

6°WEST Inch Kenneth Residency by Georgina Coburn

Since Neolithic times the Isle of Inch Kenneth has been a cradle of human faith and ritual; a repository of our histories, fictions and aspirations layered within centuries of rock, carved stone and domestic architecture.

In June 2011 6°WEST artists collective - artists Veronica Slater, Anne Devine, Mhairi Killin, David Faithfull and curator Alicia Hendrick - worked within Inch Kenneth House and in the landscape as part of a week-long residency on the island. Driven by intense observation and investigation of this environment through drawing, painting, photography, sculptural installation and performance, the group have explored the nature of the human mark; individual, collective and cultural on the island and in relation to the natural world. Human interaction with the landscape in terms of presence and absence, residual memory and change are strong recurrent themes throughout this work, acknowledging the evolving, multi-layered nature of interior and exterior landscape in direct response to location.

Central to the group mind is the idea of the island and the journey to this territory, a conception of place which is carried within. This spirit of exploration embodies both physical location and creative process; the island as a site of confinement and isolation but equally of transformative possibility and expanded perception, akin to the hermetic tradition. The powerful and enduring presence of the island of Inch Kenneth as a 6th collaborator can be seen in the group's diverse work in mixed media, culminating in this suite of original prints by Veronica Slater, Anne Devine, Mhairi Killin and David Faithfull.

Inspired by human histories, found objects and the landscape itself, each artist has circumnavigated the island physically and mentally in order to remap and reimagine this territory and our way of seeing. Scales of reference are both epic and intimate, reflecting the ways in which the island has revealed itself and the nature of the location.

Tension and ambiguity exist in the overlay of belief on the island and in the relationship between man and nature, reflected in the entire ritual landscape of the Inner Hebrides.

The work of *6°WEST* places this unique location not at the edge of our consciousness but the centre, revealing the island as a reflection of humanity and as a site of convergence between elemental forces of nature, human life and the divine. Within each print there are references to land and memory which expand our field of reference beyond the immediate confines of the island. The multi-layered process of printmaking has been the perfect medium to explore this dialogue of vantage points and overlapping timeframes.

Incorporating hand drawn and digital elements Veronica Slater's screen print *Inch Kenneth* explores the relationship between Inch Kenneth House as a human dwelling and exterior forces of nature. The print contains many frames within frames; the presence of windows, mirrors, an alcove of familial objects and the peeling map in the top left hand corner can be seen as threshold spaces, revealing an expanded idea of time and location beyond the immediate confines of the room. Landscape contours and seismic drawn marks convey the kinetic energy of the island landscape and its formation, a vibration also present in the artist's choice of palette; reminiscent of both the interior colours of the house and the exterior colours of the shoreline. The contrast between bold, deliberate drawn marks and the softer, textural interior walls imbued with faded hues of memory reflect the artist's physical work in the landscape and the contemplative nature of her investigations in the house. Slater's previous work at Inch Kenneth House in 2010 focused on the personal history of the domestic space; here the dominant marks are those of the landscape.

The way in which the interior view of the room is coupled with drawn elements; a cracked mirror, bisected by the horizon line and incorporating a view of the shore, creates a fluid sense of movement between inside and out. This is also reflected in the artist's work in

film and installation work in the grounds of Inch Kenneth House; *Wool Shadow* (2010) exploring “place, purpose and history” and the launch of 6 °WEST Artist Collective on Eilean nam Ban (The Isle of Women) in April 2011, where members stood on map fragments weighed down by rock in the form of their physical location and positioning. Slater’s *Shadow Map* (2011), a temporary work made from stones collected from the shoreline, wrapped in road map pages of Great Britain and placed within the shaded outline of a prominent tree in the grounds of Inch Kenneth House, remains in photographic form; a human mark on the landscape, transient shadow retraced in stone.

Consistent throughout the artist’s practice is the idea of home; the emotional weight of its human construction as an intimate living, space and the ambiguity of place within and without. The artist’s work also investigates the human baggage of seeing; the layers of fictions which we create in order to define who and where we are. Slater’s print captures this dialogue of vantage points, communicating the nature of this imaginative terrain as elusive, shifting before our eyes like the tracery of human memory.

Utilising collaged paint fragments from successive layers of interior decoration the artist’s materials, part of the skin of the house, become a fluid interior map. Layers of colour, orange and lilac, blended in opposite directions, together with residual marks left by the glaze of screen printed ink read like marks of time on the walls of Inch Kenneth House. The speckled patina of aged mirrors on the surface of the print and the implication of the whole 2D surface and island as a mirror expand the viewer’s frame of reference from personal identification within an intimate space to collective acts of seeing. The light switch and bell in the right corner of the composition suggest both the domesticity of a bygone age and the creative process of illumination.

Anne Devine’s lithograph *Doxology of the Earth* combines intimate and cosmic scales of reference in a womb like mandala at the heart

of the composition, invoking natural cycles of birth and death, Alpha and Omega, innocence and experience. This circular form also refers to human experience on a more intimate scale; polyphone records and their imprinted constellations found in Inch Kenneth House, the music of memory and part of the fabric of the building universally expanded. The artist's drawings made on animal dung in the grounds of Inch Kenneth House can also be seen as visualisations of microcosm and macrocosm, the lamb and its associations with the renewal of spring drawn on to decaying matter. The tumultuous swirling current around the portal-like focal point with the lamb as a symbol of the Creator at its centre is tonally pure in its stillness. Devine references the ecclesiastical history of the island as a place to go within and the aspirational side of human nature, hope and death held within the same image.

The imprint of human faith on Inch Kenneth, from Neolithic monuments to early Christian sites of worship are still visible in stone ruins on the island, in the chapel and graveyard carved with symbols of earthly status and Memento Mori. Devine introduces marks of vulnerability in the liquefied bubbles, like a wellspring around the mandala and in the fine linear profile of a woman, contrasted with the raw elemental power of nature and implied expanse of turbulent ocean. Here the individual faces away from the portal of light, a human presence that the viewer does not notice immediately, hidden among the flow of water and drawn marks like seaweed cast up by the wind and tide. This dreamlike profile, a soul lost in chaos and a distorted vision of the sublime is visualised here as part of a universal journey of mind and spirit; the pursuit of ideal beauty and seeking the unknowable. Like a found polyphone recording "The Queen of the Earth" the print invokes an almost operatic sense of tragedy contained in the mind of an individual, a shell and crown drawn in gold ink underlying the composition. The theme of isolation and confinement provides a counterfoil to the epic nature of the image, the smallness of humanity set against the drama and immensity of nature.

The print strongly evokes the human mind perceiving the landscape and also the creative process, linked with transformation and illumination. The powerful and dynamic movement of the drawn mark on stone is equally invested in the artist's depiction of the contours of the island and its cliffs, an immediate response to the overwhelming and imposing qualities of the landscape. Devine communicates the drama of the location and the concept of time and timelessness borne out of silence. The starkness of deep Prussian blue ink on crème buff paper strips everything back to its essential elements, the island and creation revealing itself to the artist and viewer. The artist explores the expressionistic qualities of the medium, depicting not a view of the landscape but the emotional gravitas of this terrain, a conception of place carried within the heart and mind.

Mhairi Killin's digital print with etched silver and wire detail; *An Taisdeal* (The Journey, or pilgrimage) distils techniques seen in the artist's metal weave and sculptural installation work into a seamless progression of imagery, evocative of place and the nature of human perception. Influenced by the early photography of Muybridge, each individual frame is rhythmically woven together, shifting layers that reflect the historical timeline of the island and the artist's creative journey through this territory. This sense of overlay is also achieved in the tonality of the print and how our eye is lead into it, an intrinsic part of the artist's visual grammar and the inner life of the landscape. In an isolated fragment; an image of carved stone in the foreground with the background out of focus, the artist references the medieval and ecclesiastical landscape of the island, causing our focus to move in and out of the print, making connections between objects and different periods of time. This movement along the timeline is both subtle and fluid; like thoughts and memories that rise to the surface of our consciousness then recede.

The combination of the graphic lines of an ordinance survey map with organic fault lines of serpentine movement; carved stone to whalebone, scrying pool to razor shell, add another layer of

interpretation to Killin's visualisation of the site. The cross reference seen here diagonally opposite as both Christian symbol and as a point of geographic positioning, like the grid overlaid with fluid ink and the seamlessness between the graphic map mark and the texture of whalebone speak of a deeper understanding of place and identity. Significantly the map is underlying rather than definitive, charting the human condition as fragile and transitory. The artist's use of silver, a precious metal of healing and transformation in the form of a luggage tag, defines the role of the artist as witness and traveller. The description of the Inch Kenneth Neolithic cairn etched upon the tag extends this idea further, symbolic of a human mark, the mystery of ancient rituals and the need to reveal that which is hidden. Killin's investigation of the island as a site of "creativity, belief and action" mirrors the meaning of creativity within the Celtic Tradition as an agent of transformation, illumination and renewal.

The role of Art as self reflexive, individually and collectively, can be seen in the window reflected in the mirror, a portal between inner and outer landscapes and the font of water in the medieval chapel, also reminiscent of the earlier ritual practice of scrying. The mirror from within Inch Kenneth house positioned to the far right of the composition, holding images of the Mitford women in its memory, marked with age and reflecting light from the world outside, reveals the complexity and multifaceted act of seeing. Killin's imagery doesn't just speak of place but of human perception; in the crafting of the print, the artist's choice of materials and in the strata of land, people and memory visualised in the landscape.

In David Faithfull's screen print *Leviathan* the island of Inch Kenneth becomes anthropomorphised as a physical presence, the underlying core of the image a great sea cave whose stalactites resemble an open larynx; a repository of collective human history and mythology. Inspired by William Golding's *Pincher Martin*, Faithfull makes a powerful connection between the physical body and the landmass of Inch Kenneth as emotive territory. Just as Golding depicts a journey into purgatory and death in his description of a

drowning man's last struggle with an island; its form reimagined as the shape of a tooth in a hollow of the protagonist's jaw, Faithfull too visualising the earth as flesh.

The print encompasses analytical and visceral reactions to the landscape, reflecting the artist's use of scientific /navigational instruments and the immediacy of emotionally charged drawn marks to explore the multi-layered nature of place. This dynamic, of charting location and positioning using both high and low tech methodologies of scale; satellite navigation, compass and the human eye is also reflected in the two sided print. In the reverse GPS image of the island the artist has numbered sites where he visualised parts of the human body in the landmass, locations inspiring multiple images. The double sided image or artist's book is characteristic of Faithfull's approach; embracing the ambiguity of space and time between multiple viewpoints, one perspective informing another and completing it in the mind's eye.

The process of measurement and observation using time based geology, tides, soil conditions and the use of materials drawn from the natural environment; reed pens collected on the Isle of Mull and oak gall ink made from local iron, ancient meteorites and other organic elements, combine the transient human mark with the palette and raw compounds of timeless earth. The creation of pigment follows a medieval recipe similar to that used in illuminated manuscripts such as The Book of Kells, believed to have been scribed on Iona ca 800. *Leviathan* signifies the nature of the journey to the island as an extended horizon; we see in the print the contours of landforms, the overlay of drawn marks and photography, mapped satellite imagery and the fluidity of ink. Diving off Inch Kenneth and the gathering of materials from the environment is part of a ritual process of creation, reflecting a need for authenticity in the artist's choice of media. Faithfull actively dredges beneath the surface, with drawing and detailed observation as a foundation of his practice, repositioning our view from multiple

angles; the same cliff face seen from opposing sides presenting a point of intersection, reimagining the island and its histories.

Within the human history of Inch Kenneth House the opposing political forces of Fascism and Marxism inside the Mitford family reflect another dynamic of convergence and amplification; in the wider theatre of war but also in the creative/ destructive potential of the individual in pursuit of an ideal. The collection of fragments for contemplation, plotting these elements within the layers of the screen print and between two surfaces, echoes the charting of human wreckage; flotsam and jetsam explored in the artist's previous work. Faithfull's series *Jettison*; prints, multiples and artist's books investigating the crash site of an RAF Tornado near Toreness Nuclear Power Station in 1999, also embody the act of bearing witness, of reconstruction and human fictions. In this latest work the landscape itself becomes the dominant creative force; further extending our collective field of reference beyond a specific historical event and exploring the process of knowing ourselves and our location in relation to the layers of time and human memory that surround us.

The creative collaboration of *6°WEST* on Inch Kenneth highlights the potential of geographical, physical place and the rural to inspire and create Contemporary Art for our times. The island remains a unique vantage point, a mirror in a time of unprecedented social, economic and cultural change. The group's engagement with this territory is part of a wider redefinition of landscape in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, actively repositioning the Inner Hebrides in a global cultural context.

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