

This work has been submitted to **NECTAR**, the **Northampton Electronic Collection of Theses and Research**.

Thesis

Title: IN FLUX: Land, Photography and Temporality

Creator: Sunderland, J. S.

Example citation: Sunderland, J. S. (2015) *IN FLUX: Land, Photography and Temporality*. Doctoral thesis. The University of Northampton.

Note: Catalogue of Works 2011-2014

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/9735/>



A photograph of a muddy forest floor. The ground is covered in brown, wet mud with visible footprints. On the left side, the lower parts of two green rubber boots are visible, partially covered in mud. The background consists of dry leaves, twigs, and some green foliage.

IN FLUX

Land, Photography and Temporality

Catalogue of Works

2011-2014

John Sunderland

INTRODUCTION

This digital archive is not an artwork in itself, but a catalogue of works produced from the summer of 2011 until the autumn of 2014. All of the works shown here are designed to be printed and displayed as material artefacts, on walls, either in the conventional “gallery space” or in domestic spaces, such as the home or work-place. They are all created with specific dimensions in mind, all larger than those available for viewing on most screens. Therefore this assemblage functions as both an overview of the works and as a way of making the collective portable. In viewing this I ask you to consider the images it contains as reproductions of larger prints, rather than examples of finished works.

This body of artwork is the product of an intense period of practice led research in the academic context of a doctorate. It is influenced by the process and its requirements. A thesis (also titled *In Flux; Land, Photography and Temporality*) considers the detailed theoretical aspects of this project, this archive is a catalogue of the artworks that accompanies the discussion. There was also an exhibition, staged at Avenue Gallery, Northampton University, UK, at the end of October 2014 titled *Continuum*. The artist statement and photographs of the show are at the back of this book.

This interwoven practice and research project has its origins in my criticism of the growing popularity of the use of the aerial view to depict the environment. This cartographic aerial position offers the viewer a fascinating perspective of both places and spaces, but it is ultimately disembodied, disconnected from the environment it depicts. It implies that we are separate from the environment, whereas the environment is the land that we are all part of. It is this sense of disconnection that has driven this work, a desire to understand how we are connected to the land and how we dwell and inhabit it as embodied beings, and to interpret this in new ways through photography. This engagement with the land is characterised by understanding places through time, knowing how they change and building relationships with the environment.

This process of building connections that form places for the individual occurs through our senses as we move through the environment. In order to interpret this, various forms of movement have been incorporated and alluded to in the resulting artworks. This was achieved by investigating the phenomena of perception through the filters of our senses, principally of sight in this case, using, in all but one of the projects, a digital compositing technique derived from the use of close range photogrammetry in archaeology, a cartographic photo-map making technique. Liberated from its record making roots, this method was used to bring a spatio-temporal aspect to the works using a variety of techniques that extended the processes of photographing and, in some cases, making these processes evident in the resulting artworks.

The only project that does not use compositing is *Space Between*. Here blurring was used as another form of investing the static photograph with a temporal inference, a symbolic trace of the passage of the individual in space and time. These traces are evident in not all of the other projects directly, the illusion of change and the passage of time is only alluded to in *Ground Work* through the choice of subject matter, the transitory space of a cultivated field and its margins that is subject to annual cycles of change through cultivation and seasonal variation. In *Hinterland* traces of compositing are evident in some of the works made at sites subject to or about to be subjected to drastic change in the form of human-driven infrastructure development. None of these sites would be recognisable now, as I write this, to anyone visiting them. *Continuum* and *Flow Motion* both refer directly to forms of movement involved in our visual perceptive processes. The movement of the head and eyes involved in observing a scene from a static position in *Continuum* and the acts of visual perception whilst walking in *Flow Motion* respectively.

These perceptions of movement in the environment, investigated here through these bodies of work, are processes in themselves and are not conclusive. They are ongoing, or constantly becoming through time and, as Henri Bergson points out, they do not occur in the measured staccato of mathematical time, but in a durational flow, as a continuity of succession. Photographs give the illusion of freezing this continuity, of breaking it down into instants that in actuality do not exist.

For this project to succeed in interpreting how we perceive the environment through photography, then this temporal interpretation of perception needed to be brought to the artworks. And the processes of perceptions of change through time needed to be mirrored in them. This has been achieved by making the processes of creation evident in the works and by considering bodily movement in the acts of both perception and of making in the environment. This is achieved in both *Continuum* and *Flow Motion* where the movement of the body is mimicked through the evident use of the compositing process.

In this work the body is considered as the locus that is enveloped within the environment, within a sphere of perception that moves as the body moves. It is through this sphere that the world is perceived. The body is therefore at the centre of both space and place.

Space is considered in this project as the environment perceived through the senses, whether or not we pay attention to the information that the environment affords us, whereas place is that which is remembered of this experience at a location, a set of events that are constantly overwritten with both new experiences and experience recalled as memory. In *Continuum* this concept of place, as a series of events, is investigated by repeatedly photographing each scene visited and re-making the works as new and different to the earlier pieces.

These works are deliberately not displayed in any chronological order to reflect further on the temporality of memory of the environment. We do not remember in the sequence of experience, but in accordance with the stimulus to recall, remembering is likely to be cyclical or random, perhaps radial, as John Berger puts it, linked to events. It is also not location specific, making place elusive as an experience, as Doreen Massey points out. We can know it, be familiar with it, but all changes - even the photographic work will change - through time, through repeated viewing, differing contexts and technical and cultural evolution. All is in flux, a continuum of change and becoming, knowing and re-encountering through time.

Finally, none of these projects are about documenting the specifics of any one place, but interpretations of the perceptive experiences of space and place through time, reflecting on our multi-layered experiences of movement and remembering in our contemporary multi-centered lives and are meditations on how our environmental connections are formed through these temporal perceptive experiences.

John Sunderland August 2015

GROUND WORK

The fields investigated in *Ground Work*, like most of the fields that make up much of the European landscape are for most of the year out of bounds. Access is denied as crops are sown and grow. Then for a few weeks of the year, after the harvest, they can be walked over and investigated. In this case this occurs annually, as once the crops have been gathered, the dogs from my family's home can run freely across the stubble fields that surrounds their cottage, appropriately named Allfield.

Ground Work is a series of artworks made during this period, in 2011, by walking across the fields and working in and at the margins of them. Each piece is a composite image that follows my movement as I scan the ground, making an aerial view at the scale of my body. Each work is an aftermath of events and processes that occur each year.

Ideally, when printed, these works would be to actual scale, 1 to 1, as if they were technical drawings from an archaeological site.



Under Quercus



Shredded I



Shredded II



Raptor Kill Site



Crack



Chaff



Vulpes



Triticum



Tracking

Space Between

In the processes of everyday life, we move from place to place, from home to work, to the shops, to a visit a friend or relative, for leisure or necessity. In the course of this movement we travel down established predetermined lines of motion, along constructed roads or railways, paths and tracks through the environment we inhabit in vehicles like cars or the carriages on a railway.

When, for example we travel in a train, our sensory perceptions of the environment are limited, curtailed by the partially enclosed space of the carriage speeding through the land. We are unable to control how long we are present in it. We cannot decide to linger to satisfy our curiosities about what we encounter, or move toward it. We cannot hear it, touch it or feel the cold or warmth. Our eyes can see in a flash but due to speed, what is seen is not understood. What is close by is not recognisable and we tend to look to the distance.

We sit passively observing a scene as if it is passing before us through the window of the train, as if it is a

fiction, like a film. The land appears to move before us, but this is an illusion as it is we who move.

Our lack of capacity to understand what we pass through, our inability to feel we are in the space coupled with our lack of need to act in the process of travel, creates a sense of limbo, of not being in space, but disconnected, that results in contemplation and imagination.

Space Between reflects upon the processes of vehicular movement, turning the glimpses from the fast moving transportation at the spaces between our destinations into artworks that not limited by time and movement, but opened to imagination and fictive interpretation.

These works are designed for display in transitory spaces in buildings like corridors or hall ways, spaces people move through to get to a destination. They follow the lines of movement in the building where they are displayed, mimicking the fictional journey they depict in the movements of those who view the works.



Space Between #1

[PLATE # 10]



Space Between #2

[PLATE # 11]



Space Between #3

[PLATE # 12]



Space Between #4

[PLATE # 13]



Space Between #5

[PLATE # 14]



Space Between #6

[PLATE # 15]



Space Between #7

[PLATE # 16]



Space Between #8

[PLATE # 17]



Space Between #9

[PLATE # 18]



Space Between #10

[PLATE # 19]



Space Between #11

[PLATE # 20]



Space Between #12

[PLATE # 21]



Space Between #13

[PLATE # 22]



Space Between #14

[PLATE # 23]



Space Between #15

[PLATE # 24]



Force Nine (*Triptych*)

[PLATES # 25 - 27]



Space Between #16

[PLATE # 28]



Space Between #17

[PLATE # 29]

HINTERLAND

A walk to the edge
To where nothing persists
Some here is no where
Anymore
All is change

All of these sites are no longer in any way recognisable. They do not look like they did when the works were made. They have all been transformed by human action, by some form of development.

Some of the works in *Hinterland* are precognitive of change, they are sites photographed with full knowledge that they were about to be developed and selected on this basis. Other sites were photographed at the stage of transition, at the point when its character, what we interpret as its sense of place, was undergoing transformation. This was usually at the very early stages of change when development had only just begun.

This work deals with the signs of outward change, either what has just occurred, is happening, or it is about to take place. It centres on events of drastic alteration, but rather than concentrating directly on the actions of destruction and construction, it deals instead with the traces of what might be happening, on signs of material alteration and the elusiveness of the events that make these sites places and events that also alter them beyond recognition as a known place.

Hence this is a *Hinterland*, always on the outskirts of our knowledge and always in flux and subject to change.



Untitled # 1 (*Hinterland* series)



Untitled # 2 (*Hinterland series*)



Untitled # 3 (*Hinterland series*)



Settlement Infrastructure



Harris Fence



Hazard Tape



Untitled # 4 (*Hinterland series*)



Landing Site



In Fill

Continuum

In *Continuum* the compositing process has been made evident as a tool used to investigate and elucidate the durational nature of perception. This has been achieved by allowing so called "errors" that arise as a result of digital automation of the combination process to remain in the finished works, using them to symbolically refer to the movement of the head and eyes when we stand, looking at a scene before us. These errors led to omission, repetition, distortion and the breaking up of parts of the final work. Nevertheless, a continuity across the whole of the work is maintained through control of the parameters of chance within these automation processes and by not allowing single image captures to remain evident in the work.

This use of the compositing method creates multiple viewpoints through a single scene with the anomalies of the process of construction creating an oscillation within the viewing experience, allowing the viewer to shift between noticing these anomalies and the elements of interest that are present in the scene, cyclically observing the image in a way that mimics the flows of eye movement through time.

Continuum is also an investigation of the processes of gaining familiarity with a site by repeatedly photographing the same scenes (up to 15 times, in the case of the *Track-way* images), over periods of months throughout the duration of the project. This allowed for the build up of layers of change and difference across the entire body of work. Through deliberate eschewing of the linear and chronological narrative in the display of these works, the role of memory in the perceptive processes in the field is mirrored in the experience of viewing works.

The *Standing Ground* works (plates # 60,61-63 & 65) saw a return to the bodily aerial view of the *Ground Work* series and subsequently led to the resolution of a body of works on walking in the form of *Flow Motion* below.

Continuum is a fictional woodland when viewed as a whole body of work. The images have been gathered from numerous woodlands in Ireland and England over three and a half years of intense field work. What follows is a description of the process of a visit to a site from my field notes.

DE - DE - DE
DE - DE - DE
DE - DE - DE
• • •
(Like Morse code)
S S S
ON WOOD
=
Woodpecker

I venture out for the first time this year, late in January. Snow diminishes, water and temperature rise. Too hot in all my clothes walking to site, out, escaping into the light. Sunlight, occasionally, nearly, for the first time this month.

I wade through the flooded road halfway up to my wellington boots, ranging rods in hand and bag on my back.

Fields are white dripping. Slush and ice, water, mud, brown, black, white. I exile myself from indoors and the screen. Breathe, heat even sweat.

Crunch of the soft compaction on the remaindered snow, off the road into wet wood, green emerges, slowly, slow shoots show through mushed leaves, green on brown. Life awakens again defying gravity.

The ground is soft and flattened, the wood, though wet, is easy to move through. Without boots I would not venture, as I move the water is rising, snow diminishing.

I consider one tree-fall, near Shomere, I've seen it before, never imaged it. Maybe on my way back – Perhaps I always think this here, keener to get to somewhere I am going, although I am not sure where that sums up to be. I intuit to a point of satisfaction. Far enough in to start. I intend only to make one work and return. Before and sometimes still I venture to push all effort beyond my limits of pleasantness. Sometimes fruitfully, but not on this occasion.

Time compacts again as I see the way to where I was last time I was here, flashes of memory and remembered images. Memories embody movement and effort as well as vision. The trigger is the way up that I came down. I could meet myself here.

I turn deeper into the marshy woodland, off human paths to the fox and badger trail – no human prints here. The trail is obstructed only above the height of the mammals that nocturnally traverse them. They all know I've been here, smell my scent and manufactured belongings.

Considering, looking, moving, stopping, listening,

DE - DE - DE

DE - DE - DE

A rustle above, the squirrels are still in the ivy here. The camera is still on my back. The drips enhance my spatial awareness loud and quiet to imperceptible. Near drops loud.

Familiar scenes are passed on. Then I know. I've been here before and suddenly it all fits. Another tree-fall, out in the water. Instantly, nearly, perhaps, I simultaneously see the element and remember the image I made here last, subtracting all the other potentials and the environment to inhabit this space. One I have constructed before. I relate much quicker, less to take in, revel and revealing change.

The water is higher (and rising) frozen ice breaks as I immerse my foot, halfway up the boot. I move in and think, not the same position as before. Initially I think it is too hard to get to, the water too deep. Potential of cold not heat now. I move back to the bank put down my bag and the rods. Take off my coat (will it rain?)

Decide to pause

I place the ranging rod near the tree-bowl, not like before.

Out into the water. Why is the best position often mediated by my overall approach (physical not conceptual?). I decide the position I reach in the water, close to my initial look is the one. Difference is good. This is not the same place as it was last time I was here, so I need to emphasise this in my work. I push the extended tripod down into the mud below the ice and water, and work. Difference is what I hope for, with inevitably recognisable similarity. I vary my position as my feet get colder. Three pairs of socks are nearly not enough. At the end I remove the camera from the tripod and shoot around me to the edges of my composite environment hoping that more kind errors will occur in processing.

I move back to the trail home. The fields have turned green as I exit the woods still patched by white and brown. I struggle through the flood using the ranging rods to look for shallow ground slowly moving on tiptoe, so as not to allow the wave, so near the top of my boots, from washing over. Ahead three dogs, Jess, Kasha and Granville wag in anticipation and my partner wishes she had her camera. Still waters rising, but I made it without spilling down inside my boots.

Extract From Field Notes

(see plate # 45 for the work made on this occasion)



The Cage # 2

4:23 pm - 4:57 pm

34 minutes

[PLATE # 39]



Track-way # 8

12:50 pm - 1:31 pm

41 minutes

[PLATE # 40]



Tree-fall # 1 Version # 3

4:13 pm – 4:34 pm

21 minutes

[PLATE # 41]



A Fox I Thought # 1

5:56 pm – 6:16 pm

20 minutes

[PLATE # 42]



Blue Land # 1

3:24 pm - 4:04 pm

40 minutes

[PLATE # 43]



Tree - fall # 5 Version # 1

1:59 pm - 2:24 pm

25 minutes

[PLATE # 44]



Tree - fall # 5 Version # 2

1:59 pm - 2:35 pm

36 minutes

[PLATE # 45]



12:02 pm - 12:08 pm

6 minutes

4:35 pm - 4:45 pm

10 minutes

Rhizomatic # 1 - 2

[PLATES # 46 & 47]



1:51 pm - 1:56 pm

5 minutes

12:26 pm -12:34 pm

8 minutes

Rhizomatic # 3 - 4

[PLATES # 48 & 49]



Track-way # 12

11:14 am - 11:56 am

42 minutes



Track-way # 6

3:20 pm - 4:14 pm

54 minutes

[PLATES # 50 & 51]



Track-way # 3

11:54 am - 12:51 pm

57 minutes



Track-way # 11

3:10 pm - 3:55 pm

45 minutes

[PLATES # 52 & 53]



The Cage Version # 5

1:45 pm - 2:12 pm

27 minutes

[PLATE # 54]



Tree-fall # 8

Version # 4

12:40 pm -12:53 pm

13 minutes

[PLATE # 55]



Shrine # 1

2:59 pm - 3:39 pm

40 minutes

[PLATE # 56]



Blue Land # 3

11:38am - 12:13pm

32 minutes

[PLATE # 57]



A Deer in the Wood

4:37 pm - 5:07 pm

30 minutes

[PLATE # 58]



Track-way # 13

12:17 pm - 12:48 pm

31 minutes

[PLATE # 59]







Track-way # 5

4:26 pm - 5:18 pm

52 minutes



Standing Ground # 7

11:45 am - 12:22 pm

37 minutes

[PLATES # 62 & 63]

Track-way # 2

1:35 pm - 2:12 pm

37 minutes



Standing Ground # 9

1:05 pm - 1:42 pm

37 minutes



Tree-fall # 8 Version # 6

2:42 pm - 2:47 pm

5 minutes



The Cage # 1

11:23 am - 11:42 am

19 minutes



Tree-fall # 2 Version # 3

5:10 pm - 5:42 pm

32 minutes



Shrine # 2

2:19 pm - 2:41 pm

22 minutes



Tree-fall # 2 Version # 1

Time lost



Tree-fall # 13 Version # 1

11:48 am - 11:53 am

5 minutes



Tree-fall # 1 Version # 1

Lost time



Tree-fall # 8 Version # 1

5:03 pm - 5:27 pm

24 minutes



A Fox I thought # 2

1:35 pm - 1:36 pm

1 minute

[PLATE # 74]



Tree-fall # 8

Version # 3

4:54 pm - 5:10 pm

16 minutes

[PLATE # 75]



Tree-fall # 14

5:38 pm - 6:28 pm

50 minutes

[PLATE # 76]

FLOW MOTION

*"Animals and people do in fact see the environment during locomotion, not just in the pauses between movements. They probably see better when moving than when stationary. The arrested image is only necessary for a photographic camera"*¹

It is this difference, between seeing and photographing, between the stasis of the image and the duration in motion of visual perception that James Gibson emphasises and that I wished to bring to the fore in this work.

Flow Motion is the culmination of many experiments of photographing whilst walking, resolved eventually into the works below, by the interplay between the techniques of

compositing in *Continuum* above, and through the act of walking forward when making the *Standing Ground* pieces, when I first saw that the traces of my presence, as part of the environment in the form of footprints, was a subject worthy of making a work about.

The act of walking is the fundamental basis of being in the environment. All visits to sites begin and end with walking, it is the way that the environment becomes known and it is by walking paths and leaving traces that the environment is impacted in, leaving footprints like memories in the ground. These performative works are made in the act of walking itself, I no longer reach a point of stasis but make works along lines of flow, following lines of perception. Making and motion are brought together in a single act.

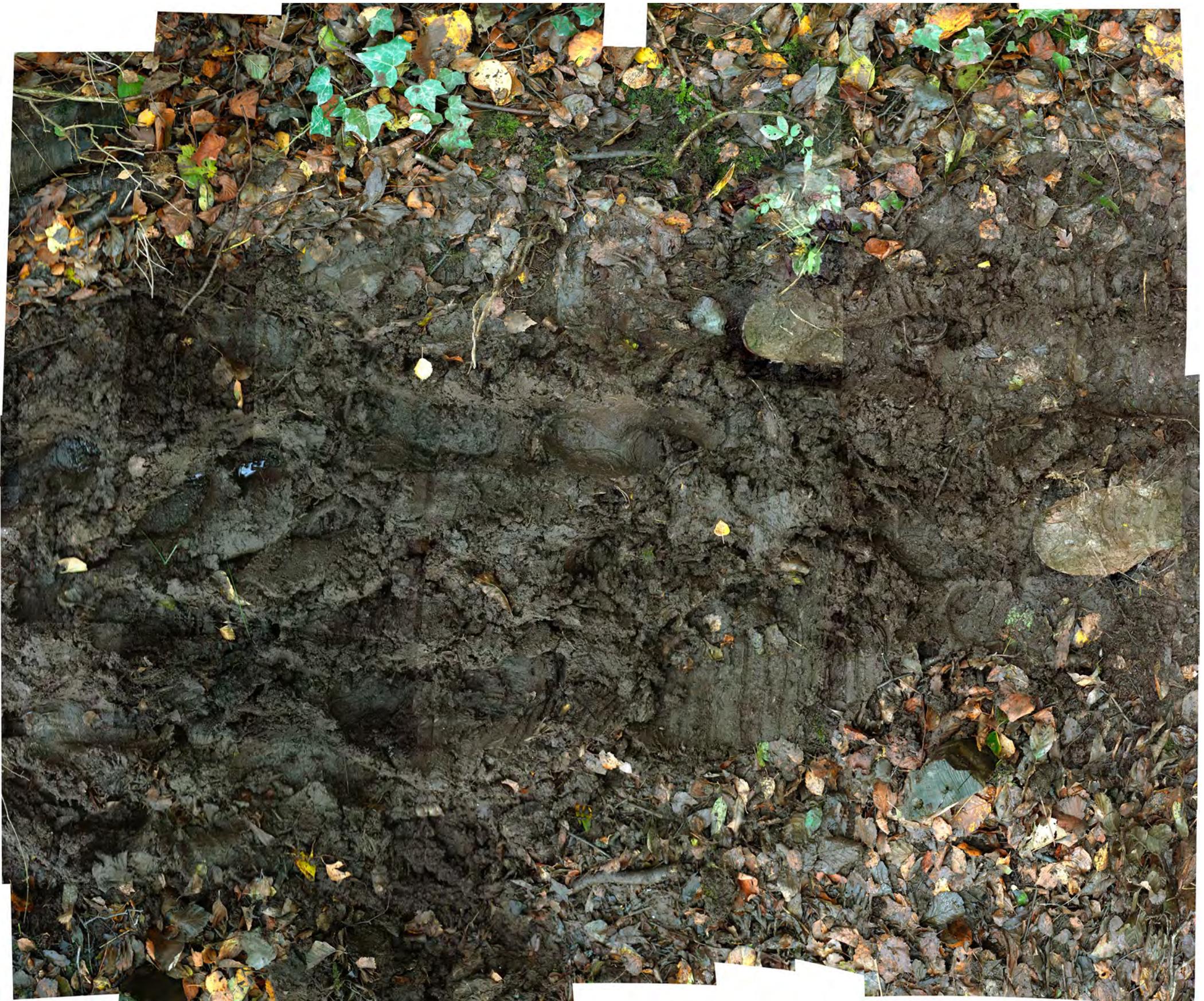
¹ Gibson J. (1986) *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis Group, New York, Hove.





Across # 11 (Fox, Vulpes)

[PLATE # 78]



Across # 17

[PLATE # 79]



Across # 13

[PLATE # 80]



Across # 9

[PLATE # 81]



Across # 2

[PLATE # 82]



Across # 4

[PLATE # 83]



Across & Into # 1

[PLATE # 84]

Flow Motion in the gallery



Continuum
John Suberland
17 October - 19 November 2014
Museum of Contemporary Art
100 North Main Street, Ampton, MA 01026
www.mocaport.com





100



101

Continuum - The Exhibition

Forty-three of the artworks in this catalogue were exhibited at Avenue Gallery, Northampton University from the 27th October to the 7th November 2014, under the title *Continuum*. These came from *Space Between*, *Continuum* itself and *Flow Motion* respectively. *Space Between* was exhibited in the corridor leading to the gallery along with one piece from *Flow Motion* (*Across & Into # 1*) opposite the gallery entrance. All works were either mounted, pinned or adhered directly to the gallery walls using a vinyl substrate (see plates above and below).

Artist Statement

The works in *Continuum* grew from my sense that humanity is becoming disconnected from the land that it inhabits, and in particular, from the rural environment, through urbanisation, translocation and digitalization. In the last two decades, experiences of the environment have become increasingly mediated through the screen in work, leisure and communication, rather than directly through encountering the land itself. In these circumstances, there is a danger that fewer people will have and maintain the intimate direct knowledge that forms our sense of place than was the case even in the recent past. To address this concern, I decided to investigate what it is to inhabit land, to dwell and experience places and to be embodied in space, through the photographic interpretation of visual perception. This phenomenological approach was augmented by the theories of Henry Bergson and Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasising that the mechanisms of perception are durative experiences, occurring through time and constantly becoming known.

The intention was also to investigate how the familiarity of a site of engagement forms through time into the experiences of place and how this can be interpreted through photographic practice. This includes the acceptance that these experiences cannot be directly communicated through art, as both Hamish Fulton and Lucy Lippard acknowledge. That the artworks offer a different, if partially connected, experience to the viewer of the work, rather than the actual experience of being in and knowing a place. Hence there is no reference to the *where* of each of the sites interpreted in the works, rather this centres on the creation of a fictional place that is an imagined woodland, a conglomerate of a number of depicted places, thought of as events and processes of engagement, rather than static representations of points on maps (Massey). These engagements have been deliberately repeated, a process of place learning (Gibson) has been investigated, resulting in multiple views of each scene.

Each artwork mimics the durational space of embodied motion through a compositing process of digitally bringing together numerous viewpoints from single photographs as an interpretation of the heterogeneous, but whole environment, as it was encountered. This process was then repeated and reinterpreted on further site visits as a new experience according to the changes, both in myself and the environment encountered. This offers an interpretation of land not centred on location, rather on the temporal experiences of land as an ongoing continuum. This approach was driven by the understanding that rather than perception being a series of static moments, as photography implies, it is a constant flow of experience.

In this work the durational and mobile nature of perception is brought to the photograph through processes of compositing, following the constant movements of the eyes, the head and the body through and with the environment, a persistent and also a changing space that we are part of, not separate from, for it is the relationships that we form with the environment that are the key to our understandings of it and our capacities to care for it.

Continuum reflects on the flux of motion in our perceptions by deliberately questioning photography's stasis, pushing at its limitations and opening pathways for memories and imagination, for the viewer to journey through their own resonances with land, through large scale colour photographs in the place that is here, Avenue Gallery.

John Sunderland 26th October 2014





Mock-up of exhibition



Visitors looking at *A Deer in the Wood*



Viewing *Track-way # 13*



[PLATE # 91]

Track-way # 13 (background)
Track-way # 8 (foreground)
With work from *Flow Motion*

[PLATE # 91]



General View



Forest Path

[PLATE # 92]



Viewing *The Cage # 3*

Space Between

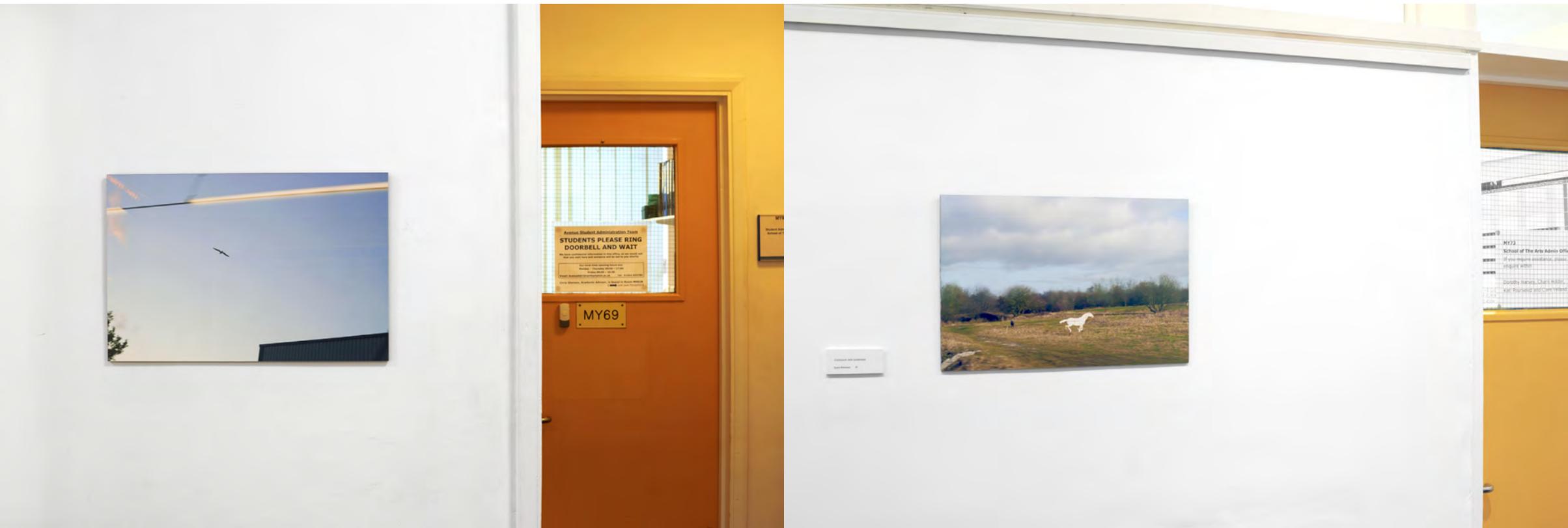


Force Nine (triptych)



Corridor view

[PLATE # 95]



[PLATE # 96]

All rights reserved

© 2014

All photographs and text: John Sunderland

www.johnsunderland.com

samsunderland@gmail.com