



P A U S E

Chris
Wainwright

University
of the Arts
London

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Professor Chris Wainwright
in conversation with
Quentin Cooper

PAUSE
Chris
Wainwright



Cover image

Pause

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Inkjet print

2014

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S Q U A R I N G
T H E C I R C L E

SQUARING THE CIRCLE

One of the earliest and sustained reference points over the last thirty five years that has informed my photographic practice, is that of British landscape painting, in particular the nocturnal landscapes of three artists, Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-1797) and John Martin (1789-1854). The period of time during which these artists were active, from around 1750 to 1880, represented a significant period in history that effectively witnessed the beginning of the end of romanticism and straddled both the birth of photography and the era of the industrial revolution. It is also a critical period when the visual representation of landscape changed with the invention of photography, the role of documentation, hitherto aligned exclusively to painting and the graphic arts.

‘The Harvest at Night’ (1835) by Samuel Palmer is a specific example along with a wider body of nocturnal works by Joseph Wright of Derby made in Derbyshire, also my home county in the Midlands area of the UK, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution and some of Britain’s most beautiful landscape. Whilst much of Wright’s work sits firmly within the classic

British pictorial tradition he was painting at the time of the Industrial Revolution and is widely recognised as someone who captured the spirit of the age of industrial technological innovation and the birth of the age of capitalism. Interestingly much of our science data that refers to changes in our climate indicate



Samuel Palmer, 'Harvest at Night' circa 1835

that the significant period of change and the sharp increase in carbon emissions began at the time of the



Joseph Wright of Derby, 'Lighthouse' circa 1789

industrial revolution in the late 18th and beginning of the 19th century.

A consequence of such an identification with painting of this era is the implicit relationship with notions of the sublime and beauty, prompting the inevitable association with romanticism. It is my intention therefore to propose that the sublime can and should be revisited in relation to contemporary landscape representation with reference to the increasingly pressing issues of climate change, the frequency of

dramatic and devastating natural disasters and the endless environmental impact of our global out of control materialist and consumerist tendencies, and the subsequent energy production required to satisfy those needs.

I see this as an opportunity to look at the relationship between landscape and environment and for a re evaluation of the role of the sublime and its relevance to contemporary photographic practice, as well as rethinking the importance picture making as a primary activity and avoid the potential instrumentalisation that occurs when too closely associated with a particular issue. I for example would not define myself as a climate change artist even though my work is significantly informed by the urgent need to address the extreme changes to our climate as a result of human activity. There needs however to be a continual critical distance from the issues in order for the photographic works to function pluralistically and with reference also to informed and relevant visual traditions and theories of representation. In other words to seek to problematise the relationship of the photographic representation of beauty in the light of imagined and impending catastrophe.

Edmund Burke in 'A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful' published in 1757, a text often cited as linking the sublime and beauty with romanticism, equally considers power, pain, darkness, ugliness, fear and terror as aspects of the sublime, a set of terms so often used to articulate our current condition in the face of devastating floods, earthquakes forest fires, droughts etc with their attendant loss of life and livelihood.

What place in this scenario does spirituality, mythology, ethics and the inability to justify or articulate effectively our relationship to the seismic changes to our planet play? I would argue that to consider the relevance of the sublime as inappropriate or a romantic notion in this context, is too simplistic and maybe misses the point. We need to develop a new language of representation that seeks to encompass not just a rehabilitation of beauty, but looks to embrace a wider notion of the sublime that breaks away from the misrepresentations of its attachment to the historical notion of romanticism.

The third artist whose work continues to be a reference point and a link to my rethinking the

sublime is John Martin. In particular the monumental painting 'The Great Day of His Wrath' (1851-53)

Martin's aim in producing this work as one of a series of three was highly romantic, intended to express the sublime, apocalyptic force of nature and



John Martin, 'The Great Day of His Wrath', 1851-53

the helplessness of man to combat God's will. Of all Martin's biblical scenes, this presents his most cataclysmic vision of destruction, featuring an entire city being torn up and thrown into the abyss; a work made at the peak of the Industrial Revolution

¹ 'Futureland Now' was an exhibition by Chris Wainwright and John Kippin, curated by Liz Wells for The Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle Upon Tyne. UK in 2012-13.

It followed on from the original exhibition Futureland in 1989 in highlighting the changing postindustrial landscapes of 'The North'.

Returning to the present and to the reference to John Martin. 'The Great Day of His Wrath' was selected as a key work to be included in a recent exhibition, 'Futureland Now'¹ that examined the post industrialisation of the North East of England and linking it to other parts of the world where there were parallels and questions of how to represent the post industrial sublime.

In March 2011 I was working in Japan preparing for 'Futureland Now' and left on the 7th March, four days before the Great North Eastern Earthquake and Tsunami. Like many around the world I viewed footage of the tsunami and the aftermath of mass coastal destruction and the incomprehensible loss of over 20,000 lives, with many others missing who were never found. I was struck by the way the Japanese appeared to deal with such devastation and loss in a manner that combined a controlled private grief and a degree of fatalism, with a level of efficient mechanistic organisation and controlled civic response that was both extensive and immediate. Of course the reality is somewhat different for the complex political, social and economic tasks of rebuilding communities and the reconciliation of such profound loss. This is compounded by the one issue that seemed

incomprehensible and underestimated at the time, the long term effects of continuing radiation leaks from the damaged nuclear power plant at Fukushima Daiichi.

I returned to Japan and the devastated coastal area of the Tōhoku Region in 2012 with an intention to make a series of works at Minamisanriku, Ishinomaki and Kesennuma where there was now a contingent relationship between land and water, not purely determined by the tides, but altered forever and reshaped by the massive impact and force of the tsunami waves. Most of the destroyed areas had been tidied up and waste and debris sorted into neat mountainous piles, crushed cars, concrete, trees, and steel, etc and a series of temporary buildings and community support infrastructures were beginning to take shape. The only punctuations besides the skeletons of derelict buildings, were a handful of ships carried many kilometers inland and left high and dry once the waters had receded. The places where there were once thriving towns were now manicured landscapes with only the shadow like gridlines of roads visible, reminiscent of Robert Adams seminal photographs of the of rapidly constructed townscapes growing out of the inhospitable flat plains of the

American Midwest. In the title essay of his book 'Beauty in Photography' in 1981, he wrote:

"If the proper goal of art is, as I now believe, "Beauty, the Beauty that concerns me is that of Form. Beauty is, in my view, a synonym for the coherence and structure underlying life. . . . Why is Form beautiful? Because, I think, it helps us meet our worst fear, the suspicion that life might be chaos and that therefore our suffering is without meaning."

The defining factor however when considering what happened in the Tōhoku region in 2011 is that whilst there was an uncomfortable but undeniable profound aesthetic of sublime destruction, the result of awesome power and incomprehensible forces of nature, there was the underlying nuclear issue. The Japanese people have for centuries lived with the threat and history of the earthquake. In popular mythology there is a giant catfish, the Namazu that lives under the land and is held in place by the Kashima god. When the god loses concentration and his hold on the catfish, it starts to move and thrash around causing earthquakes and tidal waves.



'The Namazu tamed by the Kashima God' Japanese illustration, date unknown

A cartoon drawing of a catfish is used still as a symbol

for earthquake alerts and on earthquake monitoring devices.

This may explain in part the apparent fatalistic response to the 2011 disaster as something that was inevitable. The nuclear contamination threat however is a different matter as there is no precedent, no historical reference, no language as such that explains or locates the situation historically. The nearest reference to nuclear devastation is the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 6 August 1945. We are entering here again into the realm of the sublime, where language fails, where the sheer weight of heightened emotion, of the dark, the fear, the terror, that Burke refers to. Too terrible to imagine and capable of rendering one speechless.

² 'A Catalogue of Errors' was an exhibition at The Diawa Foundation, London in 2013 and consisted of work made in Japan before and after the 2011 earthquake. 'A Catalogue of Errors'², is a series of works I produced in Tōhoku on my return in 2012 that makes reference to the continued radiation fallout from Fukushima Daiichi, recognising the earthquake as a natural disaster, but questioning the wisdom of designing and building a nuclear power station in such a potentially vulnerable location and the unpreparedness for the consequences of it suffering

major damage. The long term effects of radiation contamination that shows little sign of being halted are of great concern in terms of supporting a relocated population and the ability of the landscape to support vital agriculture.

As in previous bodies of work, 'A Catalogue of Errors' uses the semi obsolete semaphore signaling system as a form of visual language, in particular the symbol for 'Error' performed as an act of drawing for the camera using light wands commonly used in Japan by the authorities for managing traffic flows and for regulating crowd movements. The error in this instance, a reference to the human errors of judgment in relation to the damaged power station.

In the technological age of the twenty first century semaphore is a means of communication that few understand, an obsolete language rooted in maritime history. If however our complex technologically reliant communications systems were to fail, or be rendered inoperative, due to loss of power as the result of catastrophic disasters such as floods, earthquakes, acts of terrorism, technical malfunction, hacking etc, then semaphore would be our only non technological



form of visual communication. However semaphore would be inadequate to do more than simply signal and highlight events. We would be more reliant than ever on our imagination and the remembrance of notions such as beauty and horror in particular, in a changed world.

The “squaring of the circle”, or the solving of the problem as the term implies in this scenario, might require us to imagine and review the sublime as a means of addressing that which is unthinkable.

Chris Wainwright

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Chris Wainwright **Error**, Aldeburgh, Suffolk. 2011'

Ship at Kesenuma
Tohoku Region, Japan
2012



Robin Hood's Stride

Derbyshire

Black and white
photographic print

1975

Nine Stone Copse
Derbyshire
Black and white
photographic print
1975



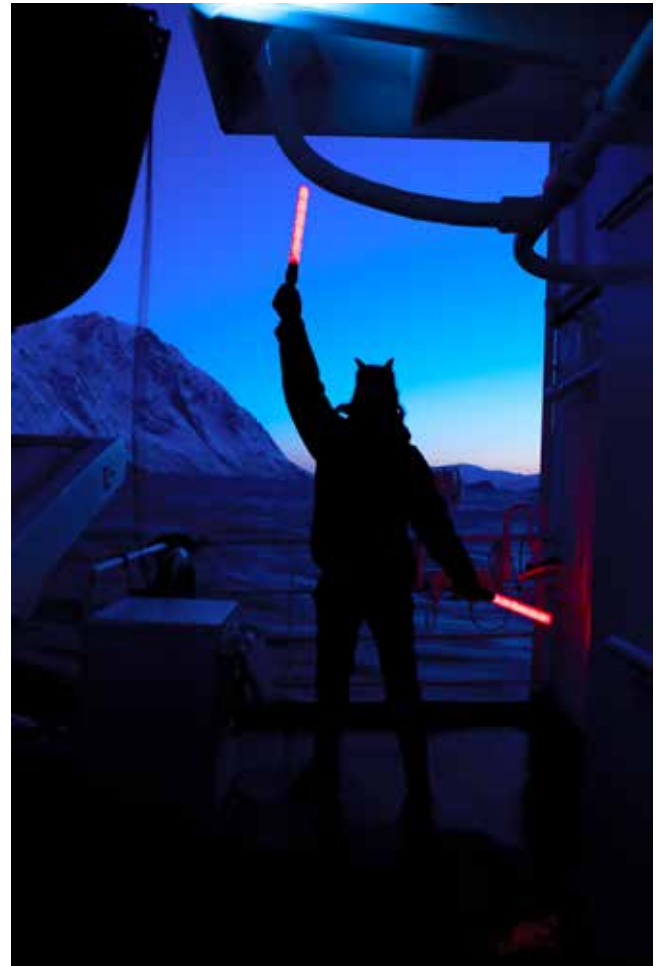
P R O J E C T S

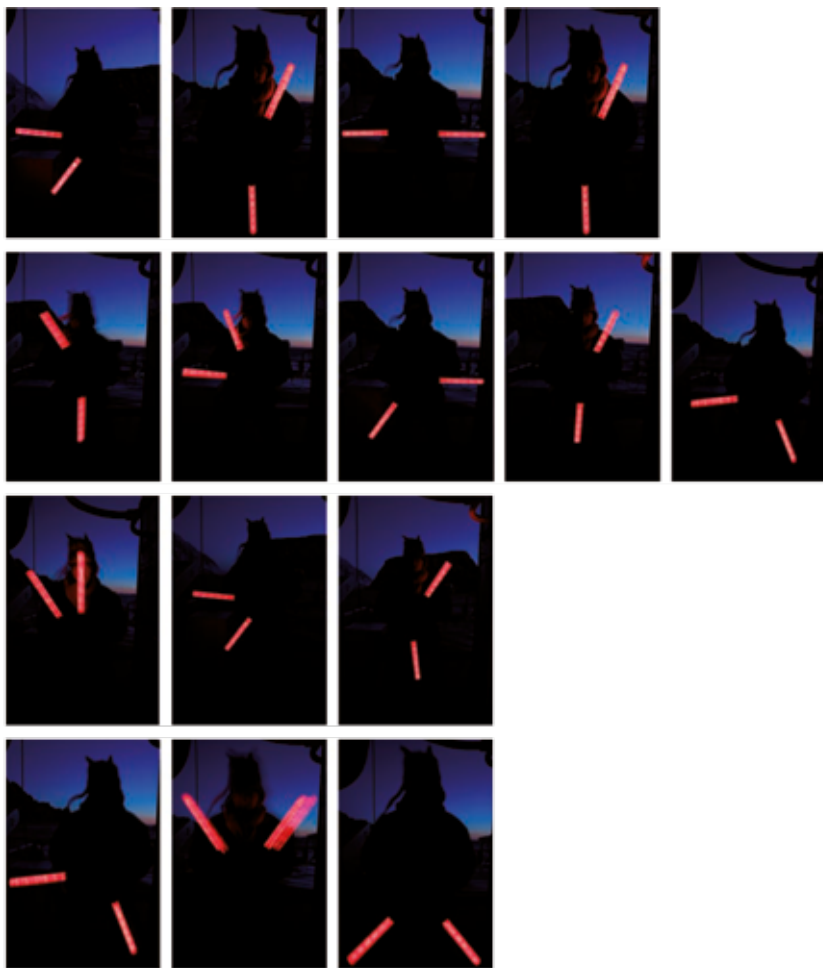
HERE COMES THE SUN - THERE GOES THE ICE

On board the *Grigory Mikheev*, Disko Bay, West Greenland

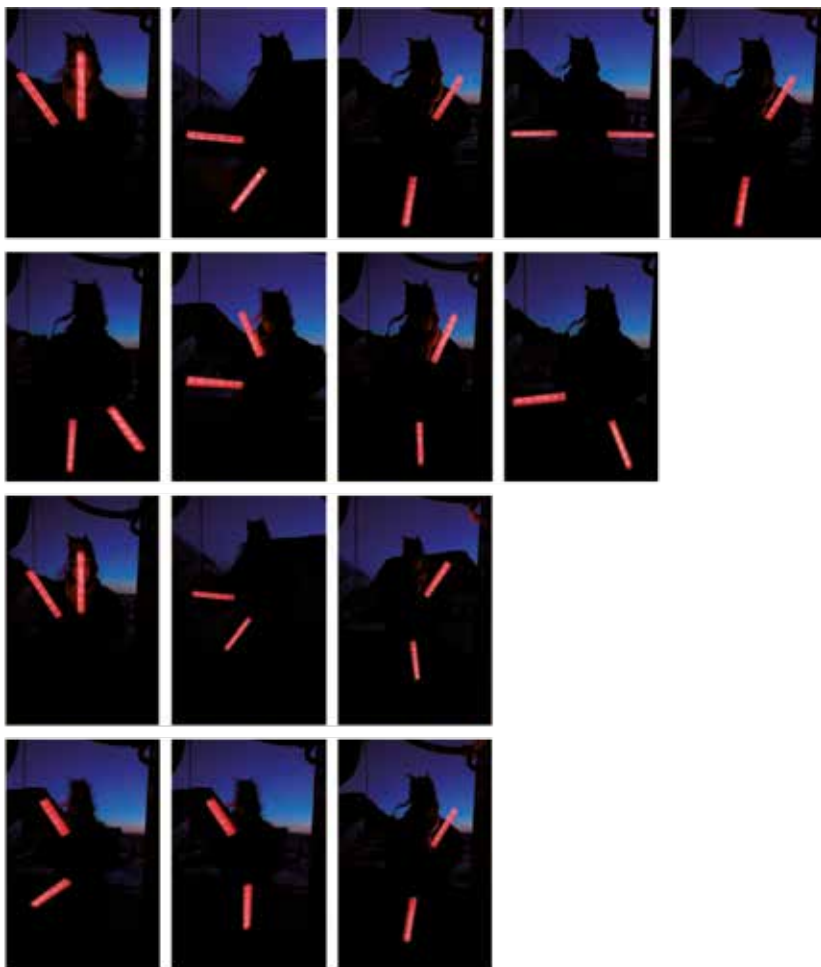
Inkjet prints

2009





HERE COMES THE SUN



THERE GOES THE ICE

RED ICE - WHITE ICE

Disko Bay, West Greenland

C-Type and Inkjet prints

2009















Film stills

From *Burning Ice*

Director. Peter Gilbert

2009

A CATALOGUE OF ERRORS

Tohoku Region, Japan

Inkjet prints

2013

- p. 33. Error # 1 at Ishinomaki
- p. 34. Error # 1 at Kesenuma
- p. 35. Error # 3 at Minamisanriku
- p. 36. Error # 4 at Minamisanriku
- p. 37. Pause at Minamisanriku











FUTURELAND NOW

Exhibition

Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne

With John Kippin

Curated by Liz Wells

2013-2014

p. 39. **Error at Teesside**

p. 40. **Error at Wearside**

p. 41. **Error at Blyth**







POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Exhibition

House of Photography, Stockholm

With Katerina Mistal

Curated by Hans Hedberg

2014

Departing for *The Lady of Avenel*

Isle of Mull, Scotland

Inkjet print

2013







Firehills, Sheffield

Black and white photographs
1974

WHERE ICE COMES TO DIE

Various locations around Svalbard, The High Arctic
Inkjet Prints
2012

Sailing due east off the north coast of Spitsbergen in bad weather and rough sea. Heading towards White Island (Kvitoya). We watched the movie 'Mary Shelley's Frankenstein' with the ship pitching and rolling as we sailed through the night, secured ourselves in our seats and endured the film with an eye always on the dramatically shifting horizon, occasionally visible through the portholes.

The level of arctic sea ice today was the lowest ever recorded.
Diary entry 16 September 2011

MS Stockholm
Holmiabukta
Spitzbergen
Inkjet print
2012





Film still

From 'Mary Shelly's Frankenstein'

Director. Kenneth Branagh

Tristar Pictures

1994

Pause
Holmiabukta
Spitzbergen
Inkjet print
2012





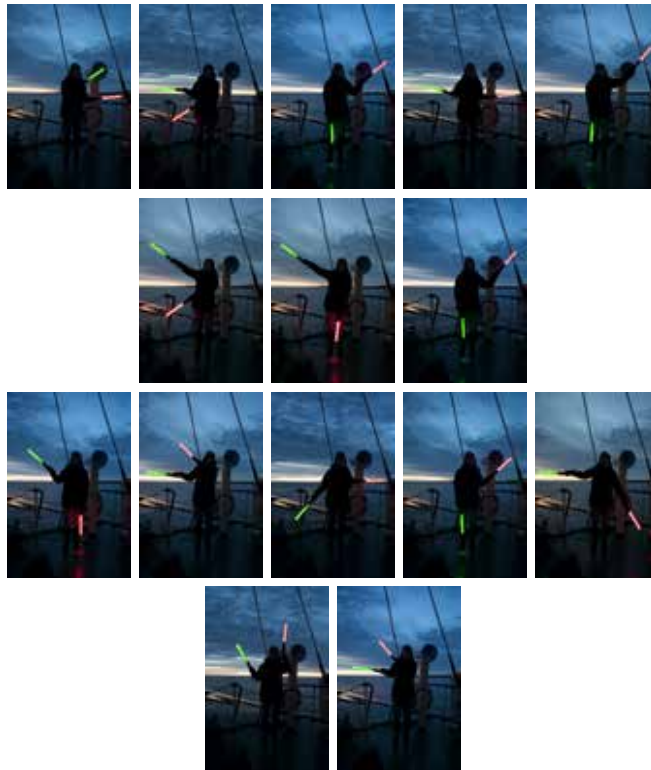
Light Wands
on Floating Ice

Holmiabukta

Spitzbergen

Inkjet print

2012



Where Ice Comes To Die

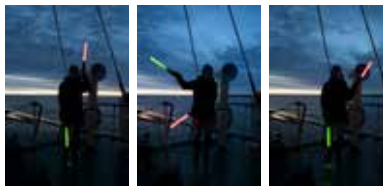
80·2° Latitude Off The North Coast

Of Spitsbergen

16 September 2011

Inkjet prints

2012



WE ARE ALL STARS

Iwate Prefecture, Tohoku, Japan
Inkjet prints
2014

One of the deeply ingrained memories from my last visit to Kamaishi, is the recollection of survivors telling me just how clear the sky was the night of the tsunami on the 11 March 2011, with no electricity to pollute the night sky and how bright the stars were. As they looked up to the sky they pondered on the fate of those who had been swept away and lost out at sea and wondered had their souls been transformed into the stars above? Many people were 'taken' by the tsunami and never found. They remain to this day, in the transitional and restless space between worlds.

'We Are All Stars' is a call for individual and collective resilience, a positive approach to a post survival future, with the knowledge that the forces of nature, not for the first time in history, have exerted such devastation on the area.

Error at Ōfunato
Inkjet print
2014







We Are All Stars (1 to 8)

Light drawings/performance

Horiakan

Inkjet prints

2014





We Are All Stars (9 to 18)

Light drawings/performance

Kamaishi

Inkjet prints

2014



Ketsudan (Decision)

Photo/performance

Kamaishi

Inkjet print

2014

Ashita (Tomorrow)
Photo/performance
Kamaishi
Inkjet print
2014





Survive

Photo/performance

Rikuzentakata

Inkjet print

2014

Almost Full Circle

Light drawing

Kamaishi

Inkjet print

2014



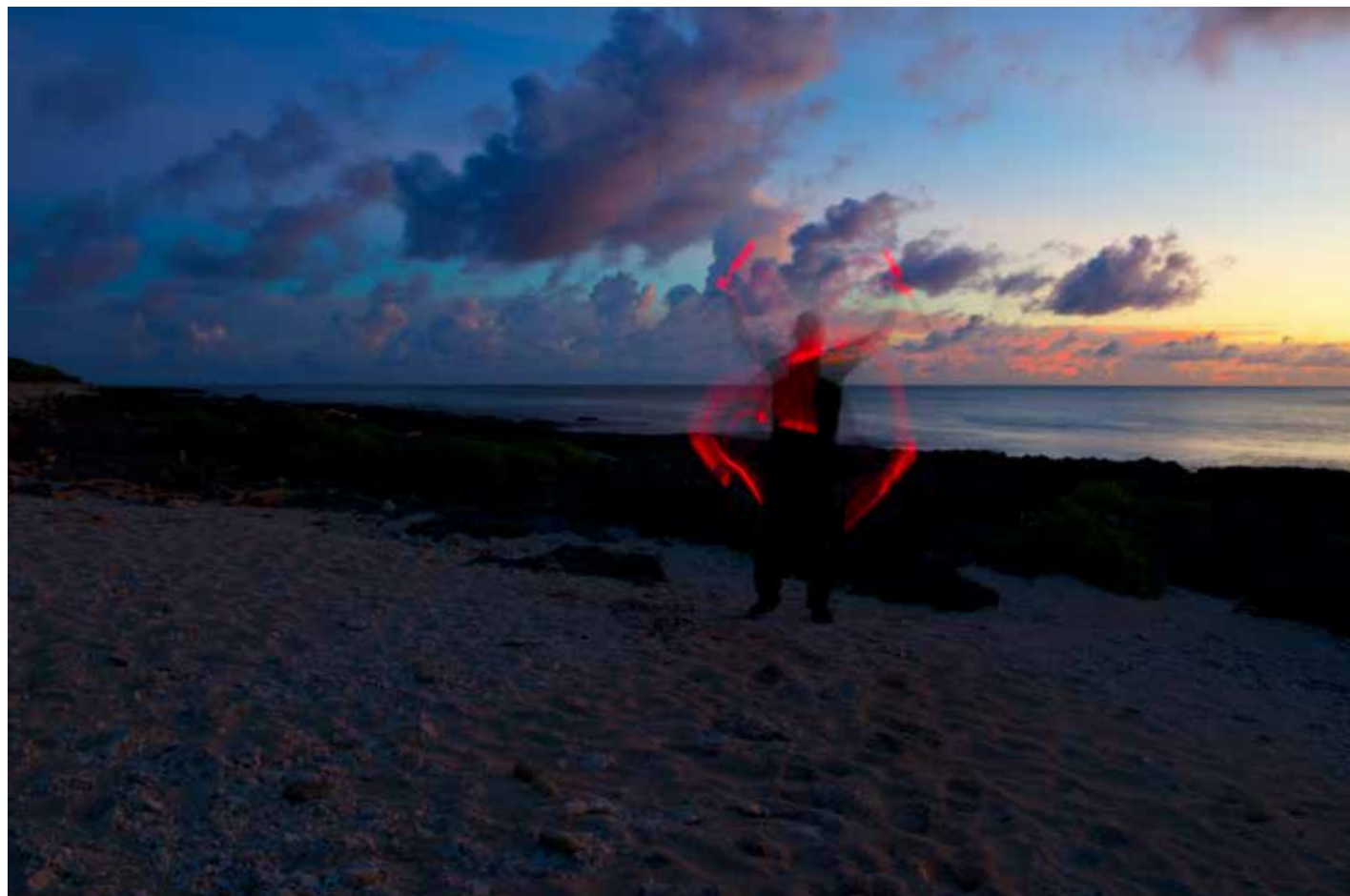
CARVED INTO THE BONE OF A TURTLE

Kenting, Taiwan

Photo/performance during Moon Festival

Inkjet prints

2014















C U R A T I O N

U - N - F - O - L - D

International Touring Exhibition

Co-curated with David Buckland for Cape Farewell

23 artists responding to climate change

Vienna, Austria: London, Newcastle, Liverpool, Newlyn, UK:

Chicago, New York, USA: and Beijing, China

2009-2013

- p. 73. **Greenhouse Gas**
Sunand Prasad with Chris Wainwright
Disko Bay, West Greenland
Inkjet print
2009
- p. 74-77. U-n-f-o-l-d installation
Central Academy of Fine Art Museum, Beijing, China
2013
- p. 78,79. **400 Parts Per Million**
U-n-f-o-l-d workshop at Olympic Park, Beijing
Inkjet prints
2013















TROUBLED WATERS

Exhibition

Featuring installation works by: Sarah Dobai, Anne Lydiat,
Martin Newth, William Raban, and Chris Wainwright

KUANDU Museum of Fine Art, Taipei, Taiwan

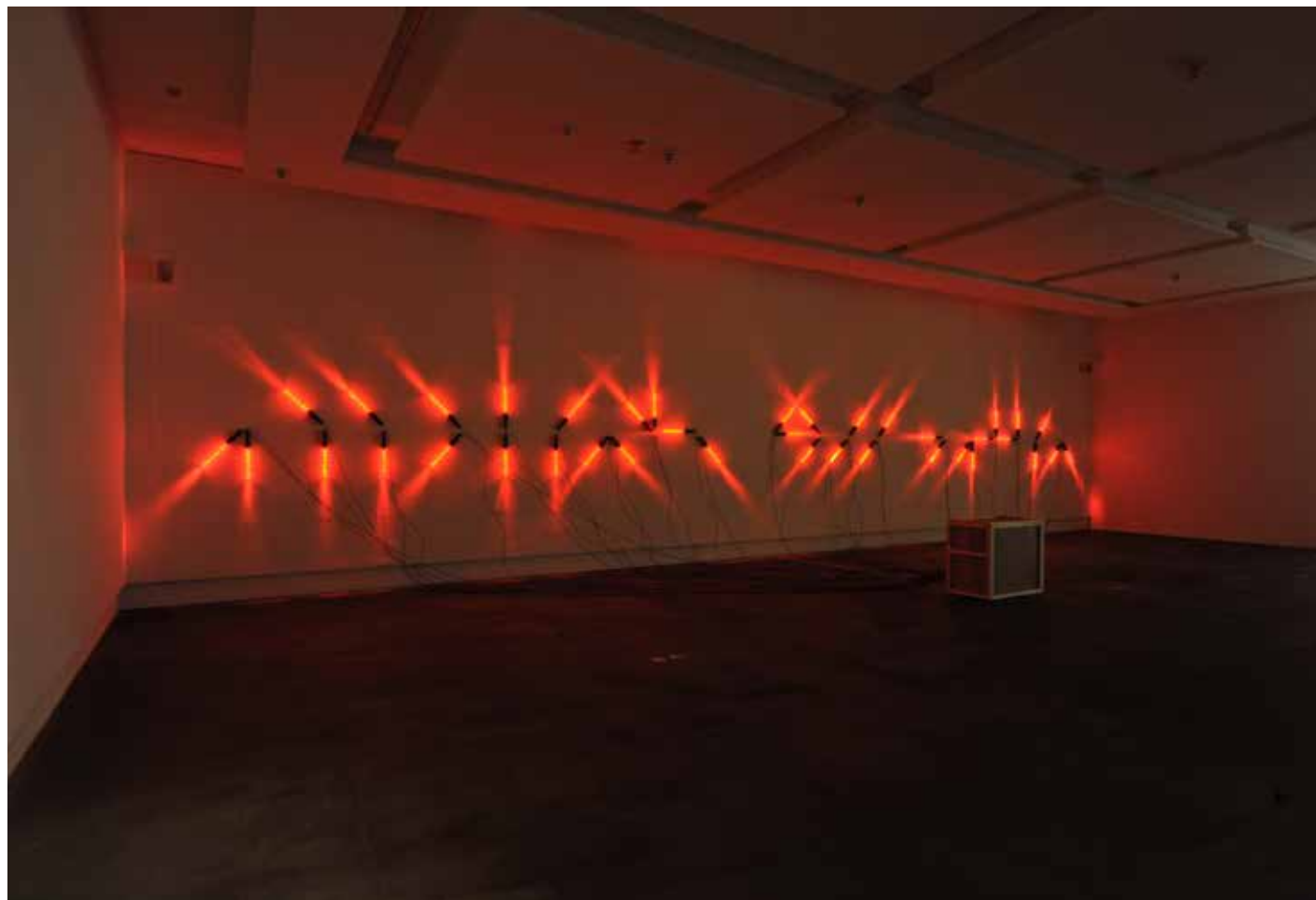
2013

Accidents Will Happen

Light wands, CAT cables, amplifier,
CD player, speakers, shipping crate,

Inkjet print

2013





Sarah Dobai, William Raban,
Martin Newth
Video Installations
2013
84

Anne Lydiat
Still
Wall drawing, chalk,
nautical chart, plumb line
2013



WHAT HAS TO BE DONE

Voyages on The Lady of Avenel around
The Scottish Western Isles
14 participants
2013
11 Participants
2014

What Has To Be Done is a cross disciplinary cultural network that addresses key environmental issues and in particular, the increasing effects of climate disruption. The network is based on an action research and cultural practice model involving a combination of European and worldwide partnerships, utilising effective means of environmentally conscious participation, communication and dissemination.

The network makes a number of references to the notion of the voyage as a central methodology of collective exploration of both ideas and territory. In particular the use of a sailing ship that maximises wind and tidal power and requires active engagement by all participants, is central to the concept of 'What Has To Be Done'. The vessel is considered as an almost perfect immersive model to support a group of participants that facilitates co dependency, collective responsibility and common purpose, to explore the threat, fear and excitement of the unknown. It promotes the ability to transcend the every day, to stimulate an intensive period of critical thinking, ideas formulation, reflection and activity.

A key reference and inspiration for the network is the series of voyages made around the Scottish Western Isles by the Richard Demarco's Edinburgh Arts in conjunction with German artist Joseph Beuys in 1980/81 on the historic sailing ship *The Marques*.

What Has To Be Done

Photo/performance

Aldeburgh, Suffolk

Inkjet print

2011





a.



c.



b.



d.

a+b *The Marques*

1980-1981

c+d *The Lady of Avenel*

2013-2014

The Lady of Avenel underway

Scottish Western Isles

2013







Film stills

From *What Has to Be Done*

Director. Chris Wainwright

2011

M E T A -

BIOGRAPHY - CHRIS WAINWRIGHT

Professor Chris Wainwright is an artist and curator whose practice is located in photography, performance and installation. His recent exhibitions include: 'Those Who Go East' White Conduit Projects, London 2015: 'Carved Into the Bone of a Turtle'

The Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei, Taiwan 2015. 'Troubled Waters' Kuandu Museum of Fine Art, Taipei, Taiwan, 2013: 'A Catalogue of Errors, The Diawa Foundation, London, 2013: 'Futureland Now with John Kippin', Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, UK, 2012-13: 'Between Time and Space', Heijo Palace, Nara, Japan, 2010: 'The Moons of Higashiyama', Kodai-ji temple, Kyoto, Japan, 2009: 'Between Land and Sea', Box 38 Ostende, Belgium, 2008: 'Trauma', The Culturcentrum, Brugge, Belgium, 2008.

He recently co-curated a major international touring exhibition for Cape Farewell called 'U-n-f-o-l-d' that profiled the work of 23 artists addressing aspects of climate change. The exhibition was shown in Vienna, London, Newcastle, Newlyn, Liverpool, Chicago, New York and Beijing, 2009-2013. He is currently a lead artist and advisor on a three year project with Future Lab Tohoku, to provide a cross disciplinary arts based

contribution to the social rebuilding and cultural enhancement in the Kamaishi area in the Iwate Prefecture of the Tohoku Region of Japan, devastated by the 2011 tsunami and earthquake.

His work is held in many major collections including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; The Arts Council of England; Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris: the Polaroid Corporation, Boston, USA: and Unilever, London, and is previously a member of The Tate Britain Council and currently an advisor to Cape Farewell, an artist run organisation responding to climate disruption. He has recently been appointed to the Board of Directors of the Today Art Museum, Beijing and is artistic convener of the environmental network 'What Has To Be Done'.



Professor Chris Wainwright would like to thank the following individuals and organisations in particular who have collaborated with him and assisted and supported the projects featured in this publication. Much of the authored work and curatorial projects rely on specialist knowledge, mutual concerns and shared interests without which much of the work would not have been possible to devise and create and present:

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BIOGRAPHY - QUENTIN COOPER

Described by the Times as both “the world’s most enthusiastic man” and “an expert on everything from pop music to astrophysics”, by the Daily Mail as someone whose “wit and enthusiasm can enliven the duller of topics” and by Jeremy Paxman as a “jammy so & so”*, Quentin appears regularly on radio, TV and in print and hosts a diverse range of events in Britain and beyond from major conferences to public talks to media training.

One of the most familiar and popular voices of science in the UK, he’s written and presented many hundreds of programmes including for over a decade fronting Britain’s most listened to science show, the live weekly *Material World* on BBC Radio 4 – hailed as “quite the best thing on radio” by Bill Bryson and “the most accessible, funny and conversational science programme on radio” by the Radio Times. He’s also as of 2014 Creative Director of Science Oxford, one of the UK’s largest science outreach organisations, and continues to host the UK and International finals of *FameLab*, rated as “the world’s leading science communication competition” by BBC World Service, and “the best time we’ve had

in months” by Nobel prize-winning co-discoverer of DNA James Watson. Quentin writes a regular column for BBC Worldwide linking science and fiction, and has presented, produced and been a regular contributor to countless other science, technology, arts and entertainment programmes across BBC radio and television, Channel 4, the Discovery Channel, ITV and other channels. In his – limited – spare time still manages to be a film critic on BBC World, Radio 2 and elsewhere.

His “major contribution to the public understanding of science & engineering” has been formally recognised in the last couple of years with honorary doctorates from Edinburgh University and Heriot-Watt University, as well as by being made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry. His first degree is also from Edinburgh University where he studied Artificial Intelligence and Psychology, and he went on to get a Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism Studies from University College Cardiff. He was briefly one half of a click-boxing duo with Oscar-, Grammy- & MTV-award winner Ryuichi Sakamoto and there is a hill in South Australia named after him.



*Paxman’s response to a correctly guessed answer from Quentin during *Christmas University Challenge* semi-finals, January 2015

CREDITS

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