

# Exhibitions

## Groundwork

various venues Cornwall 5 May to 30 September

I write this review of a visit to Groundwork in Cornwall from a place that is almost its mirror image, ie an Irish coastal peninsula from which copper was once extracted by large-estate landlords; where fishing is curtailed by EU regulations, the waters instead being worked for leisure sporting activities; and unique telecommunications sites attract tourists and conspiracy theorists alike. Both areas also foster artists, local and blow-ins. Interestingly, Groundwork, an ambitious season of international contemporary art curated by Teresa Gleadowe as part of her directorship of CAST (Cornubian Arts and Science Trust), grew from conversations around themes of 'place' and 'extraction' that evolved from the Falmouth Convention in 2010 (Reports AM338) and, two years later, the Penzance Convention (Reports AM358), which brought art-world actors together to explore said themes. Supported by funding through Arts Council England's Ambition for Excellence scheme, CAST is part of a partnership with other organisations in the Cornwall area: Tate St Ives, Newlyn Art Gallery & The Exchange and Kestle Barton Gallery. While 'partnerships' and 'excellence' have a queasy corporate ring, the principle of arts organisations

**Adam Chodzko**  
*Ghost* 2018 The Lizard, Cornwall

**Christina Mackie**  
*The Judges II* 2012-18 King's Room, Godolphin



joining forces in the current climate need not simply be a monetary bid for survival, but can be an ethical one of situating art more firmly into communities' well-being. Bringing in well-known international artists such as Steve McQueen (Interview AM202) and Tacita Dean (Interview AM281) might seem like jazzing-up the area for summer tourism, but this is only one aspect of the project, the other being more markedly pedagogical and infrastructural, a curatorial ethos of looking anew at the richness of the area's uncommodified values, its history, poetry and folklore. It also has to be said that some of the artists have been visiting the area for the past three years of the project's development.

One difficulty in reviewing Groundwork is that the programme changes. Artists whose work will either be opening later on in the season or whose work was only on during the opening weekend before my visit are: Andy Holden, Abigail Reynolds, Abel Rodriguez, Janet Cardiff, Tacita Dean, Francis Alÿs (Interview AM323), Steve Powell, Laureana Todek, Rosemary Lee and Adam Chodzko (Interview AM318), though footage of Chodzko's kayak ferrying, *Ghost*, was available to view in the CAST building in Helston, a former Science and Arts School built in 1897 with funds provided by the Cornish philanthropist John Passmore Edwards.

Helston Museum is the location for two films by Sean Lynch, *What is an Apparatus?*, 2016-18, and *Latoon*, 2006-15. The former, situated in the Old School Room, can be viewed sitting at old school lidded desks, which is apt given the film's pedagogical mythologisation of the mores of global capitalism. Spanning sites such as maritime museums, shopping centres, art-school refurbishments, new roads and bridges, copper mines and medieval churches, the footage was mainly accrued in Ireland with newer footage shot in Helston. Some of the local footage, for example of Helston's flora day festival and a 'spirit cleansing' in the local Weatherspoons, seemed slightly tokenistic, though the voice-over by actress Gina Moxley, a frequent collaborator, gave a compelling consistency to the documentary fragments as tales were told of frogs that rained from the sky and copper boots with animal ears, the motif of capitalism as a devil humorously and darkly threaded through the narration. *Latoon*, an 8-minute short set in County Clare, Ireland, featured folklorist Eddie Linehan recounting how he successfully campaigned to protect a bush, deemed a fairy meeting-place, from being removed for the construction of a bypass. While the story could be seen as a triumph of the 'little people' against development, I was troubled by the film's portrayal in this museum context of Irish folk as quaintly superstitious even if fully aware of their own manipulation of such 'piseogs'.

In contrast to the fictional documentary sensibility of much of the work in Groundwork, which is mainly moving image with some sound and performance, McQueen's *Gravesend*, 2007, projected large scale in CAST's building, is driven by a formal poetics. Unlike the miners who risk their lives to extract the coltan that electronics industries depend on, the only violence in the film is the sharp cuts between grating, throbbing sound and jarringly silent passages, as well as visual close-ups of plunging through holes of various kinds, a violence underscored by the accompanying 54-second film *Unexploded*, 2007, a silent black-and-white distillation of a crater, another hole, in a damaged building in Basra. Although powerful, *Gravesend's* combination of loosely structuralist and cinematic aesthetics seems weirdly anachronistic after a further decade of artists' moving image, though clearly the film is included to generate possible discussions between the situated knowledges of local mining histories – Groundwork has organised related fieldtrips and talks – and how art might document the exploitation of labour differently. Experimental documentaries with a more instructional, yet prosaic poetics seem more like the order of the day at Groundwork.

Further examples of this ilk were screened in the Battery Store of Goonhilly Earth Station, itself part of a conglomerate of universities which is working to establish radio telescopes for astronomical observation across the UK as well as developing similar projects in Africa, in a strange inversion of the colonial project referenced in Simon Starling's black-and-white film *Black Drop*, 2012. Mainly comprising static shots, it has the familiar voice of Peter Capaldi narrating a story of French astronomer Jules Janssen's invention of the photographic revolver, a device designed to assist in measuring the moment the planet Venus contacts the edge of the sun in a planetary transit which happens approximately every 125 years. The correct measurement would enable navigational control of the seas, the film travelling backwards and forwards in time from Captain Cook's 1769 voyage to Tahiti to a 21st century Honolulu to track this solar attempt at oceanic mastery. Also a film within a film – an editor character is shown cutting the shots and watching them back in an editing suite – *Black Drop* reflects melancholically on technological extinction. Screened immediately afterwards, Semiconductor's *As the World Turns*, 2018, a new commission for Groundwork along with Manon de Boer's *Bella, Maia and Nick (From nothing to something else)*, includes stunning colour footage of the site over which an accented female voice-over, a fictional scientist, meditates on future technological exploration after her death. Accepting the passing of human time, she considers herself embedded in celestial and terrestrial universes that the camera shows are equally shared with bees and satellite dishes, both of which trace sonic relations between each other that she can only intuit, unlike the colonial observers of Starling's film which also critiqued the measuring impetus by invoking Henri Bergson's more fluid notion of time and space.

Rhythms more akin to Bergsonian expansive time vibrated in de Boer's film, which is installed at Kestle Barton Gallery, one of the restored farmhouse buildings of Kestle Barton guesthouse. The film documents an improvisational session by the young musicians of the film's title. It nestles seamlessly into the gallery space, its opening shot of three windows overlooking the sea becoming our illusionistic view of the outside. Much as the minimal edits move from mid-shot to close-up to long-shot views of the sea through the studio window, the session shifts from offering musical strains on flute and trumpet to messing around with percussion to singing harmonies that gently resonate with the location's inner atmosphere.

At Godolphin Estate, a National Trust building whose previous owners made their fortune from copper and tin mining, Christina Mackie's *The Judges 11*, 2012, an iteration of this trestle-table installation in response to the King's Room, seemed strangely out of place. Given that visitors happen upon the work en route to the estate's gardens, the installation appears at first glance like an obstacle course, but following Mackie's signature translations of objects from 3D to 2D and vice versa, and from one medium to another, an abstract narrative of geological and mineral extraction slowly burns across temporal spectrums that intimate an anthropocenic, yet paradoxically domestic, sublime.

Place, though, is something that humans make and while art is not a remedy for social ills, it can contribute to the value of rural locations beyond the extraction of capital. Groundwork's network of relations, while not without the problems of bringing things to a place, nonetheless begins to narrate the miasmas of displacement in ways that might nourish possible art futures in the area. ■

**Maria Walsh** is reader in artists' moving image at Chelsea College of Arts.



'Zoe Leonard: Survey' 2018 installation view



**Zoe Leonard**  
TV *Wheelbarrow*  
2001

## Zoe Leonard: Survey

Whitney Museum of American Art New York  
2 March to 10 June

'I want a dyke for president. I want a person with aids for president and I want a fag for vice president and I want someone with no health insurance and I want someone who grew up in a place where the earth is so saturated with toxic waste that they didn't have a choice about getting leukemia.' It is ironic that the best-known work in the first major overview of Zoe Leonard's work in a US institution is among her least visually assuming. Leonard's *I Want a President*, 1992, is a single typewritten sheet of paper that spells out the artist's bitter disappointment at the corrupt and elitist nature of governmental power in the US. Composed for *QW*, an obscure queer magazine, in direct response to the Aids crisis, its charged critical perspective assumed a new relevance in the context of the 2016 presidential election, when it gained unanticipated visibility via social media and public art (a large-scale version was installed on Manhattan's High Line).

*I Want a President* remains a powerful statement, but 'Zoe Leonard: Survey' revealed its maker as an artist of much greater subtlety than this particular *cri de coeur* might suggest. Leonard has spent the past three decades exploring the half-