

GROUND THINGS

In this article I describe why objects have become an essential part of my interdisciplinary practice. The six objects pictured here are framed alongside the recollection of a walk taken with Mariusz Tchorek in Poland in the mid-nineties, during which the first two objects were found. The other four objects span the last ten years and represent the nature of my parallel career as a gardener. My entire oeuvre of object work relates to a close engagement with the land and landscape and notably a two year period cutting and tending vines in the Lot Valley, South West France. Each of these recovered objects, altered or unaltered, raises questions surrounding belonging and belongings - In what way do they come to me? I attempt to answer this by offering up a series of narrative vignettes that reposition the found object as a relational medium with an emergent subject that germinates and matures slowly. The text concludes with another question that places the future of these objects in the hands of the carrier as seed.

Objects:

Whilst I may choose not to alter the objects that enter my studio, there is always a sense of mutual shaping that takes place. This thought alone intrigues me enough to want to continue with them. Touch, therefore, is a sensibility implicit in the material of the objects I take in and in this, a language by which I hope to transmit some kind of humanity through this close contact.

Touch:

The finding, the picking up, the placing down, the close looking, the re-finding, the positioning (singular or ensemble), the forming, the dismembering, the remembering, the final seeing, the setting down, the putting to one side, the safe storing, the keeping, the losing, the displacement, the sifting, the uncovering, the reconnecting, the re-reading, the revising, the refining, the settling, the reaffirming - are processes that shape what it is - in and outside

of the object's edges - in and outside of myself. The first touch is a vital one, an agent of change.

Facing:

I see the objects in my studio as I might my face. Not in likeness but as if I were touching my face to see if I can see beyond its skin. Objects do to me what my drawings do not. They are not spatial illusions, as drawings are, and therefore not an entry into space. The objects exist and press into me the closer I get and the more I know them, as if they are looking back at me with the same intent of eyes, borne of my own. Seeing is also touch. In this sense I recognise the face and the facing out of each object I hold and where our spaces, that of object and self, collide with deep residual consequence.

Naming:

And do these objects then speak for themselves? I give them names, as one would artworks, dreamt up to satisfy my belief that they mean something more than they are in reality. More than the sum of their material worth. They were once lost, abandoned, broken, burnt, damaged, ruined, forgotten and waiting. They were, of course, powerful to me before I named them. I respected them then and recognise that in their naming I have repositioned them and changed their course from a non-place to some-place? Names can be a barrier as much as a doorway. Their names serve to remind me that they had figured in my thinking, there and then, in the moving from raw state to recovered state, with me, in me and of me - the result and process of justification and a giving way to something true.

The bundle of bound twigs that I now call, *'You Swept and I Found'* (Fig. 1.) was found discarded by the wayside of a farm track. A day earlier I had seen a lady sweeping her dusty front path with the same kind of hand-made brush. I remember the short, arcing sweeps



Fig.1. *You Swept and I Found*



Fig.2. *Sun Jar*



Fig.3. Killing Me



Fig.4. *Once Your Chair*

Fig.5. *Tree*

Fig.6. *The Carrier*

and the visible body of dust.

The small glass vessel which I refer to as the 'Sun Jar' (Fig. 2.) was unearthed from a thatch of meadow grass, part buried in the ochre grey ground, on a parcel of sloping land acquired by Mariusz Tchorek in the village of Dobre, Poland, and where he and his wife Katy Bentall were set to build the wooden house that now stands.

I had been walking with Mariusz from Kazimierz to Dobre in the Easter of 1996 following the Spring thaw - seven kilometres over two and half hours. It was on this walk that I came face to face with these objects and was compelled to pick them up and take them home with me to England. I had witnessed Mariusz himself carrying objects backwards and forwards between Poland and England wrapped in paper, linen and bubble wrap. His wife Katy revealed to me recently that many people thought Mariusz's father had cared more about objects than people and that this is why Mariusz became a psycho-therapist. Yet "Mariusz also loved objects" Katy said.

The Sun Jar has remained wrapped and safely stored in my studio since our walk. It mattered then and now the object resonates more strongly.

The objects that I have gathered in recent years have become closely entwined with my routines as a gardener - planting and staking, clearing and pruning, turning the compost, digging over the beds, mulching and keeping the bonfire, seasonal rhythms that all hold the promise of further object encounters.

'Killing Me' (Fig. 3.) was one such object found buried in a state of degradation in the compost heap at Hill House, Great Bealings, overlooking the Fynn Valley, Suffolk, where I have gardened for ten years. The title relates to a headline that can still be read and the fact that some time before I had taken up the strap leaves and thrown them on the heap.

Pruning is a gardening process I align with the act of drawing. This connection has occupied my thinking since I was taught to cut and tend to vines in the Lot Valley, South West France by M. Thierry Meze, over a two year period a decade ago. Each cut establishes the future potential of the vine's growth. In this sense each cut is both a physical mark made and a mark imagined as the cutter selects and predicts, in his mind's eye, new growth. I left thousands of notional drawings behind me in the vineyard of Chateau Gautoul - working vine to vine, row to row, parcel to parcel. At the end of my day, when the shadows were long, I would gather up the branches of severed vines and carry them back to my studio where I set them down to consider them en masse over the winter.

Objects that are the by-products of our intervention in the natural landscape often interest me but they do not always stir me enough to want to pick them up. I was moved to recover 'Once Your Chair' (Fig. 4.) from the ashes of a bonfire - the last bonfire I made for Rosamond Firebrace who died surrounded by her garden aged ninety-two.

I recovered 'Tree' (Fig. 5.) - the intermeshed branches of a Norway Spruce from a bucket I had stuffed them in. It was the strangeness of their new form that grabbed me. I had cut them, and there in the bucket they had languished, forgotten until found, dry and re-formed by my action into their current state.

In the case of 'The Carrier' (Fig. 6.) I had not anticipated an object borne directly off my own back - the jumper I had been wearing whilst walking through a field of Burdock. Its brown spiky burrs latched on to my navy blue, cable knit jumper and with this inadvertent action I had become the carrier and disperser of its seed. In doing so, I had joined other terrestrial mammals in a process of epizoochory.

And where do these objects belong now?

Biography

Based in Suffolk, England, the inter-disciplinary work of artist and gardener Jevan Watkins Jones is underpinned by personal narrative and a sensitive interest in the nature of things. Recent projects have included *'Alternative Yellow Book'* - a dialogistic drawing project with the elderly, some living with dementia, from a rural community in Essex, that wove together individuals' memories of plants and gardens. *'Facing-Recovering'* - a dialogistic drawing project with wounded and injured soldiers from Chavasse VC House, Colchester Garrison that gave a public voice to the man behind the uniform. *'Occupied with Plants'*, Art Exchange, University of Essex - a project residency in conjunction with plant physiologists, School of Biological Science. *'Turf Twinning'* - a collaboration with artist Lawrence Bradby and tenants and residents of Greenstead housing estate, an exchange of circular turf between green spaces in different communities in Essex. Jevan is an alumnus of the Royal Drawing School, London and leads a drawing programme at Beth Chatto Gardens, Essex, and for The Field Studies Council at Flatford Mill, Suffolk, England.

'Alternative Yellow Book' limited edition artist's book, High Stile Projects (2016)

ISBN 978-0-9954868.0-5

'Occupied with Plants' solo exhibition with accompanying essay, *'The World's Long Thoughts'* by Lawrence Bradby, Art Exchange, University of Essex (2015)

'Facing-Recovering' exhibition catalogue with Essay *'Journeys into the Unknown: The Artistic Face of Conflict'* by Peter Jenkinson OBE, Firstsite (2014) ISBN 978-0-948252-42-6

'Turf Twinning' collaboration with Lawrence Bradby, publication with essay *'Six Cuts'* by Jonathan P. Watts, Firstsite (2013) ISBN 978_0-948252-39-6

'Associative Enquiries' with essay *'Living Subjects in the Gallery'* by Cinzia Cremona following the choreographed encounter *'Falcon - GYR X SAKER'*, Firstsite (2013)

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