Landscape Portrait: Now and Then

HESTERCOMBE GALLERY
Contemporary art in reclaimed spaces

17.5.21 - 25.7.21

LANDSCAPE PORTRAIT: NOW AND THEN

C.W. Bampfylde
Patrick Caulfield
John Coplans
Susan Derges
Rev John Eagles
Gilbert and George
William Hoare
Andy Holden
Derek Jarman
Claudette Johnson
Balraj Khanna
Ken Kiff
Leon Kossoff
Jo Lathwood
Anna Liber Lewis
Sarah Lucas
Henry Moon
Trish Morrissey
Jane Mowat
Alek O
Susie Olczak
Andy Warhol

Foreword

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes
Marcel Proust

In the middle of the eighteenth-century people referred to the eyes as 'daylights'. I recently learned this in a book of quotations and it struck a chord. Those of us lucky enough to work with, and respond to, landscape 'see' and feel the world around us as days lengthen and shorten with the yearly cycle of seasonal change. The inescapable Covid-19 pandemic of the last year has forced many of us to stop and just 'be' in our local outdoors, seeing with our 'daylights' and sensing nature and non-human species, with which we coexist, in heightened and more poignant ways.

Landscape Portrait: Now and Then began life as what was to be the final chapter of 'Bampfylde 300', a year of celebrations marking the tercentenary of Hestercombe's past owner, garden designer and artist Coplestone Warre Bampfylde (1720-1791). Much of what we had planned and launched on Saturday 29th February 2020 sadly only lasted three weeks before being locked down. I am grateful, therefore, as we re-emerge over a year later, that firstly we are actually able to open our doors to welcome people in and secondly, to still be able to deliver this exhibition programme.

Landscape Portrait: Now and Then explores the links between landscape painting and portraiture at Hestercombe since the eighteenth century, juxtaposing historic paintings and illustrations with artworks from the past sixty years. Themes that began to preoccupy artists centuries ago are firmly rooted in today's innovative art practices. From iconic works by leading international artists to newly commissioned installations, this exhibition forms a landscape portrait.

As with most things during the last extraordinary year, this show has only been possible through versatile, close, yet socially distanced, partnership working. I would like to thank the commissioned artists and writer, who delivered under very difficult circumstances as alluded to in Lizzie Lloyd's insightful catalogue essay; as well as funders, private and public lenders, especially Arts Council Collections and The Courtauld, all of whom have been flexible and supportive.

Tim Martin
Art Director

Opposite, Susan Derges, The Observer and the Observed, Gelatin silver print, 1992

Landscape Portrait: Running On *by Lizzie Lloyd*

Right now, the sense of being in a landscape has never felt more vital. I've never been made more aware of the feeling of my body in space, and its proximity to other bodies – human, animal, mineral, inanimate matter. It is partly a question of seasons: grounds in winter make themselves known underfoot, through the stickiness of mud, the wetness of puddles, the crispness of frost, and the slipperiness of months of soaked soil. But there is also the question of Covid-19 that has meant that surfaces that I might previously have thought inert and innocuous have come alive with the possibility of microscopic congregations, deposited by the skin of one and transferring to the skin of another. On encountering people in the street, I plan my approach, watching for small directional adjustments in the bodies around me, measuring the space between us. I hold my breath, turn three-quarters, press myself up to mossy wet walls, hug the side of a road, veer off a gravelly path. When the coast is clear, or clearer, I release my breath and recalibrate, setting in motion plans to alter the time, place, and route of my walk tomorrow.

The rationing of access to physical spaces has led to a broadening of my idea of landscape. It is probably an act of self-preservation. It has had the effect of heightening the way in which my sense of self feels dependent on, and inextricably linked with, literal and metaphorical landscapes; I see the landscape of the internet, the landscape of our bodies, the landscape of our thoughts. I have taken to scrunching up sheets of paper. On opening them back out I trace lines of creases and fill in a selection of the troughs and ridges of their newfound contours with graphite or watercolour. These drawings map at once the constitution of a particular sheet of paper – its pulp and the compositions of its fibres – and the gesture of my hand as it contracts, gathering and enclosing the paper into my palm.

Sometimes my action is forceful, at others more coaxing. And then there is my momentary decision to trace a given line over another, to fill in one crest, shoulder, or hillock over another, guided by the way that light and shadows are thrown across the paper at a particular time and place. What I mean is that they amount to portraits of myself, the space and time of day in which they take place, the weather, the makeup of my materials, and the contractions of my muscles.

In *Landscape Portrait: Now and Then* the relationship between representations of bodies, selves, and landscapes is similarly multi-layered and intertwined. It takes as its point of departure the history of the Hestercombe estate as the birthplace of Coplestone Warre Bampfylde (1720–1791), landowner, soldier, landscape designer, and artist. As an artist his interests ranged from history and landscape painting, to topographical drawings, watercolours and satirical cartoons. *Landscape Portrait: Now and Then* is touched variously by traces of these interests. The exhibition includes, for example, works by Bampfylde including a self-portrait, painted with his friend the artist Richard Phelps; watercolours of Stourhead and a recently discovered large oil painting of Mount Etna. Some of the works commissioned for the exhibition use Bampfylde's own artwork and his family estate at Hestercombe as jumping-off points. Among these, Jane Mowat's work takes his line drawings of mountains and cliffs and transposes them to a series of simplified black-stitch embroideries on white handkerchiefs. While Susie Olczak uses photographic studies of the gardens at Hestercombe, parts of which Bampfylde also designed, to build her semi-geometric collages. The history of the man and his family estate plays out as an active backdrop to *Landscape Portrait: Now and Then*, and is pulled in and out of focus throughout.

Opposite, Portrait of C. W. Bampfylde by William Hoare of Bath, c1770

There is a long tradition of interweaving portraiture and landscape through the history of art. Radical art critic, historian, and self-professed Marxist, John Berger uses the example of Thomas Gainsborough's Mr and Mrs Andrews (circa 1750) to argue for the interlinking of conventions of portrait painting and landscape painting. Key to Gainsborough's early painting is the depiction of landscape as property and, therefore, as another form of portrait painting.

'Among the pleasures their portrait gave to Mr and Mrs Andrews,' wrote Berger, 'was the pleasure of seeing themselves depicted as landowners and this pleasure was enhanced by the ability of the oil paint to render their land in all its substantiality'. Depictions of land as property define the identities of well-to-do-sitters, as much as their clothing, body language, and facial expressions. 'It was not in Berger's nature to stick rigidly or literally to definitions of genre, of course. In Tom Overton's introduction to Landscapes: John Berger on Art, the matter of what constitutes a landscape and what a portrait, in Berger's thinking, becomes an 'animating, liberatory metaphor'. The relationship between art, society, culture, humans, and their environments, in the writing of Berger then, is one of entanglement and embeddedness.

So, what 'liberatory metaphor' animates Landscape Portrait: Now and Then? One is that portraits and landscapes are freed from the conventions of opposition: they do not denote the orientation, for example, of a painting on a wall. Within and without, private and public are not juxtaposed; internal selves and external spaces are not clearly defined, bound, or discrete. Landscape Portrait: Now and Then instead envisages figures and places as inherently, necessarily entangled: landscapes are contiguous with bodies, bodies with landscapes.

For some, like Trish Morrissey in Self Portrait with two Snails (2021), this involves finding resonant relationships with the flora and fauna that surround her. In Morrissey's film, two snails are pictured roving over the contours of her face (and even eyes) as she stares, eyes wide at the lens, apparently unruffled. Elsewhere, Andy Holden's Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape (2016) – part-film part-essay – casts his own body as an animated avatar

Left, C. W. Bampfylde, Frontispiece for 'An Election Ball' 3rd ed, 1776
Opposite Top, Trish Morrissey, Self Portrait with Two Snails, film still, 2021
Opposite Bottom, Andy Holden, Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape, film still, 2016

guiding us through a collage of cartoon characters and landscapes, bridging the surface-level differences between multiple worlds, and multiple orders of experience.

Doreen Massey, eminent British geographer, sees places, as defined by the people and things that inhabit or pass through them. She writes, ‘space and landscape could be imagined as provisionally intertwined simultaneities of ongoing, unfinished, stories’. Massey argues for an ‘understanding of both place and landscape as events, as happenings, as moments that will be again dispersed’ or ‘meeting places’ of natural and human-made phenomena come together. Artists like Alek O and Balraj Khanna make literal the sense of landscapes as an enactment of coincidental human action and movement, by making works that are made from the piecing together of physical residues of places. In Edward Higgins White III (2011) Alek O unpicks a series of gloves found during a walk around Helsinki and uses those unpicked fibres to create a small embroidered grid. Khanna similarly is less interested in representing a place, but conjuring an ‘essence’ of place by allowing his work to grow out of bodily sensations and memories of places with which he feels a personal connection. In Apple Green (2011), he uses his own breath to disperse paint across the canvas. The action creates an uneven speckled surface that shimmers and undulates; it echoes the action of the wind shaping landscapes through erosion, abrasion but also calls to mind the scattering of seeds and the dispersal of microbes and animals, a poetic embodiment of his own diasporic experiences.

Top, Gallery 8, Balraj Khanna, Apple Green, 1991 with C W Bampfylde, The Storm, 1774
Bottom, Gallery 4, Patrick Caulfield’s Sculpture in a Landscape, 1966
with Derek Jarman’s Large Landscape Drawing No.4, 1968.

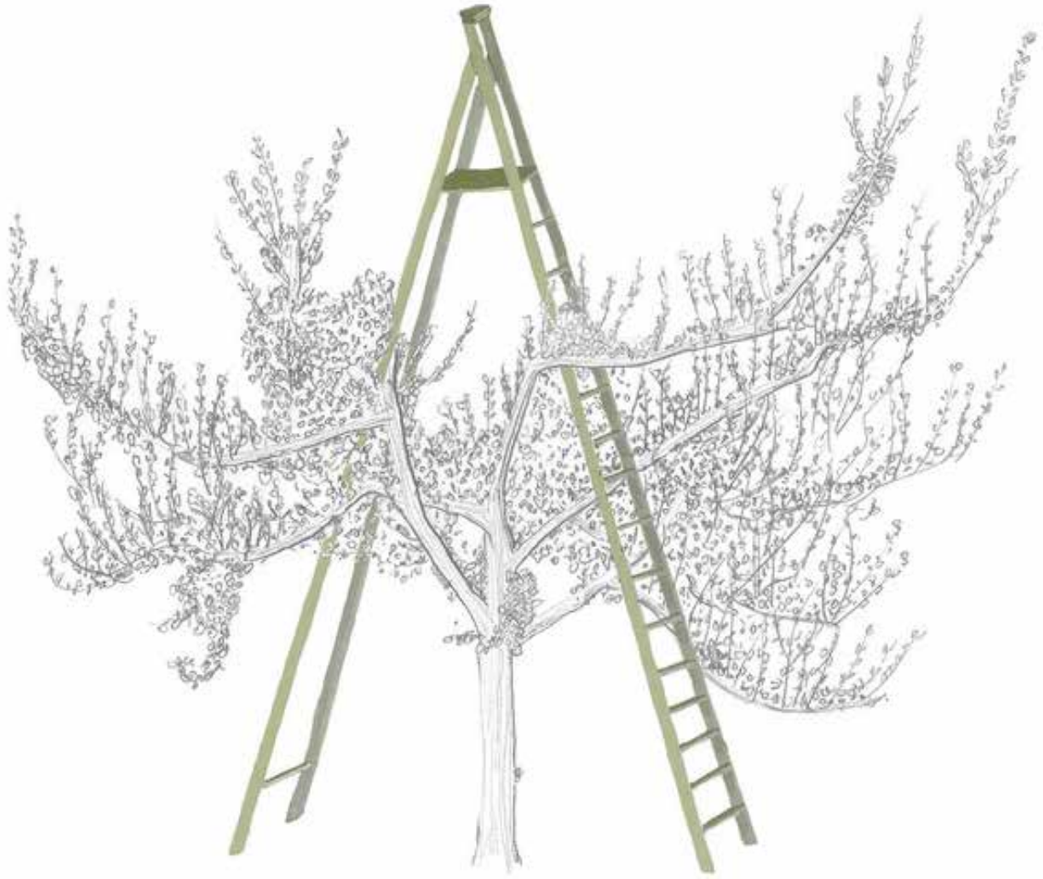
Top, Gallery 4, three of C. W. Bampfylde’s watercolours, kindly loaned from The Courtauld, London.
Bottom, Gallery 3, Gilbert and George, A Portrait of The Artists as Young Men, video, 1970 with Portrait of George Huddesford and John Codrington Warwick Bampfylde (c. 1778), after Sir Joshua Reynolds and Sarah Lucas’s, Self Portrait with Knickers, 1994.

This view of place as relational is akin to a contemporary understanding of a sense of self where identity is no longer taken to be a singular, stable, knowable, or representable whole but as culturally mediated and the site of unfixed, fluid, pluralities. It is in this context that works such as Claudette Johnson, Sarah Lucas, Susan Derges, and John Coplans sit. In Johnson and Lucas, the postures of the central figures are mirrored – hands on hips, legs set firm and apart, eye contact held – neither conforming to stereotypes of either femininity or blackness. Both seem to traffic instead, in 'ands' and 'alsos'.

Figures that enact a heightened awareness of their position in relation to others appear in Derges' and Coplans' work too. The surface of the body forms a landscape in Coplans' photographs which are fragments of his – largely unidentifiable – body, pieced back together in a triptych of seemingly dislocated bellies, knees, and limbs. The body in Derges' The Observer and the Observed (1992) functions rather differently; here the self-portrait exists in a state of momentary and contradictory multiplicity. Her face is closely cropped signalling intimate proximity with the viewer. But is also obscured, partly because it is out-of-focus but also due to a breakout of water droplets that hang, as if frozen, in the space between us and the blurred background face.

Another look reveals that, rather than being eclipsed by the jet of water, the apparently singular self-portrait is multiplied in miniature, reflected and distorted through the individual droplets that act like lenses on which the camera focuses. Here the landscape of the self is at once absorbed and splintered by its position in relation to its surroundings.

The porous relationship between ourselves and our surroundings is alluded to throughout Landscape Portrait: Now and Then. The exhibition turns on how we navigate our landscapes, and how our landscapes navigate us, the way that one impresses on the other, the way gases are shared, and particles exchanged. Our awareness of ourselves in relation to the earth has become increasingly heightened, not just due to the global pandemic but also, of course, through our growing understanding of climate change. Jo Lathwood, in Graft Ladder (2020), uses the motif of the ladder as both practical tool and poetic metaphor. To climb a ladder is to rise up, reach, or overcome impediments. But she abuts her ladder to the action of grafting. Grafting is the process by which two plants – often though not exclusively – of different varieties or species come together to grow as one. The graft occurs at the site of a wound, which can occur naturally or be caused by a human act, after which the tissue of the two plants regenerates, over time, fusing so that the two plants grow as one. This exhibition enacts a corresponding grafting. The terms 'Landscape' and 'Portrait' of its title are not separated by a conjunction but run on. Landscape Portrait: Now and Then registers our increasing realisation of the co-dependency of intuitive relationships between living and non-living things. It starts to enact 'the flow of consciousness' – as the great archaeologist and writer, Jacquetta Hawkes, would have it – between people and land, between past, present and even future. 'Consciousness,' wrote Hawkes in 1978, 'is melting us all down together again – earth, air, fire and water, past and future, lobsters, butterflies, meteors and men.'



Right, Jo Lathwood, Graft Ladder, 2020

Top, Susan Derges, The Observer and the Observed, 1992 with Andy Warhol, Beuys by Warhol, 1980

Bottom, Alek O, Edward Higgins White III, Embroidery, 2011

Right, Jane Mowat, Mr Bampfylde's handkerchiefs, 2019-20, detail

List of References/Further Reading

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Above, Susie Olczak, Liquid Landscape, Collage, 2021
Opposite, Anna Liber Lewis, Woman in Landscape, 2020

Acknowledgements

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Curated by Tim Martin

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Cover image: Anna Liber Lewis, Woman in Landscape, 2020

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