

Exhibition Guide

Sarah Browne

How to Use Fool's Gold

15 February – 22 April 2012

First Floor Galleries and Tower Room

Hamish Fulton

15 February – 22 April 2012

Second Floor Galleries

Postcards From Japan *— A Message*

From Tohoku Artists

15 February – 22 April 2012

Ikon stairwell

IKON

Sarah Browne *How to Use Fool's Gold*
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The following are from Sarah Browne's own writing on *How to Use Fool's Gold*.

On 'fool's gold'

Otherwise known as pyrite, 'fool's gold' is a crystalline mineral with a lustrous metallic appearance, sometimes mistaken for gold while prospecting. For me it evokes ideas of desire and naiveté in relation to the material resources that define wealth, as well as the less rational factors that underpin large-scale social and economic crises. *How to Use Fool's Gold* is the name of a work in the exhibition; it involves using a piece of pyrite as a detector in a very basic radio set. This enables the reception of an audible radio signal from the air without any electrical input at all. The work is a pragmatic and a poetic attempt to fashion something out of almost nothing, to repurpose materials thought to be without value. This attitude to the art object, which has its own uncertain value or surprising potential, is also suggested by other works in the exhibition.

On titles

I always give titles to works. I use writing, text and publishing in different ways in my practice, and I am particular about language. I find titles useful for establishing the field of enquiry or the territory of a given work, such as the location, context or protagonists involved – *Second*

Burial at Le Blanc; Carpet for the Irish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Sometimes a title is a tool to will the work into being. It can also be a useful focal point for discussion if working with other people and trying to communicate the essence of an idea.

On artistic practice

The ethos of the sculpture department where I studied in Dublin, at the National College of Art and Design, was steeped in socially-engaged practices. So my understanding of sculpture came from a consideration of how objects can materialise certain social or political relationships at a given moment. Anthropologist Marcel Mauss talks about the gift as an object within an economic system of 'total exchange'. That is, something whose value is non-monetary, or not only monetary, and subject to constant negotiation. I am interested in thinking about art works as objects of similarly peculiar value that can be inserted into and reflect such systems.

My practice borrows techniques and research from the social sciences, particularly anthropology and economics, though without the expertise or the objectivity such disciplines might aspire to. The challenge as an artist is how to bring criticality and rigour to such a practice of knowledge production when you are making all of your own rules.

On collaboration

Learning about a given context through sharing with others is a key drive of the work. Some projects have involved me

learning a certain skill (knitting, upholstery, using a hand-wound 16mm camera), and others have involved requesting or commissioning the particular skills and expertise of others. These include Alana (Keaney, who knotted the carpet); Jack (Phelan, who built and programmed the ticker tape countdown clock); and Geoff (Roberts, who helped me with making the crystal radio). The works set questions that I am typically not equipped to answer on my own, though I don't see 'collaboration' as the correct term to use for this process. As I am setting the terms of the enquiry, I am the author of the work seen in the gallery, and accountable as such. However, the diverse participants and contributors to each work are clearly essential to how its questions are addressed.

On her interest in the past

There is a Russian proverb that claims the past is becoming more unpredictable than the future. Our comprehension of 'the past' for me is no different to our understanding of the present or the future: all of these temporal experiences are malleable and can be willfully imagined, mis-remembered or repurposed. They are all equally important and equally plural. I am more interested in an attitude towards the past than the past in and of itself: nostalgia for example is a pseudo-Greek term from the 1600s that was initially a medical diagnosis for Swiss mercenaries away from the mountains during war. Such a longing for an idealised past, rooted in a certain place, often proved to be fatal. I am concerned with the desire for alternative futures, which may be seeded in alternative pasts. This kind of feeling is necessary in order to develop new forms of political imagination.

On technology

For certain works I have used technologies that are on the point of becoming redundant (though not actually obsolete yet), such as film. There is a moment where the use of such technology suddenly becomes a matter of craftsmanship. I see myself more as a maker of 'things' than of images, so when embarking on projects that deal with the closure of a factory or the disappearance of a currency, film seems to hold that information closer to itself. (I've become interested in magnetic tape recording recently too.) Both are analogue technologies: there is a direct relationship between the finite quality of time available and the physical quantity of stock used, and therefore I feel a kind of synchronicity between what the recording represents and what it materially 'is'. I am not at all interested in using old technology simply for some kind of visual effect or retro appeal; it depends on what's appropriate for a given work, which has its own frame and set of contingencies.

A full colour publication accompanies the exhibition, priced £20, special exhibition price £18. It includes essays by Tessa Giblin, Curator of Visual Arts, Project Arts Centre, and artist Jeremy Millar, plus texts by graphic designer Chris Lee and anthropologist Marshal Sahlins. Visit Ikon's online shop at www.ikon-gallery.co.uk/shop

Second Burial at Le Blanc and the exhibition catalogue are co-produced by Project Arts Centre, Dublin, Ikon Gallery and Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver.

Sarah Browne's exhibition *How to Use Fool's Gold* is supported by Culture Ireland and The Arts Council Ireland.

Hamish Fulton
15 February – 22 April 2012
Second Floor Galleries

Hamish Fulton *Walking in Relation to Everything*

Introduction

Concerned not to be represented as a land artist or a conceptual artist, Hamish Fulton describes himself simply as a 'walking artist'. His approach to making art is perhaps best summed up in the simple statement of intent: "If I do not walk, I cannot make a work of art."

This exhibition, a collaboration between Ikon and Turner Contemporary, Margate, combines new and existing works that have a strong sense of place. At Ikon the installation consists entirely of wall pieces. With strong upper-case sans serif text they exemplify Fulton's counteraction to the "relief of wordless art".

The following extract by Hamish Fulton is from the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition:

WALKing

"Never write anything. You'll only regret it." Don Whillans, legendary English climber, 1983.

The artist may not be the best person to write about their own work but, art historians whose job it is to write about art do not research the vast world of walking, and walking is the subject of all my art. The climber talks straight, but the writer exaggerates.

I am a contemporary artist, not a writer. I think in statements, not continuous sentences.

WALKing is a seven letter word.

I attempt to apply the 'ideas' of contemporary art onto the existing conventions of 'normal' walking. In theory, I accept all forms of walking, there is no hierarchy – only comparisons.

It is my hope, by introducing one or two ideas (in this exhibition) ... that I may be able to 'shed some light' on my thinking and influences. Let the art speak for itself – I don't think so. Some people have said my art is difficult to understand. Perhaps, this is because walking – the central theme for 100% of my art, lies outside of what is considered art.

Outside, is a seven letter word.

WALKING IS AN ARTFORM IN ITS OWN RIGHT.

(As time passes the physical action of walking only becomes more and more important.)

Made in England. I have exhibited internationally since 1969 and lived in Kent since 1970. I would like to thank both Victoria Pomery and Jonathan Watkins – who invited me to make exhibitions within days of each other – for this rare opportunity to show my art in England.

Publications are a vital part of Hamish Fulton's practice. An illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition, priced £9.95. It includes extensive artist's notes and an interview between Fulton and Erling Kagge, acclaimed Norwegian adventurer. To coincide with his exhibition at Ikon Fulton has also made a limited edition print. Visit Ikon's online shop at www.ikon-gallery.co.uk/shop

Hamish Fulton's exhibition is supported by the Henry Moore Foundation.

Associated Events

In Conversation

Saturday 7 April, 6.30–7.30pm – FREE

Join Hamish Fulton and Jonathan Watkins, Ikon Director, as they discuss a variety of topics relating to the artist's work including different categories of walks, the Tibet issue and the influence of mountaineering. Places should be reserved by calling Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

Group Walk with Hamish Fulton

Sunday 8 April, 2.30–4.30pm – FREE

Hamish Fulton leads a city-centre walk. Booking is essential by calling Ikon on 0121 248 0708. Organised in collaboration with Fierce Festival as part of *Re-Tracing the City*, a programme of walking-based public artwork.

Postcards From Japan – A Message From Tohoku Artists

15 February – 22 April 2012

Ikon stairwell

Sculptors Hironori Katagiri and Kate Thomson were working in their studio in the countryside of Iwate when the major earthquake, and subsequent tsunami and nuclear disaster, struck Tohoku (north eastern Japan) on 11 March, 2011. Power supplies, land lines, mobile phone networks and internet access immediately went down, making it extremely difficult to contact family and friends. The Japanese postal service – Japan Post – was quickly up and running again, and in many cases the first news that loved ones were safe was by postcard.

Inspired by the impact postcards can have, Thomson and Katagiri invited artists from the stricken region to make new work for an exhibition to be shown across the world. The priority in the devastated regions is to re-build communities and livelihoods. Life goes on: art is vital in celebrating life, and can help to nurture the imagination, energy and determination to move on.

This project was the catalyst for many of the artists to make new work for the first time since the disaster. Even artists who had lost so much in the tsunami were keen to celebrate life and international communication. The results are beautiful and poignant works that give insight into the extraordinary grace and resilience of the Japanese spirit. Some reflect on nature, others on family and community,

and some are peaceful abstract meditations, while others incorporate artefacts cast off by the sea and infuse them with new meaning. All discuss issues raised by the triple disaster and ongoing aftermath.

People in Japan were touched and encouraged by the enormous support from all over the world. All the artists in this exhibition would like to take this opportunity to say thank you.

It is important to share the lessons from the Japanese experience since March 2011, and recognise that priorities in life should be family, friends, community and the necessity to find sustainable ways of surviving in harmony with nature.

The project continues and in reply, artists of any age or stage in their career, from around the world, are invited to make 'Postcards To Japan' and post them to Tohoku as tangible messages of support to communities affected by the devastation.

Please see www.postcardproject.org for the address to send to and more information.

A fully illustrated catalogue, priced £5, is available from Ikon Shop, or can be ordered at www.postcardproject.org with all profits going to support artists in Tohoku working on recovery projects in the regions hit by the tsunami.

Postcards From Japan – A Message From Tohoku Artists is supported by the Daiwa Anglo Japanese Foundation and The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation.

Associated Events

Meet the Curators

Wednesday 15 February, 4–5pm – FREE

Café Ikon

Kate Thomson and Hironori Katagiri, curators of *Postcards From Japan* lead an informal discussion about the exhibition and their personal experiences and observations on the effect of the Japanese tsunami. They will also be signing copies of the catalogue. No need to book, just drop in. Join us afterwards at the opening of Ikon's new exhibitions (6–8pm).

One Year On

Artist Workshop with Elizabeth Rowe

Sunday 11 March, 1–4pm – FREE*

To mark the first anniversary of the Japanese tsunami, artist Elizabeth Rowe leads an afternoon of collage activity, giving visitors a chance to make their own creative response to this poignant date. Suitable for all ages. No need to book, just drop in. *We will be collecting donations for the Japanese Red Cross.

For more information about these artists and our off-site programme please visit the Resource Room where you can find a selection of books, audio and film.

If you have any questions about the exhibition please ask the Visitor Assistants in the gallery.

Ikon Gallery, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS
Open Tuesday–Sunday, 11am–6pm, free entry
0121 248 0708 / www.ikon-gallery.co.uk

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