this disease? Why here and now if not always and everywhere else? By mobilising the artist's own body, daily life, and sense of self in the equation of blood for oil, *Recipe* pondered such questions intimately and personally, asking viewers to do the same.

Left to its own devices blood has a cycle. Blood flows, changes, grows, differentiates, mingles, heals, reproduces, degenerates. Blood organises itself over time. Time may also fossilise the body and its blood into oil – it depends upon how it is *contained* (what is done to it, where, by whom and for what purpose). One of these bottles of blood (in its 'universal container') clotted and developed imperceptibly into other modes of being; with the potential for strange beauty, fascinating and interesting shapes, colours, dynamics. Or, if tainted with anti-clotting agent, it could be maintained in an artificial state. This had a certain minimalist aesthetic quality, one might suppose, but was rather sterile – not only that, but it required the dead density of the oil for the effect to work. For my part, in art as in politics, I prefer the self-determination of the human element, which in both spheres has the additional capacity to not need the oil at all. And, when organised political resistance does finally return to the agenda, if an 'artificial State' is deemed to be oxymoronic as well as moronic – so much the better.

Sally Madge

Replay

Installation, Childhood Memories Museum, Palace Building,
Grand Parade, Tynemouth, North Tyneside, March 1999.



Toys can be powerful reminders of childhood. In the Museum of Childhood Memory, they evoke nostalgia as well as a more direct physical experience of child's play. Their visual qualities hold a fascination for the viewer, but memories are much more elusive. Encased behind glass, the multitude of museum exhibits frustrates, as it magnifies, the desire to play.

The installation treats this as a metaphor for commodity consumption in general. The display cases are shrouded, so that the toys are 'absent', instead replayed as ambivalent and disturbing hints, shadows and projections. These animate the space, especially when combined with ambient sounds of toys and children's voices. The aim is to emphasise a sense of fragmentation, poignancy and loss and to activate more of the presence of childhood.

Sally Madge

Return to Sender

An installation at Berwick Museum, September 2014



This installation forms part of the *Shelter* project (www.thesheltermuseum.net), which centres on a small stone hut built originally as an anonymous, unofficial artwork in 2002 on the northern shore of Lindisfarne. Over the years, the shelter's interior has been embellished in increasingly elaborate and imaginative ways by its builders and large numbers of visitors using found and manufactured items. Many of the results have been salvaged and archived, including after the shelter's destruction in 2009 and last December when a tidal surge partially demolished it, and again following a fire there in August of this year.

The pieces displayed in *Return to Sender* include items created from a beachcombing and litter picking event held on Lindisfarne in July. Linked to Berwick Film Festival's theme of 'Border Crossings', the exhibition's title refers to the fact that much of the flotsam and jetsam washed up on the shores of the island is carried by tidal currents from various places to the north, including Berwick and the Scottish Borders. The installation thus returns some of this material from whence it came, exhibited as transformed items including sculpture, assemblage, video, film, photography, film props, writing and recorded events. Also on display is the costume from the film *Granfer*, shot on location on Lindisfarne for Berwick Film and Media Arts Festival and showing at Coxon's Tower on the town's mediaeval ramparts from 18th to 21st September.

Artworks are on display by collaborating artists as well as artefacts generated from a postal art project, where packages containing beach items were sent to, transformed by, and received back from a range of recipients, including visual artists, children, designers, scientists, writers, musicians and others. An intervention in Berwick Museum's Burrell Collection is also part of the installation.

The gathering of materials used in making the work on show could represent a kind of lowbrow archaeological excavation of objects which might normally be considered merely the detritus of consumer society, for example, such that many would not expect it to form the basis of either a museum display or media for artistic manipulation. Likewise, the richness and variety of the shelter's décor resulted from types of activity which even many of those responsible may not necessarily have interpreted as creative, let alone as 'art'. *Return to Sender* and the *Shelter* project therefore raise many questions, such as: What is judged to be of 'value' or to have 'worth'? Who is deemed capable of engaging in transformative practices and pronouncing on the outcomes? Which enterprises enter the public realm, official discourses and the historical record as significant, important and meaningful events? Finally, who benefits or profits, and how, from such endeavours?

Sally Madge

Scatter

Ensemble of cushions covered with fabric rescued from beach detritus around the UK (2017-2020)



I am a collector. Part of my collection consists of broken, lost or abandoned items which I like to 'rescue' or revitalise by combining them to create something new. For this work I have gleaned fragments of cloth found washed up on beaches around the country and stitched them together to create abstract and colourful patchworks. Mystery surrounds each piece. Where has it come from? If clothing, who wore it and how did it find its way to a particular destination? For how long and how far has it travelled? Is it here as a result of misfortune or is there a more mundane story associated with its passage? Multiple possibilities are implicit in each sea-worn remnant, and I have refashioned this fabric of mixed quality and uncertain provenance to make cushions which might provide comfort and rest after a long journey ... [They] aren't quite cushions, but reference bits of the body ... There's a sort of lovingness about it, trying to recreate something positive out of something destructive.

Sally Madge

S.C.U.M.

Performance. Collaboration with Carole Luby, at INX: Istanbul-Newcastle Exchange, 'Wunderbar Festival', Star and Shadow Cinema, Newcastle upon Tyne, November 2009.



Four decades after Valerie Solanas shot Andy Warhol, we revisit the corrosive impact of sexism, re-igniting the passion embedded in Solanas' SCUM Manifesto (Society for Cutting Up Men).



Sally Madge

Shelter

Presentation in conjunction with a discussion of the Northern Peripheries Network research project 'Reframing the North', at Baltic 39, High Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, 4th February 2014.



In the autumn of 2002, I constructed a small drystone hut on the rocky northern shore of Lindisfarne, a tidal island off the Northumbrian coast, a.k.a. Holy Island, famous (amongst other things) for its gospels, St Cuthbert, Lindisfarne Mead, and Roman Polanski's 1966 black and white movie *Cul de Sac*. The hut survived eight years of winter storms, spring tides and worried officialdom and gained status among locals and visitors as a public artwork, site specific installation, museum and/or space for reverie, play, pilgrimage, parties, sleeping, having sex, and bird-watching. Over time the interior filled with a bricolage of flotsam, found objects, handmade artefacts and personal mementos, including comments in a book left there. Over the years, much of this ephemera has been collected, archived and some of it exhibited.

Originally an anonymous, playful, unofficial artwork, the hut gradually became a collaborative venture with those taking part assuming an integral role in its development. The boundaries between artist/maker and visitor/spectator became not only blurred but interchangeable. I regularly tidied, edited and rearranged the contents – and so did others (often not to my liking!). The hut became a locus for an ongoing symbolic engagement between strangers (sometimes humorous, frequently poignant, occasionally unpleasant), and I found myself disoriented as well as intrigued by the fact that ownership and provenance had become such a moveable feast.

In the autumn of 2010, I was surprised and upset to find the hut had been knocked down by person or persons unknown. I rescued some of the contents, made safe remaining walls, piled up the roof timbers nearby, and left the site open for further intervention. Several months elapsed and nothing happened so I decided to go public and enlist the help of a professional dry stone waller, who over the course of 2011 rebuilt the hut with the help of volunteers as a much safer and stronger structure. After the reconstruction/resurrection, I was approached by officials from Natural England, who manage the nature reserve and who registered concern about the illegality of the construction and its safety. Following a series of meetings with the warden and a structural engineer, a compromise was reached and the hut can now remain in place on the basis that the roof is rendered safe, the site is kept tidy and it is designated an artwork. Ironically, perhaps, the new improved hut was recently again destroyed by the tidal surge in December 2013 and is currently a picturesque ruin. Plans are underway to again rebuild.

Thinking about the project's life to date, its 'hutstory' and 'architexture', the informal, spontaneous and unmediated exchanges of ideas and practices have made this a unique venture which I am aiming to extend as a more considered, interdisciplinary collaboration. From a 2011 review of *Shelter* by Tom Jennings, speaking of the flow of activity and exchange in and around the hut:

"A lowbrow archaeology of the island, natural and effluent, sacred and profane, thus coalesced in magical juxtaposition – which, crucially, was unconditionally available for anyone to shape. And authorial integrity did comprehensively erode, since so many partook of equal opportunities to reconfigure the topography. Furthermore, twentieth century conceits posit the artist imagining a 'concept' and pronouncing it 'art' - but here there was no originary revelation, just habitual creation. Only subsequent intrusion into public discourse prompts questions of artistic privilege; otherwise, perhaps, we have a glorified sandcastle. Even then, the history of ordinary folk's workaday passage and holiday enjoyment associated with beaches cross-fertilises with traditions of workers' self-build housing, rural craftiness, and the flouting of restrictions on the use of space. So, action against enclosures of the commons throughout the centuries, not to mention ramblers' campaigns for access and contemporary guerilla and graffiti art, also come to mind. The performative elements of *Shelter* therefore seem key, along with its communal ethos and the kinds and sources of value felt and ascribed".

So, with great uncertainty and concern about the potential erosion and abandonment of this ethos and spirit of unofficial, subversive activity, communality and playfulness, I have embarked on a collaborative venture which now includes artists, academics, educationalists, institutions, fund raising, and project coordination. Despite this shift in gear and the danger of the fun/subversive element bleeding away, our plans allow for the hut to remain untampered with, apart from the occasional intervention, and there are certain art precedents which offer the potential to extend the narrative. To quote Tom Jennings again: "From Dada, surrealism, situationism and Fluxus onwards, radical artists honour sensuality's subversive potential, emphasising mundane human origins in children's play, unconscious and bodily experience, and collective resistance to oppression."



To this end, in collaboration with Ben Ponton in his capacity as the driving force behind experimental music collective :zoviet*france: and Adam Phillips, artistic director of CIRCA Projects and film maker, we have embarked on developing an active programme of events in and around the hut as a constantly evolving site. Central to our plan is the development of an online and travelling alternative 'museum', this builds on the already existing archive of collected ephemera – a re-imagined museum which gathers momentum and embraces context as it goes, a performative site, a discursive space – engendering dialogue and action as a means to generate further material for the collection. In one sense this represents a return to the pre-disciplinary *wunderkammer*, with its unorthodox taxonomies and unlikely juxtapositions allowing for doubt, contradiction, irony conflict and constant revision.

One aspect of the development of this idea already in place is a collaboration with Berwick Visual arts and Film Festival, where a mass litter-pick (or beach-combing) event will be organised on the island (as much of the rubbish washed up on the shores comes via tidal currents from Tweedmouth and Berwick). The aim is to return the collected material to Berwick (possibly by boat) repurposed and reclassified as archaeological artefacts for a film/sound documentation in Coxon's Tower (a medieval gun platform on Berwick's eastern ramparts), to link with the festival theme of 'Border Crossings'. There will also be a museological intervention either in Berwick Museum or the Gymnasium Gallery.

Using the hut as a site for 'social networking' and as part of the research process towards gathering material for the museum, I am developing contacts with various individuals who have visited the hut and left their details via business cards or written comments. The first connection made in 2010 using this process was with the drystone waller Donald Gunn who responded with enthusiasm and generosity to rebuild the hut and now has a pivotal role in the existence of the project. Other contacts include a border piper who we recently visited and filmed, and who is currently composing songs for an independent Scotland; also, an Icelandic blacksmith and a German journalist who I have yet to contact!

It is proposed to carry on the tradition of informal group gatherings at the *Shelter* site. There have been several attempts to screen films, with limited success due to recalcitrant portable generators or mistimed incoming tides. Without losing the spirit of informality, practitioners including artists, musicians, writers and scientists have been contacted to use the site to make work or to host events. The first event will be followed by a performance by Sandra Johnston and Lee Hassall at Baltic 39 on Sunday 23rd March, and Charlie Danby and Rob Smith will be presenting work at a later date. As a grand finale to the (funded) project, :zoviet*france: will construct temporary acoustic sculptures on site: an aeolian harp which uses the wind to make sound, and a wave organ which interacts with tidal movement through a series of pipes.

slippery

sally madge

blisses



The city is often described through analogy with the body: the heart, soul, guts of an urban space. Waygood is situated in the heart of the city in a space which once functioned as the workplace of a sizeable labour force. Now the building stands largely silent and empty. While close to the Big Market and its vibrant night life, the site remains hidden and enclosed, both part of and separate from city centre street activity.

Romantic love also appears detached from mainstream culture - a special, intimate space separate from community. Fantasy and desire are felt to exist inside our isolated selves. Sexual interaction is somehow marginal to economic and political business - an influence to be suppressed part of our 'private' lives. Likewise, cultural expressions of romance and sex easily end up in low status genres such as Mills & Boon novels or pornography. Social groups honour sexual love, but also monitor and police its worrisome unruliness and subversive potential.

Drawing on these connections Sally Madge's installation blurs boundaries between the bodily, social and historical, and weaves a narrative through the physical and emotional structure of the space. In romancing the heart of the city the work hints at the ways a sense of place, and our positions in it, are constructed through processes originating outside its boundaries in other times, spaces and experiences.

Video performance:	Natalie Lake and Rowan Moorhouse
Video editing:	Sue Thompson
Music:	Tom Jennings
Technical support:	Paul Reid and Edwin Fairley

Supported by Newcastle City Council and Northern Arts

Waygood Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, July-August 1996

Sally Madge

Still Life



Installation for The Boat multimedia unit in the Heritage Gallery, the Old Low Light community cultural and heritage centre, North Shields Fish Quay, October 2016-January 2017.

Sally Madge presents touching and disturbing assemblages highlighting the plight of sea birds in our coastal waters

Sally Madge is an artist who defies categorisation. Her work encompasses performance, film, photography, sculpture, drawing and printmaking. She is interested in mixing the ordinary and the extraordinary, the sublime and the abject, using strategies and techniques which merge conscious and unconscious processes in creating unexpected qualities and associations from everyday actions, objects and places.

The work on show weaves various narratives around the plight of seabirds* and their endeavours to adjust to changes in the physical environment caused by human activity and the resulting devastating global processes. Humour, pathos and a touch of surrealism are combined in visual scenarios using a range of objects, materials and media, including preserved sea birds, plastic beach debris, children's action figures and scale models, as well as performance on film. Viewers are invited to develop the story lines implicit in the work.

* For example, seabirds face "a litany of threats: overfishing, drowning in fishing lines and nets, plastic pollution, invasive species like rats in nesting areas, oil and gas development and toxic pollution moving up the food chain. And, as if these weren't enough, climate change and ocean acidification threaten to flood nesting sites and disrupt food sources. ... Conservationists have long known that many seabird populations are in decline, but [according to research] seabird abundance has dropped 69.7% in just 60 years, representing the deaths of some 230 million birds" (from Jeremy Hance, 'After 60 million years of extreme living, seabirds are crashing', *The Guardian*, 22nd September 2015).

The exhibition is made in collaboration with Sonny Addison, Leon Brown, Samuel Farmer, Catherine Hardwick, Michelle Hirschhorn, Billy Hooper, Nancy Hooper, Jack Lithgow, Margaret Livingstone, Stephen Livingstone, Dan Turner, and Daniel Wallder; "On The Gut" performance and video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBWXE17KGTc&feature=emb_logo

Sally Madge

Still Life: Draw to Perform

Performance. Performance Space, Hackney Wick, London, November 2013.

Exploring the question of What is Drawing, I show how my practice has been informed and inspired by my mother's nature notebooks from the 1930s. Through the act of mixing pigment and making marks, I appropriate text from the books and reconfigure my mother's notes as graphic and visceral memory traces.



Sally Madge

Stuff of Dreams

A performance lecture

In the 'Mapping the Return' event, part of 'Returning to the Philosophers' Table',
Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle upon Tyne, September 2013



Blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, the artist recounts her explorations through the sites and spaces of public and private institutions – the library, the museum, the kitchen the studio. The artist as adventurer and collector attempts to construct a personal taxonomy from these experiences, choreographing her encounters and engagements with people, events, materials and artefacts. Over the course of her 'return to the philosophers' table' she utilises her personal collection of objects, anecdotes, jokes and theoretical citations to investigate ways in which she might develop an autoethnographic position within the flow of these events.

This is a surreal assemblage of humour and critique which incorporates the messy business of individual subjectivity into the research process and outcome, where objects act as 'verbal props' and represent nexus points for particular dialogues and concerns that derive from conversations and actions by and between people. Hopefully too this might generate a reassessment of the provenance and display of museum objects, propelling them beyond their fixed and materially-bound context and questioning assumptions about the nature of collections and conservation.

Sally Madge

Touch Wood

Site-specific interactive installation. Group show, 'Waygood Wood',
Castle Keep, Newcastle upon Tyne, May 2008.



This piece questions the nature of enchantment. Immediate associations with trees and enchantment are those of childhood play, the sinister excitement of fairytale forests to get lost in, magic, flights of fancy and rites of passage. In folklore, religion and ecology, trees may symbolise refuge, natural plenitude, and sustaining life. Referencing these themes, voices on the soundtrack recount individual experiences of enchantment, quote scientific facts and read stories and rhymes about trees.

These trees are grouped in the darkened ground floor of the castle keep, which over time has served as chapel, confessional, garrison, prison, workshop and museum. Cultural narratives abound here, prompting the imagination as the shadowy forms of a captive arboretum, a mobile copse, a ghostly plantation are activated by torches given to viewers as they enter. Whispering voices echo through the space like leaves rustling in the wind; occasional words can be discerned but no coherent meanings made.

Amid the disquiet, fortified stonework promises protection from physical threat while superstition calms fears of the supernatural with collective reassurance. Perhaps enchantment lies somewhere in the intersections among so many dimensions of personal resonance, in places where the emotional force of an experience can't be explained away.

Sally Madge

Transitional Goods

Site-specific installation, group exhibition, 'Shop', Blue Cowboys,
Newcastle upon Tyne, September 1996.

Review: 'The Child as Parent to the Art'

"What might be searched for is a patchwork which combines the specifics of time, place, event, gender, race, class, age and sexual orientation across comparative instances of complex social identity" (Caryn Faure Walker [1]).

Such adventurous strategies and processes are increasingly adopted by contemporary British women artists, especially in installation, performance and multi-media. In her installations, for example, Sally Madge is developing a distinctive visual language – a cognitive and emotional projection of experience into embodied sites and spaces. Installations are metaphorical bodies, at the intersection of the social construction of identity within biography, culture and politics. The complex ambivalences of life are rendered in three dimensions surrounding the viewer, whose emotional and aesthetic responses can resonate with and/or oppose, those of the artist.

From early work in sculpture, painting and ceramics, the problematic of containment – physical and psychological – was always central to Sally Madge's art. The leap to installation then exploded tendencies towards interior reflection on universal experience and excavating unconscious conflict; so that the containment of form and content in traditional Fine Art becomes the historical specificity of the site [2]. Now, traces of personal experiences are intuitively blended with its institutional disciplining, etched into and contained by the fabric of buildings. Highly personal and idiosyncratic references, found objects, materials and media catalyse the concoction of so many different levels of connotation – surely unstable; but also satisfying, achieving a precarious balance of resonances in the viewer.

In *Transitional Goods*, the artist inflects the parent-child theme – through a typically lateral manoeuvre – emphasising the child *within* the adult, taken for granted as a central element of artistic expression, and of identity. An analogy is offered between the strange fascination exercised by consumer durables, often far exceeding any utilitarian or intrinsic worth, and the magical qualities children impute to their special toys. This is compared to adults collecting toys (or art), and to fetishism, nostalgia and kitsch.

By gathering hundreds of soft toys from car boot sales, charity shops and jumble sales, the economic relations of mass-produced commodities are questioned using alternative, undervalued forms of exchange (echoing their sweatshop production). Site-specificity here arises from filling an ex-Oxfam shop with an artist-curated group show about shopping, in a city centre whose image and planning is obsessed with consumerism. This ironic over-determination is compounded by the value of the toys to their owners. Bought as gifts, passed on second- and third-hand, a considerable weight of emotional meaning accrues just as their monetary value plummets. Young children feel very close to these transitional objects, playing with fantasies of love, nurturance, security, control, punishment and cruelty.

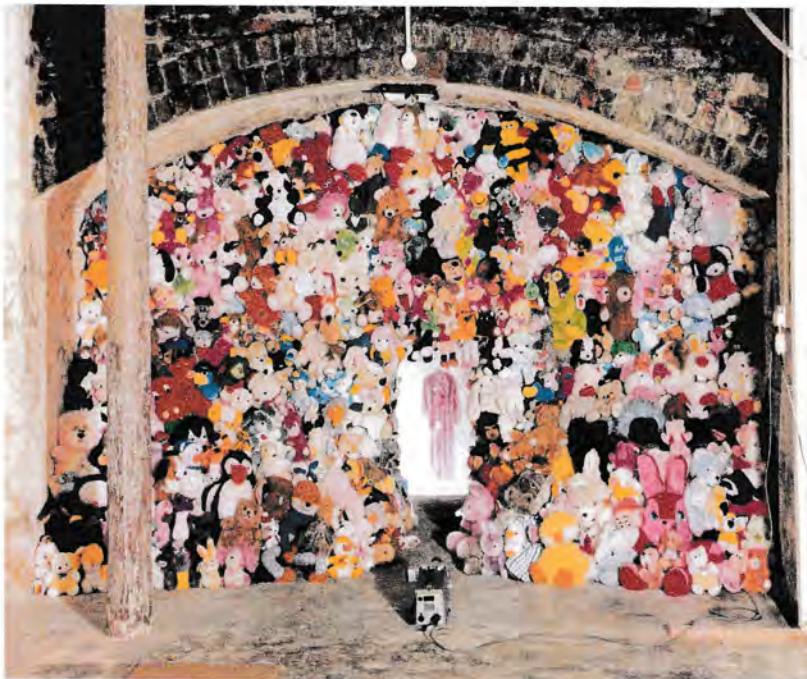
"In playing the child externalises and works out the differing trends of her internal, psychic life ... Children gather objects from the world and use these in their fantasies, playing out fragmented experiences which ... come *under their control* ... A child can resolve the conflicts of powerlessness within the family, and learn how to become a social being" (Jo Spence & Rosy Martin [3]).

Transitional objects oscillate between being felt as independent, external beings, or split-off parts of the self, imagined into them via introjection and the fantasy role-playing of parents' and siblings' behaviour. The installation explicitly links these receptacles for controlled projection with adult play and creativity – a photograph has the mature artist, dressed in a childlike pink rabbit suit, in bed with her toys. The richness of associations they evoke contrasts with the power of consumer objects, where an instant gratification of buying supplants the difficult intimacy of social relations. After all, if anyone damaged these 'transitional goods', the artist wasn't responsible. Whereas actual toys people keep as souvenirs from their own childhoods are often incredibly poignant – worn out, bald, battered, ripped apart – externalised scars of forgotten passion and ambivalence.

The toys resonate with childish longings for satisfaction and security, simultaneously recalling the infantile terror and anger at the failure of the environment and its carers. To collect them might also render such conflicts safe, tamed by the energy of obsession and selectivity – as with the biographical falsifications of family photo albums. However, the installation's framing and juxtaposition complicate the pleasures of contemplation with sorrowful, painful, abject and grotesque overtones. Apart from simple sentimental reactions, some viewers felt an urge to blend into the mass of toys (some children acted on this!); others reported disquiet, repulsion or disgust. Scrambled together rather than packaged and classified, these soft toys look out balefully, accusingly. From the self-portrait, the artist watches them spill forth, draining the husk of an adult pink rabbit projected into the installation's womb. They squeeze under a bare brick basement archway, leading to associations with the charnel house, mausoleum, death and horror. This structure implicates deeper layers of infantile fantasies: the terror of dissolution, anger and envy of the mother's imagined powers of nourishment and withholding, love and hate.

Such fantasies mingle later with the pleasure and pain of sex, parenthood, children's independence, ageing and death. In 'Transitional Goods' the intensity of a child's pain and yearning lives on in a middle-aged mother whose children have grown up and left home – expressed in the distance between the untidy mob of toys and the formally-staged, neatly mounted image of the artist. With hands folded over her abdomen, she reclines serenely among her babies/transitional objects/art medium.

Most interestingly, the viewer is stranded in this gap. One side of the installation is always out of sight, while the artist and the toys gaze in unison at the viewer. So, if mothers, and artists, sometimes have manic fantasies of omnipotence; this too echoes the planning, manipulation and surveillance of contemporary urban space – especially in shopping centres, where viewers as consumers are caught in the gap between false promises of fulfilment and their own partly infantile needs and fantasies. But in the installation, viewers can vary perspective, sensing the tensions in the spectacle. Displaying the vulnerability of the child-within, constructing her artwork from 'serious play', Sally Madge offers pathways through the paradoxes.



Notes

1. Caryn Faure Walker, *Ecstasy, Ecstasy, Ecstasy, She Said: Women's Art in Britain, a Partial View*, Cornerhouse, Manchester, 1994, p.29.
2. Sally Madge's site-specific installations include: *Listen With Mother* (1991); *Are You Sitting Comfortably?* (1992); *No Trace Without Resistance* (1992); *Hot House Cold Storage* (1994); *Heart of the City* (1995), *Psycho Soma* (1996), and *Slippery Blisses* (1996).
3. Jo Spence and Rosy Martin, 'Phototherapy', in: Jo Spence, *Cultural Sniping: the Art of Transgression*, Routledge, 1995, p.166.

[edited version of essay by Tom Jennings, accepted for publication in *MAKE: The Magazine of Women's Art*, April 1997 (unpublished)]

Underdog

Sally Madge and Sam Hooper

Video installation and sound performance, in group exhibition, 'node 5+5', Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, October 1999.



The Guardian, 15th October 1999

Exhibitions

Node (5+5)

Is there anything in contemporary cinema as astonishing as the moment a razorblade slices through an eyeball in the 1929 classic *Un Chien Andalou*? Sally Madge and Sam Hooper have created a tribute to Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali's film, in the form of a video installation called *Underdog*. It's one of five collaborations in this gallery for VANE 99. Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland (0191-514-1235) until November 20th.

Jonathan Jones

The Guardian, 17th November 1999

Exhibitions

Node 5+5

Last chance to see an exhibition that brings together local artists with the likes of Japanese installationist Tomoko Takahashi. The star of the show has to be Sally Madge and Sam Hooper's version of Luis Bunuel's and Salvador Dali's film *Un Chien Andalou*, admirable if only for its brazen cheek in remaking one of the least dated and most enduring films of all time. Dali would have approved of their cojones. Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Fawcett St. Sunderland (0191-514-1235) until November 20.

Jonathan Jones

Inspired by *Un Chien Andalou*, Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali's 1929 surrealist film, *Underdog* draws on its scenarios, iconography and treatment of time and space, and shares its aims of resisting any "idea or image which might lend itself to rational explanation". Visuals and soundtrack weave together abject, kitsch, recycled and found material, exploring the potential of dreams, fantasies and the unconscious via a range of cultural genres and styles.

This is a site-specific installation with a difference. The 'site' is a key work of twentieth century art rather than a physical location. The video is effectively a series of installations on screen. In the gallery it was shown projected. Other cubicles exhibited its 'sets', and music and literature used and referenced, with *Un Chien Andalou* on TV – compounding the art's framing (a second- or third-order installation?).

Home video and dolls house aesthetics, blending with ambient rhythms and sonic transitions, give changes in mood and atmosphere which may be simultaneously perplexing, seductive, repellent and fascinating. Static *mise en scenes* are enlivened by animation and action, mingling with sequences of animals, humans and Super-8 footage. Nevertheless, the most comic and disturbing images are those involving the dolls rather than, say, the nudity and sexual foreplay. The manifest content – or anti-narrative – as in *Un Chien Andalou*, is romance. Here, the central pair (matador/flamenco dancer) never function explicitly as lovers. Power is reversed, female agency foregrounded – masculinity and the gaze no longer coalesce positioning woman as object. *Underdog* may transcend Bunuel and Dali in several respects – travelling far beyond their adolescent macho, but also in the complex layering of associations evoked. The dolls, and the recurring imagery of cats as predator/beastly/male and/or as pussy/graceful/female, along with mice as generic underdogs, satisfyingly disarm the pomposity of human, and artistic, pretension.

Tom Jennings

Sally Madge

***Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the
Circumference of a Circle***

Performance, in 'Platform Northeast', Star and Shadow Cinema,
Newcastle upon Tyne, December 2010

Part of a continuing exploration of performative mark making. The shedding of surface layers traces my movement through the space.



"All paths lead nowhere so it's important to choose a path that has heart." Carlos Castaneda



Sally Madge: artist's statement, 2019

Extracts from 'Paula Blair talking with Sally Madge', *Audiovisual Cultures* podcast, episode 40.

'Chance encounters': As I work in my studio, things get cleared aside, dropped, piled up, lost and forgotten, sometimes later to be rediscovered and reused. Spillages, stains, accidents occur, by-products of purposeful action, the mess left during the process of creating something of greater significance. There are, however, definite possibilities inherent in these abject remains. Out of the corner of my eye, I notice an interesting juxtaposition of lines, stain, and torn-apart image, and once these are conjoined there's a suggestion of something other, something more. Edges become points of departure, the place where action happens, boundaries are blurred and borders crossed. It's the point where I have to distil, refine and formalize all this wonderful potent chaos, which is challenging. In a conversation with the artist-collagist John Stezaker, the writer and curator David Lillington states that "collage is a realm of play, a retreat to the maternal gaze and protected reverie, and working within the limits of already available components can be related to the childlike and the collagist's attachment to lost innocence". This resonates for me with regard to my own practice. My constant quest is to find a key which turns that playfulness into something more formulated whilst retaining the freedom and open-endedness of the process itself.

In 2010 I made work in an artist friend's small domestic gallery. It was called *Making a Mess and Clearing Up*. Over seven hours, I drew blindfolded on the pristine white walls, feeling my way around the room and mapping my journey through the space, making marks with crumbling charcoal. Following the drawing process, I removed the blindfold, washed down the walls, swept the floor, and repainted the space. Throughout the performance, viewers watched through the windows or entered the space. By the end of the day, no apparent trace of my presence was left; the space restored to its original state with all the stages of mark making sealed into the fabric of the building preserved behind a screen of white. I'd like to think that the minimal outcome privileged my expressive process by refusing a final fetishized art object.

If I think what drives my practice and where my ideas come from, partly I think of a rather solitary childhood where my parents were largely absent and the age gap between me and my siblings was big enough for me often to feel like an only child. We moved a lot, so it was hard to put down roots or make lasting friendships, but throughout my childhood we always lived in the country and often near the sea. So I roamed freely in the wide open spaces and developed an intimate and enduring relationship with the surrounding landscape, building dens, weaving fantasies, climbing trees, wandering the shoreline, collecting and hoarding. I think that echoes of this rich childhood experience along with the loss and the longing to recapture it reverberate throughout my practice. I suppose most artists go back to their childhood as a source for their work. I enjoyed and was told I was good at art at school, so on leaving I followed a conventional art training, which prompted my first encounters with city environments: an art foundation course in Oxford, a diploma in ceramics in London, a BA and MA in Fine Art here in Newcastle. Having cut my urban teeth in Oxford, with many adventures and mishaps, I moved on to London and it was the Swinging Sixties and a mind-blowing culture shock for a country girl.

This is an excerpt from a text I wrote for an artist friend's book: "It's September 1966, Shepherd's Bush, London, a fine day. I leave the flat in Sinclair Road feeling good in my new Anello and Davide black Spanish shoes and Mary Quant miniskirt, red. I spent half this term's grant on them, so extra shifts at the Italian restaurant are needed to fill the financial void. Black and red, and I feel good. I'm on my way to pick up Sebastian and Georgia, the artists Mark Boyle and Joan Hills' kids: the Boyle family, famous for their earth studies and liquid light shows. I look after the kids on a regular basis. It's Ivor Davies who introduced me, a friend and key player in the Destruction in Art Symposium, DIAS, Gustav Metzger's assembly of international artists and activists using destruction *in* rather than *of* art as a strategy to critique

conventional aesthetic forms and to promote direct engagement in culture as a political force for change. I'd met Ivor earlier in the year when I assisted with one of the auto-destructive events he staged in Edinburgh as part of DIAS. Now, as I look back, the only memory I have of this is a faded newspaper article and photograph where along with a friend I assist Ivor with his protective headgear – an old fire guard – in preparation for his detonations. It's following this that he comes to stay in my flat in Shepherd's Bush and sets to work on developing a destructible pyrophonic organ for his next event. I'm not really aware of the nature of his research and the materials he's using, but one afternoon on returning from a visit to a friend I find several fire engines outside the flat. On entering, I'm confronted by a damp and charred bedroom and several police who are in the process of confiscating Ivor's chemicals, some of which have unexpectedly ignited and caused the fire. When things have calmed down and I've had a chance to take stock of the extent of the damage, I discover on checking my wardrobe that a neat round hole has been blown through the toe of one of my precious Anello and Davide shoes. No one can quite work out how it happened, such a precise puncture, so strategically placed – a conundrum which has over the years been a subject of much conjecture on my part. At some level, this shoe, in the process whereby it has reached its altered state, stands as a metaphor and signifier of my lowly status as a footsoldier in the battle against the established order; here's a war wound, and a battle scar. There were many more during my life as an art student in London. However, all this has added grist to the mill of my later practice."

If there is rhyme or reason to the art I produce, it might be located within the ordinary, unregarded stuff of everyday life and the extraordinary possibilities which lie within and beyond its boundaries. Things I make often grow out of a particular personal memory, encounter, place or event from which I make connections with broader social and political issues and try to create visual narratives which explore the deeper and more complex aspects of everyday experience. There are many factors guiding my methods and output. Sometimes I use performance as a means to an art end; other times, installation services the idea, a film, photographs, text, a collection of objects or a combination of all these – a sort of expanded collage, if you like, where scraps on the tabletop and the floor develop into an environmental bricolage. It often depends on the context and specificities of the site; whether it's a gallery, open landscape, a library, or an empty office block. Also, it makes a difference to the work as to whether I've been commissioned or if I'm just putting it out there. In the main, I think it's fairly safe to say that my formal and aesthetic concerns are broadly rooted in a consideration of place and time.

When I look back there are certain themes which run through and connect different projects. Drawing on a rich tradition of feminist practice, I often use domesticity as my *modus operandi*. In 2009, I was commissioned to make an interactive work for *The Dream of Fluxus*, an exhibition of Fluxus items from an extensive private collection shown at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead. I chose to do a performance which I called *Avant Guard* (spelled GUARD), harking back to my exalted London connections and my subordinate role amongst the art cognoscenti. I borrowed a cleaner's trolley and worked my way around the gallery dusting and sweeping and cleaning showcases, arranging dusters and cleaning materials carefully around the space and generally keeping an eye on the exhibits as well as inviting visitors to join me in my endeavours. My aim was to draw attention to some of the ironies thrown up by the official art world's recognition of Fluxus: its original manifestos aimed for a 'living art', an 'anti-art', valuing the creativity of ordinary everyday activities rather than unique artifacts made by special individuals. But, here, these revolutionary efforts were fossilized in museum showcases. So, I turned the gallery into a sort of theatre where I wove in various themes for my actions as a 'flux worker': the role of women, the institutional appropriation of countercultural artistic endeavours, and the codes and conventions which dictate gallery behaviour.

Continuing with the performative and the domestic, as part of a group exhibition 'Returning to the Philosophers' Table' at the Literary and Philosophical Society library in Newcastle in 2013, I collected a lot of dust. In an excerpt from my diary, I described my

dust-gathering experience: "Swept gallery walkway for an hour, sometimes on hands and knees but mainly squatting so as not to get splinters. Wore face mask, apron, and rubber gloves, got very hot and dusty. Interesting to think I've actually ingested some of this ancient and erudite dust. It's become part of the fabric of my being, if only temporarily. It does, however, make me feel quite sick and I can feel a headache coming on. As I sweep, I note that the Greek Mythology and the Biblical sections are dustier than others, there's a damp stain on the floor near Social Sciences, Ethics gets a lot of sun, and there are large gaps in the floorboards along the Spanish, French and German Literature sections. I'm developing quite an affection for dust balls and also note there are some tiny book shreds in my dustpan. Some dust which comes from under a loose floorboard probably dates back to the 1800s." Following this, I produce small packages of literary and philosophical dust as artists' multiples and sell them for £1.99 a packet.

Dust again! At 'Landscapes', Galata International Performance Festival, Istanbul, 2008, and 'Landscapes', Baltic 39, Newcastle, 2015, I used a sticky lint clothes-roller to lift the dust and debris off multiple surfaces: people, animals, plants, furniture, buildings. Each encounter required an active engagement with the subject or object, a conversation, a manoeuvre. The most daunting encounter: a large feral dog sunning itself on an Istanbul street. I approached it with great caution and managed to stroke it with my lint roller without injury. I displayed the peel-off sheets with their intricate surface patterns as drawings, landscapes, and portraits. I was intrigued by the way that marks emerged as traces of encounters. Time and place were registered when those vestiges of events were deposited on receptive surfaces – where every presence, in order to know itself as present, bore the trace of an absence which defined it. Shades of Freud's mystic writing pad ... In a solo show at the Customs House Gallery in South Shields in 2015, I constructed a metal dome reminiscent of a Mario Mertz igloo – although, in place of stone, glass and neon, I used lint drawings as cladding for the structure. Children who visited the gallery used it as a den.

There are other projects where identity politics have played a central role in the work, notably in the performance collaborations with my late friend and artist Carole Luby – jam making; using bread as a sculptural medium and tool for getting our message across; and revisiting Valerie Solanas's SCUM manifesto – but at this point I'd like to follow the 'den' trajectory; in my case, makeshift shelters. In 2012, as part of a group show, 'New Curators North East', organized by the London-based Departure Foundation, I created a studio-cum-workspace out of found materials in a partially empty office block in an industrial park in Sunderland. In one sense this was an architectural construction, a temporary dwelling space within a bleak empty office space, with connotations of squatting, the type of *ad hoc* construction found in marginal urban spaces to accommodate the homeless and disenfranchised; in another sense an installation referencing the formal elements of sculpture, and viewers and artwork and participatory installation – and, further, a performative piece where the work started and continued with the process of selection, collection, placement, arrangement, use, and dialogue. An excerpt from my diary at the time: "As I map the area, cruise the car parks, look through skips, and encounter passersby, as well as building materials I gather lots of anecdotal and photographic research. It's become a fascinating compulsion. I leave home every morning and arrive as if at the office. The room in which I'm building my studio structure is also filling up with photographs, charts, maps, books, tea, coffee mugs, kettle, radio, tools. It's gradually turning into a temporary office cubicle, a studio, and a research base. I hear doors banging somewhere in the building and watch from the windows people leaving work. It feels quite lonely. I had hoped to sleep here, there's a shower downstairs, but the organizers have been told they can't allow it."

Another temporary but enduring structure which grew from playful and informal beginnings was a small stone and driftwood shelter I built on the north shore of the island of Lindisfarne, off the Northumbrian coast. This anonymous construction lasted, with many adventures, from 2002 till 2016 when it was finally destroyed by fire. During its life, it played host to many individuals who discovered it whilst walking the island or through word-of-mouth and who left their mark inside it in the form of written testimonies, drawings, paintings, objects

gleaned from the beach, photographs, and keepsakes. Birds nested in its roof and small mammals inhabited its interior, a shrew and a stoat amongst others. After some tussles with officialdom over its illicit construction and lack of planning permission, I won through and gained the approval of the powers-that-be to retain it as an artwork. On the strength of an Arts Council grant I was able to shift it into a different gear without compromising its *ad hoc* autonomous ethos. To that end, I sought out individuals who over the years had left their contact details in the shelter – amongst others, a professional drystone waller who helped rebuild the structure to render it more secure, a musician from the Scottish Borders who played his pipes for an evening gathering where Polanski's *Cul de Sac* (which had been filmed on the island) was screened. Through contact with a local school, I discovered that they'd used the shelter as a stimulus for creative writing, inviting children to visit a hermit who lived there (one of their teachers in role). Artists' residences were organized, exhibitions mounted, a sound installation installed, a film made and shown at Berwick Film Festival, and an online museum produced. Too much else to mention here, but a truly special collaborative project, where my main role shifted from caretaker to fundraiser and project manager.

Continuing with the theme of fugitive architecture, this is a good point to mention a work I'd made a lot earlier, *A Gerbil's Guide to the Galaxy*, in 2005 at the Waygood – an artist-run space in central Newcastle now sadly lost. For this show, I installed a live web-feed of a gerbil in its cage chewing away at the pages of an old book: a 1933 first edition of an illustrated reference book, a compendium of carefully compiled, alphabetically organized facts where, to quote from the editor's introduction, the reader "has a mine of information at his fingertips". Within the confines of its cage, the gerbil went about the business of mining the data for its own purposes. Over a period of several weeks, it edited the book, translating the carefully constructed text into an unruly mass of dislocated fragments, recycling it as material for building a warm and secure nest. The fate of the book dissolved the architecture of knowledge into that of action; likewise, the physical object diminished in size as its shape mutated and disintegrated. The gerbil as architect worked to reconstruct its environment according to its own design.

References to and uses of live and preserved animals is another thread running through my work. I'm a collector, and I have many stuffed animals. A performance entitled *Bird in Hand* at the Freud Museum in London in 2011 was first staged as part of a Fluxus event, 'Three-star a la Carte', at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in 2009. Here, I sat quietly in the lobby of the museum next to a table on which I'd placed a box containing a preserved bird and a pair of white cotton gloves with an accompanying sign requesting visitors to open the box and follow the instructions. Inside the box, the text read: "Put on the gloves, carefully lift out the bird, examine it closely, consider its beauty, be sad at its demise, tell it a secret, return it to the box, take off the gloves, close the lid, your secret is safe." My aim was to engage with the context of the Freud Museum as a site of display as well as its visitors, referencing psychoanalytical notions of free association and confidential disclosure. The bird – a redshank, a shoreline wader found on the northeast coast and freeze-dried at a local museum in the exact state in which it was found – was transformed in this travelling performance by the weight of its secrets, while I as the attendant remained vigilant.

More recently, as part of the group show, 'Borderlands', at Gallery North, Northumbria University, I've made a work based on the story of a Syrian brown bear – the mascot of a World War Two Polish military unit stationed after demobilization in 1946 in the Scottish Borders. I'd visited the defunct airfield and its abandoned and derelict buildings, seen the marks of the bear's claws etched into the trunk of a tree, read the book, seen old filmed footage, and listened to local stories. I wanted to create a memorial. The bear, Wojtek, was adopted as a cub in Persia in 1942 by the military unit which then travelled through Iraq, Syria and Palestine to Egypt. Formally drafted with the rank of Private complete with paybook and serial number so as to be allowed to ship with the soldiers to Italy, Wojtek is said to have carried artillery shells during the decisive battle of Monte Cassino in 1944 before passage to the displacement camp in Scotland. The installation consisted of a small-screen video monitor sitting precariously on what looked like a pile of rubble, or perhaps a waymarker cairn, made of

broken and partly dressed masonry. The monitor hosted a short film of a man in a bear suit wandering around the derelict airfield. Carefully composed, lingering shots showed the ruins and the pantomime bear peering into doorways and out of windows, stamping on rubbish and banging metal on wood, engaged in apparently aimless, rather melancholic play or perhaps some kind of hopeless quest and hinting at a story which is not quite evident other than as an uncanny juxtaposition of incongruous elements. And I quote from the text accompanying the exhibition: "the installation presents an alternative monument or an un-monument to Wojtek, the Syrian brown bear. Here, rather than the usual heroic effigy and snapshot biography, attention is drawn to the disjunctures, absurdities, and inconvenient disorder of history, which often involves the official or unofficial transgression of boundaries and rules. The physical traces left by unruly forces persist in the form of ruins, whose reality of mess, detritus entropy and decay, but also vitality and potential can, if not fetishized, aestheticized or otherwise tidied up, resist simplistic understanding. Conventional public memorials are also problematized as they tend to freeze a range of conflicting and contradictory experiences into an authoritative, solid, static structure reinforcing the fiction of a single shared narrative we are all expected to subscribe to. An overall aim, therefore, is to complicate the uniformity and conformity of mediated ritualized remembrance." Remembrance, memory, time, space, place – thinking about it, I think this is possibly a self-portrait ...

One thing that I'm doing now is rescuing scraps of fabric from the beach, when they get washed in by the tide and caught up in seaweed. Whereas I used to wander as a child along the shoreline collecting shells, now I collect rotten stinky old fabric. But I think reparation is another aspect of my practice, collecting old, worn, forgotten, leftover bits and pieces and restoring them, and I've made quite a large quilt. I've obviously washed them and they do smell for a while but then that subsides and now I'm making part-flags which aren't quite flags but reference flags, and cushions which aren't quite cushions but reference bits of the body – because some of those scraps of fabric or pieces of clothing, who knows where they come from? It might have been very mundane, somebody's dropped them on the beach, or they might have a much more sinister and poignant provenance. I've been playing with this fabric, cutting it up and re-sewing it and trying out different things to do with it that are about putting all the fragments together, repairing, reusing. There's a sort of lovingness about it, trying to recreate something positive out of something destructive.

Why do we value one thing over another as individuals and where does that come from? I hope that, in general, my work is a critique of the system that we have that places value on art as a commodity, people as commodities, and a system that's totally unfair in relation to equality in terms of people's experience and their lives. I think I'm questioning value right the way throughout and perhaps building a sense of where I place my own system of values. The work I make isn't, largely, saleable or collectible, but then a lot of art is now collected, whether it's a performance or conceptual. It seems to me that the system will appropriate, the institution will appropriate whatever, it always finds a way. So, it's like dodging all the way, you know, if you are critical of all the systems that you come up against and are part of, and to a large extent you are colluding in that, but nevertheless asking those questions and constantly striving for some way of presenting your own perceptions to the world, whoever that is; for me, it's a very small corner of the world. I've got to have confidence in how I feel about those things, at the same time as not being quite sure of what those values are; they shift, they change but, for me, value lies in the unseen, in the unvalued.

I've noticed in a lot of my work that repetition comes behind the scenes. In order to make something, I have to use repetitive actions. For example, I've collected animal bones for years and I just try to sort those out into vertebrae, ribs and various others and I spend hours making piles and then trying to reorder them into a system where I like them aesthetically as a sculpture and then they collapse and I have to reorder them all again. It's a fascinating process and a ridiculous process and sometimes I feel embarrassed and hope that nobody comes in when I am doing these things. Because it's in many ways apparently a meaningless task. But it's playful in the sense that you're exploring ways in which to operate in the world ...



Shelter

