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“Bound,” The Use of Cloth as Interface: Exploring Boundaries and Concepts in Relation to Site and Place.

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Outside: Activating cloth to enhance the way we live

ABSTRACT

Bound was a project in which I identified and wrapped, ancient dead trees across the old counties of Wales. The paper is based upon this series of site-specific temporary interventions in the landscape. The paper examines the work and contextualises it against the framework of land and environment artwork. I demonstrate the role of temporary site responsive artwork using cloth and the language of textiles in rural environments in increasing an awareness of natural forms and raising questions of land use, ownership and boundaries.

‘Bound’ refers to the activity of ‘wrapping’ as well as to ‘Boundaries’, and this paper explores the act of binding and the power of cloth to communicate, and to connect people to place. This paper also draws upon the aesthetics, concepts and concerns of working with cloth in the ‘environment’, and the tacit understanding of how humans relate to cloth in the success of the artwork. The paper touches on the potential of cloth to explore politics of the environment and land. I draw on the work of other artists in particular Jeanne Claude and Christo. Finally I address future development of this work and the power of textile language to communicate ideas through the making of a new commission of art in the landscape in Darning the Land: Seam.

Keywords: Binding, boundaries, connection, land and environmental art.
INTRODUCTION: I write this paper as a practising artist exploring the triangulation of art, cloth and environment. Much of my recent site-specific work draws on the rich history and cultural significance of cloth, binding and the language of textiles. The material and a very physical working process, have a particular resonance for me as an artist in the realisation of the site-specific artworks which I have made: Bound (2003-6) in which I wrapped an ancient dead tree in cloth initially in a Garden (Bound I) and later in each of the old counties of Wales (Bound II), followed by Darning the Land: Seam (2011) in which I plant a seam of native grasses in a double-running stitch on a site in South Derbyshire. I shall discuss the personal significance of cloth and binding in more detail with specific reference to how this informs Bound and Darning the Land: Seam. These temporary interventions in the landscape are also located within the context of, and debates surrounding, the relationship between art and the land or environment. Thus the elements of land, art, cloth and binding, which I discuss below, are central to understanding my intention behind the works themselves. I describe and discuss the site-specific works in more detail later in the paper. (Barcode: FB814, 2011) falls within this body of work and is mentioned in my conclusion).

ART IN THE ENVIRONMENT: Land Art developed during the 1960s and 1970s originating in the vast and dramatic landscape of America’s West (Kastner, 2010. p12). Early works by artists such as Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson and Walter de Maria, were intended to remove the social and monetary power away from the ‘white cube’ of the gallery and the art object. Bound came from a similar desire to reach an audience not defined by social, geographical or other restrictions associated with creating work for the tastes and aesthetics of the gallery and its curators.
Approaches to creating within or addressing the landscape are diverse. Land Art encompasses earth, eco and environmental art and holds at its core the land and the individual’s response to and activity within it (Wallis & Kastner, 2010 p12). Under the category of Land Art, both Bound and Darning the Land: Seam are further defined as being ‘site-specific’ and ‘place-specific’, where a work is designed for and has a specific interrelationship with a location. The success of the work came from periods of time spent living near and on site as I sought to navigate the process of making ‘sense of place’.

Some early land art works developed in the early seventies (such as Robert Morris’ Observatory, 1971) were problematic in that their creation involved shifting and shaping the land with heavy plant and machinery similar to the domination of the landscape through consumerism and industrialisation, and could be considered an imposition on nature. Another set of possibilities is presented when subtle markings activate a memory, connection or consciousness of a place. Artists such as Richard Long, make works in isolated locations leaving a gentle trace through the activity of walking, whilst Nancy Holt makes subtle interventions and alignments that draw attention to our existence and placement on a personal and planetary level in works such as Sun Tunnels, 1973-6.

In terms of developments within Land Art Darning the Land: Seam, places myself as an artist within a generation of land artists whose concerns are sensitive to the emotional content of a place, and who, by taking an approach akin to the environmentalist, returns to the land in order to remedy damage rather than poeticise it. Lippard (1997, p264) expands on place-specific art as ‘natural’ spaces, which may be adapted, but the activity can ‘add a social dimension that refers to the human
history and memory, land use and political agenda relevant to the specific place'. The recognition that artists can contribute valuable research within the wider scientific or environmental debate is exemplified through Ex-Lab, a developing project along the Jurassic Coast in Dorset, which provides opportunity for creative meetings between artists and earth scientists to foster new understanding.

In this way, artists, who undertake a careful 'site selection study' (Smithson, 1967) [1] bring an approach to site that demands 'perception before conception', thus enabling them to make a significant contribution in analysing and revealing unexpected aspects of site, exposing rather than imposing.

CLOTH AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE: Speaking in 2009, Gooding purports that the ‘broader purpose of contemporary art that engages with natural objects in the environment are to change (in a variety of ways) our consciousness of the true nature of the fragile world’ Gooding, 2010, p5.

With Bound consciousness of a rural environment was altered through something familiar being placed in an unexpected environment. In employing cloth, a material we are intimate to draw attention to the body our own and that of the tree - in order to remind ourselves that we are not separate from nature and to foster a deeper awareness of it.

For artists concerned with the relationship humans have with the land, cloth offers a symbolically rich resource. Historically, cloth is one of the first human creations and as such, has been a key component of life providing shelter, protection and a means for survival. Constantine and Reuters (1997, p14) discuss the history and role of cloth at length, positioning twining and weaving along with tool-making as some of
the very first skills humans acquired. Berry (1987, p143) [2] was not directly thinking of cloth when he wrote about the human desire to seek security from seeing permanence in the landscape, and our desire to preserve it through culture and domesticity, but cloth is the most domestic material we can bring into the landscape.

Our language is peppered with cloth and textile references and it extends as a metaphor that references the ‘fabric of life’ and ‘the fabric of society’; metaphorically we ‘feel things in every fiber of our being’. The language of cloth is a ‘universal language’ across cultures.

Cloth plays a very significant part in religious ceremonies and rites of passage. Prayer is visible through cloth in many countries including Turkey, Japan, Tibet and India. Jones (1954 Pp 93-4) records rags being found at sacred wells in Arabia, Persia, Africa and South America and more locally in Wales in a tradition that dates back to pre-Christian times. The placing of cloth (clootie) at a well could serve as an offering, an expression of a penance, for healing (the rag was dipped in the water, the afflicted part of the body bathed, then the rag was tied to a nearby branch of a tree) or as a preservative from ‘the sorceries of the druids’ (Davies 1911, p298). My choice of employing cloth in Bound I and Bound II in the environment follows this heritage.
The decision to use cloth was pragmatic; cloth is pliable, soft and strong. It can be sourced cheaply and allows an effective, temporary and environmentally sensitive intervention. In *Bound*, it was non-invasive, easy to apply, remove and dispose of safely. It offered clean lines, creating a reversible block of colour in the landscape that was not damaging to the environment (I was troubled that some people initially assumed the trees were painted).

**CLOTH IN PUBLIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND LAND ART: Christo and Jeanne Claude**

The work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude is synonymous with wrapping. Christo’s early wrapped objects and enclosed forms speak of censorship and concealment. The architectural statements make connections between architecture as a kind of packaging, and later public works dealt with swathing open tracts of land. The work is about artistic freedom, the hierarchy of art, land use, ownership and place. Their artistic philosophy is to connect: people with people even across continents, art with engineering, with politics and with place. Fabric encircles buildings, walkways, coasts and even islands drawing attention to boundaries. In generating their own funds,
negotiating their practice and in making work that is impossible to own, they challenge hierarchies. In the temporality of the works they contest the immortality of art. (Christo 1995).

It is important to note that the artists state their work is not about wrapping as much as it is about the use of fabric to bring about transformation and this premise also applies to *Bound*. Christo (1997, p137) explains that their interest lies in the nomadic cultures of Tibet where a tented city can be present one night and be gone the next, leaving little or no trace, and in the sense of something tangible being fleeting, transient and passing.

Much environmental art is ephemeral and subject to change – this is the nature of working within an environment of natural forces and an altered timescale as well as physical scale. There is a virtue in making temporary works in that everything is subject to change, both site and places change, and a statement can quickly lose impact, relevance or meaning. The temporal nature of works in cloth, whether because of the material’s qualities and limitations or an artist’s objectives, is individual and impossible to study here. For Christo and Jeanne Claude the transient nature of the installations, often installed for a matter of days after years spent in planning and preparation, creates a specific energy and intensity in the response to the work.

Their work effectively demonstrates how textiles can connect people and place. It literally runs from ‘x’ to ‘y’ in ‘Running Fence’ California or ‘Valley Curtain’, Colorado, and is always made for places where people relate to and use the space. The wrapping of the Reichstag in Germany, prompted a 90 minute televised debate broadcast across a whole nation, proof of the power of their work to engage people
politically, emotionally and intellectually (Christo in Journal of Contemporary Art, 1995).

The use of cloth is of paramount importance in their work. Fabric is engineered and woven to have the necessary tensile qualities and strength for the works. The fabric has to be worked in the environment to allow for adaption and cloth has this malleability. They talk about the fabric as being dynamic, sensual and tactile.

In the same interview by Giancarlo Mantegna from the JCA (1995) the artists draw attention to the importance of fabric and use of cloth in the story of art. Its use in art is as old as the history of art, as a substrate upon which artists might paint or within the formality of the studies of the drapes and folds of fabric within Classical sculpture and painting. For me their work is a celebration of fabric itself and its ability to be and create a significant presence and yet in their temporality be ‘gentle disturbances’.

In the next section, I outline my own work that parallels ideas raised in work by the artists discussed.

**THE EXHIBITION: \textit{BOUND I}**

\textit{Bound I}, a site-specific work was commissioned for the 2003 exhibition \textit{Explorations} at the National Botanic Garden of Wales, Carmarthenshire, West Wales. The exhibition of temporary public-artworks was a partnership between the National Botanic Garden of Wales and the Welsh public art organisation, ‘Cywaith Cymru . Artworks Wales’ (CC.AW). \textit{Explorations} showcased the work of 11 artists who made a response to the Garden.
Public art can take many forms and be permanent or ephemeral, object based, performative, functional, didactic, interpretive, interdisciplinary, poetical, poetic or subtle. Yet its aims, I argue, should be democratic and add value to an audiences’ understanding of a place and ‘whatever form the art form takes it should remain in the hearts, minds and ideologies of its audience as well as in their physical and sensuous experience’. (Lippard, 1997, p264). Before this commission, I had not made work for an outdoor site or considered the emotional power of land, questions of scale and distance, approach, durability. These are just some of the considerations involved in making a public artwork in the landscape.

When making work in a public arena there are questions regarding who is the audience? If public artwork is for a community, what and where is the community? Who defines ‘the public’ – is it those who live locally geographically – or those who regularly pass by or through, a targeted, invited or specialist audience, or a social class or group within it. What defines a public space – is it ownership, power, politics, location, accessibility or other? These are questions raised by Lippard (1997, p264), which align themselves closely to the project.

*Bound I*, a lightening-blasted dead oak, stood on the periphery of the Garden, and I bound it in white cloth. The success of this work lay in a combination of the right site - the tree and its location within the Garden and the choice of material and process to convey the concept and to attain the required aesthetic. The work was accessible – physically and conceptually and respected both the community and environment. The tree was sited on farmland that butted up to the Garden – hence it did not belong to the Garden. This was my first rationale; to draw attention to the seemingly arbitrary decision of where to draw a line, a *boundary* [3], or fence - this side of a ‘tree’ or the
other. The work raised questions regarding the land and its current and former use, where its function was declared, decided and imposed and the delineations of where ‘nature’ and the Garden started or finished.

Figure 2. ‘Bound’, Carmarthenshire, 2003

In these contexts, ‘bound’ refers to ‘boundaries’ as well as the activity of ‘binding’. The act of wrapping a dead tree in tight bandages of white cloth was simple and effective, creating a temporary and sensitive intervention in the landscape that drew attention to the form of the oak. The tree offered the onlooker a means through which they could use their imagination to see a familiar form in a new way. Some of the associations and comments from those working at the Garden and from visitors spoke of the tree in terms of swaddling, mummification, lightening, fungi and antlers.

Thus an artist’s work can assist others in making an emotional and aesthetic relationship and response to place. Lippard (1997, p274) offers that a place specific
work can hold up a glimpse of a new way to enter everyday life. The phrase ‘revelation through concealment’ (Bourdon, 1970, p9) refers to the work of Christo and Jeanne Claude but relates to Bound. The form was released as a visual statement through being wrapped and presented.

**CLOTH AND WRAPPING:** Binding is a human activity, a means by which things are made secure, held together and contained. Elements are held fast with a knot or tie, the passing or putting something round and where things are restrained. In the work Bound I and Bound II, the act and the time involved in binding a tree’s limbs in swathes of cloth created a very physical intimate connection to the tree and to site. The repetitive act of winding is an action within time that like a thread through cloth serves to make a connection. Time is key.

Modern life lacks some of the ties to place which our forefathers would have lived with and known. The world can seem fractured and fragmented with many realities present alongside another. Our connection to each other or to place is no longer necessarily shared or communal. Binding in the form of bandaging a tree as in Bound can be seen as a metaphor for healing and manifesting a connection and continuity through a visual phenomenon that has the ability to connect people and become a shared memory.

My personal interest in binding stems from 1987, when I visited an exhibition, of Traditional Japanese Packaging, entitled Tsutsumu, at the Library Gallery, Milton Keynes. It was organized by the Japan Foundation and supervised by Hideyuki Oka. Many of the objects in the display are documented in Hideyuki Oka’s book How to Wrap Five Eggs (1967). The exhibition struck a chord for me. The often humble objects were beautifully bound, wrapped and presented: these sensibilities, ideas
and aesthetics informed *Bound* and much of my approach to making can be traced.

I was seeing a world and a place symbolised through traditional packaging, comprehending place through the language and use of materials such as straw, paper, bamboo and bark. The approach and combination of form and material inform on-going concerns in my practice regarding site, place and community and how to access and read place through materials and artifacts.

The bound tree may seem visually far removed from the objects held up in this exhibition and book, but the commonality is in the care and intention within the activity of binding that lies at the heart of the trees and the wrapped forms in the book. The ‘released’ form of the trees and the ‘concealed’ forms of the packages resonate with the concept of ‘delight in the look and feel of very ordinary, humble things’ (Nelson 1967 p6) and in the beauty within the everyday and the overlooked.

In 2003, I visited Tokyo and Kyoto in Japan. I found the cloth and paper prayers tied to poles outside the temples evocative. The paper prayers were an example of the importance and potential of cloth to communicate and link communities through shared ritual. The individual private acts of prayer which together make up a stronger singular collective informed the second rationale for *Bound*.

The winding of a dead tree in cloth is a form of ritual. The first tree was wrapped in reclaimed hospital sheeting torn into strips, sewn into long lengths and rolled tightly into bandages. The bandaging of limbs is a direct reference to healing being one of the many applications of cloth upon the body. The repetitive act of preparing and rolling the cloth, together with time taken on site in the act of wrapping, was a meditation upon the tree’s past, present and future and of our own fleeting presence
and place within the world. These were my initial instinctive reactions and reasons for making this first work.

Figure 3. Preparing cloth  
Figure 4. Prepared cloth

**THE PROJECT EXTENDED: BOUND II**

The singular *Bound I* work developed to become a much larger project to identify and wrap an ancient tree in each of the old counties of Wales. This was the statement of intent but the implications and reasoning were broader. Cloth informed and made *Bound I* possible; subsequent *Bound II* works were about making a personal connection to place and to create temporary artworks in the landscape. I was, consequently, binding myself to site and also the intimate surface of certain trees in particular locations.

Audience response to the *Bound* works (I have made two subsequent *Bound* works to the project with a different rationale) supports that it impacted on many in a very moving way. (Tom Freshwater, personal communication, 2011). [4]
Figure 5. ‘Bound, Croft Castle’. 2009

It is a fact that our landscape is unequivocally altered and shaped by man, and many of the trees had died as a result of man’s activity in the landscape. In 1972, the county boundaries in Wales were changed from 13 to the current 9. The boundaries and borderline are clearly delineated, shared through a map system on paper, yet the decisions to define spaces are imposed at a distance. In reality, ‘mapped’ spaces and lines have little to do with how a place is accessed, looks, acts, reacts, is understood or used. These concerns informed the work and remain of interest.

The trees were in the countryside, predominantly in rural locations, within an enclosed tract of land. Land demarked by a fence, hedge and or road as well as through delineation of a boundary as a marked area on a map. Millar and Joseph L. Koener (2005, p185 & p189) [5] suggest that the separation from living in a ‘natural world’ formed the notion of ‘countryside’. ‘Countryside’ being invented when we became separated from it and moved to living in cities. Even within rural locations our experience of landscape is often something outside of ourselves and Bound was my attempt to remedy this.
Working on *Bound II* allowed me to experience the rural in a very direct way. Researching suitable locations took many weeks and return visits, and physically wrapping a tree can take between one – five days on site. My first contact was with the farmers, many of whom were tenants to a landowner. Some were very isolated and my work became a way of making a community around the totem, making contact with them and through them to their community. In wrapping a tree in cloth, I created a change in the focal point of the landscape, bringing a new and different awareness and relationship to the landscape for the spectator and myself. The power of the natural form of the tree in its ‘release’ became a highly visible landmark in the landscape across Wales. For between three to twelve months, it became a focal point and a shared site, connecting people to place, individually and collectively.

There were practical considerations: the sites had to be accessible to equipment; the trees were dead for aesthetic, conceptual and environmental reasons, in a rural location, visible from a local route or road. The cloth was from salvaged bolts; the trees wrapped to cause least interference to wildlife and the landowners’ livestock or crops, and like Christo the works were temporary. Colour was decided upon through location; a cobalt blue in a river valley in Cardiganshire, and in bleak moorland on Anglesey my response to the land necessitated the use of camouflage. This referenced the use of similar rural spaces for military training and our country’s involvement in Afghanistan.
Figure 6. ‘Bound, Cardiganshire’. 2006

Figure 7. ‘Bound, Anglesey’. 2004
Bound II, Anglesey, 2004 was a work of 3 standing camouflaged Scotts Pine with one fallen tree wrapped in a pastoral black and cream ‘Toile de Joie’. One purpose of this work was to illustrate the hierarchies of land ownership; there are those who own the land, those who work on it and those who may die defending it.

Bound II, Old Denbighshire, 2004 was unwrapped after only 6 months as locals twice used it as a notice board to voice political concerns against the fox hunting ban and also the rising costs of housing for local people. The tree was on land owned by an MP, farmed by a tenant farmer, and whilst it was not my intention for the Bound works to be overtly political I was interested when it was employed as a ‘visual voice’ in this way.

![Figure 8. ‘Bound, Old Denbighshire. 2004'](image)

Bound I and Bound II have an extended meaning in that the works are now shown as photographic images and are therefore ‘framed’, limited to a given viewpoint which
references the experience of seeing landscape ‘framed’ as if through a train or car window. In this sense, I acknowledge that land art disseminated through publication or photography is problematic in that the work is not physically experienced.

DARNING THE LAND: SEAM, A MAIN COMMISSION FOR RE:PLACE

_Darning the Land: Seam_ is a temporary site-responsive work developed through a main commission awarded by ‘re:place’. Run by David Gilbert between 2009-12, ‘re:place’ was conceived as an art project about place, where artists responded to places in Derbyshire or the place that Derbyshire is. It sought to readdress a romantic and simplistic perception of Derbyshire as a bucolic wilderness through artistic practice, research and response. The programme recognised that provision for contemporary art in Derbyshire was limited and placed contemporary art practice as a tool with which to interrogate, illuminate and reshape ideas of Derbyshire and the rural.

Understanding how land is used is vital to unlocking an experience and deeper understanding of place - questions of how we identify and relate to place, to space and to site is embedded in my practice. In Derbyshire, I examined how industrialisation dominated the landscape, how geography determined work and how work and working conditions shaped community and created hierarchies within. I was concerned with the Land Act and movements of the C16th-C19th, which brought enclosure, and with it the loss of much common land in England and Wales. Enclosure as the shutting off of a piece of land with a hedge, fence or wall involves the removal of communal rights, access and controls and can be seen as an imposition - the changed boundaries becoming a charged issue. [6]
The site, Maurice Lea Memorial Park, Church Gresley, Swadlincote, had been common land. Here coal was publicly accessible to be picked during pit strikes in the late 19th century. Before its recreation as a public park in 1930, it was deeply scarred. I wanted to reference its history, and to connect people to the past when the land supported people on a fundamental level, through the metaphor of darning. The work references the lineage of civic planting, reflected in towns across the UK where
public gardens were for the exercise and release of the workingman, a tradition upheld within Swadlincote at both Maurice Lea and Eureka Park.

Physically, the piece is a double running stitch of 59 flowerbeds, spanning an area 80m x 2m across a section of the park, planted with 700 individual native grasses. The piece references a seam: a seam of fabric and a seam of coal. It uses the language of textiles to mend, creating a form that the individual can weave himself or herself through – hence *Darning the Land: Seam*.

Figure 11. 'Darning the Land: Seam', 2011
(The work planted in September 2011 will be at its best after 12-18 months when the plants have reached maturity).

Research for the project relied upon walking. I walked to access and to connect to the history of the places visited and walking informs the work. Walking, connection, thread and time meet beautifully in a sentence from Wanderlust. Solnit (2002, pXV) offers that ‘past and present are brought together when you walk…and each walk moves through space like a thread through fabric, sewing it together into a continuous experience…’

In *Darning the Land: Seam* the work invites and is activated by human presence and activity. The artist Robert Smithson was a key figure in defining the development of the idea of an artwork as an environment, which should include the spectator and this work seeks to include and connect the public directly.

The work carries the metaphor of the land being a textile surface, the fabric of the land the skin of the earth’s body. I note a project by the textile artist Caroline Bartlett (1996), whose temporary installation of patterns embossed and stenciled into the
grass based on 1950’s wallpapers within Burgess Park in Southwark references the houses buried below the site during its regeneration. Bartlett’s work evidenced a previous existence, as does *Darning the Land: Seam*.

**CONCLUSION: FINDINGS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

Cloth made *Bound* possible and its success was equally due to the poetic, practical and inherent qualities we associate with cloth. *Bound* follows a human instinct to make physical connections to and within the landscape, connecting people to place. Creating unity through a shared response that lives on in the history of a place through memory. The site of the tree provides a link to the natural world – reconnecting us where we may have become inured or disconnected. Cloth continues to be a vehicle through which I seek to remedy some of the feelings of separateness we may have from nature and from each other.

This paper has examined site-specific temporary interventions in the landscape that incorporate and employ cloth, and illustrated that a large measure of their success lies in our cultural and historic associations and understanding of the materials qualities. I have contextualised the projects *Bound* and *Darning the Land: Seam* alongside Land and Environmental Art. Future development in my practice aims to continue an examination of place and in the power of textiles, its physical and metaphoric qualities to connect people to place. Approach to place will hinge upon questions of land use, ownership and boundaries and to follow Smithson’s philosophy of ‘extracting concepts out of existing sense-data through direct perceptions’. (1996, p60)
A recent workshop in Mortimer Forest, held alongside another cloth work, *Barcode: FB814* – demonstrated the power of a textile work to communicate environmental concerns regarding the ownership and stewardship of our ancient forests. The ease with which participants used cloth to create their own response to my artwork demonstrates that actions such as binding and wrapping with cloth can literally connect people to place.

I used the word interface in this paper's title: interface referring to ‘surfaces’ forming a common boundary; a meeting-point or area of contact between objects, systems, subjects, environment and people - interface as the area of contact between a physical work, its ideas and its message and its audience, becoming the means through which the artist communicates to others.

![Figure 13. ‘Barcode: FB814’, Mortimer Forest. 2011](image-url)
Figure 14. Workshop in Mortimer Forest. 2011.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Clootie, Museum of Welsh Life, 1856. (Photograph Philippa Lawrence)

Figure 2. ‘Bound’, Carmarthenshire. 2003. (Photograph Philippa Lawrence)

Figure 3. Preparing cloth. (Photograph Philippa Lawrence)

Figure 4. Prepared cloth. (Photograph Philippa Lawrence)

Figure 5. ‘Bound, Croft Castle’. 2009. (Photograph Philippa Lawrence)

Figure 6. ‘Bound, Cardiganshire’. 2006. (Photograph Jason Ingram)

Figure 7. ‘Bound, Anglesey. 2004. (Photograph Jason Ingram)

Figure 8. ‘Bound, Old Denbighshire. 2004. (Photograph Alex Ramsey)

Figure 9. Maurice Lea Park before Renovation. Image courtesy Magic Attic.

Figure 10. Coal Pickers on Gresely Common. Image courtesy Magic Attic.

Figure 11. Darning the Land’. 2011. (Photograph Philippa Lawrence)
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Thanks to Magic Attic, Swadlincote for their permission to use the archival photographs. My thanks also to the Arts Council of Wales for supporting ‘Bound 2003-2006' through a Creative Wales Award, and to Meadow Arts and re:place for the opportunities to develop new work.

END NOTES

[1] ‘The investigation of a specific site is a matter of extracting concepts out of existing sense-data through direct perceptions. Perception is prior to conception, when it comes to site selection or definition. One does not impose, but rather exposes the site – be it interior or exterior...The unknown areas of sites can be best explored by artists’.


[2] Our relationship with the land is complex. We see stability in its mute permanence and flux in its unending variances. We exploit and attack nature; wrestling from it the things we need to survive. Yet we are also aware of its transcendent imperturbably, its awesome uncontrollable power... ‘the forever unfinished lifework of our species...the only thing we have to preserve nature with is culture; the only thing we have to preserve wilderness with is domesticity’

[3] ‘Bound’ in English language has a connection to binding with thread but is also linked to bonding meaning a landmark in medieval Latin, as such it can be used in the sense of the limits to an area of land and can mean to surround or form the boundary of.

[4] ‘Bound’ framed the approach to Croft Castle (National Trust) as part of the ‘Tell It To The Trees’ project commissioned by Meadow Arts. A volunteer told us of the effect: ‘if 200 arrived, 150 walked up the hill to gaze at the huge Red Oak and then perhaps go on to the Iron Age Hill Fort. This was everyday, and when they return down the hill, the smiles are broad and hands are held.’

For our visitors, clearly the effect was one that connected them to the landscape and to each other, highlighting something around them that otherwise might go unappreciated or unacknowledged. Bound’s use of the existing trees connected with the spirit of place, for Croft has some of the oldest heritage oaks in the care of the National Trust. The use of fabric was important to the atmosphere of the work, requiring the detailed binding of a landscape element, an act bringing with it associations of memorialising through mummification... A simple act which created complex and nuanced reactions in those who saw it. The property manager said 2009 saw record visitor numbers to Croft Castle, and that the exhibition was a significant part of that success.

Bound, Croft Castle, 2009

‘the countryside being invented after cities are built…when people who live in cities start to visit it and think of it as the countryside’. Millar, J. (2005). PLACE. Thames & Hudson, London. p189

[6] One set of boundaries and borderlines are physically contested spaces that may be visible as a fence or barricade. The artist Lise Bjorne Linnert’s embroidered ‘Fence’ project approaches private or official spaces to leave a ‘soft trace’. In her words taken from her website the: ‘the action comes from a political engagement and a research into the possibility to point to macro political challenges from a micro perspective. This very quiet, yet intrusive action, starts with the boundaries of me and you, mine or yours, open or closed’. www.lisebjorne.com

This work draws attention to these spaces and lays a claim upon them in a similar way that the women at Greenham Common women tied fragments of clothing and domestic artifacts on the fences surrounding the base.
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