

A journey explored through pairings

The intersection of craft and digital practice, specifically ceramics and sound

The twin themes of Landscape and Islands

Collaborations between three pairs of ceramic and sound artists



LANDSCAPE : ISLANDS • TIMELINE

SHETLAND RESIDENCY + EXHIBITION

August 2015 JY & KA Residency at Scalloway Booth, Shetland Isles

April – June 2016 *In A Shetland Landscape*, Shetland Museum & Archives

THE CERAMIC HOUSE EXHIBITION

May 2016 *Landscape : Islands*, The Ceramic House

May 2016 *In Camera* Gallery, Inagural Performances

INTERNATIONAL RESIDENCY + EXHIBITION

August 2016 International Residency, Phoenix Brighton & The Ceramic House

September 2016 International Residency Exhibition, Phoenix Brighton

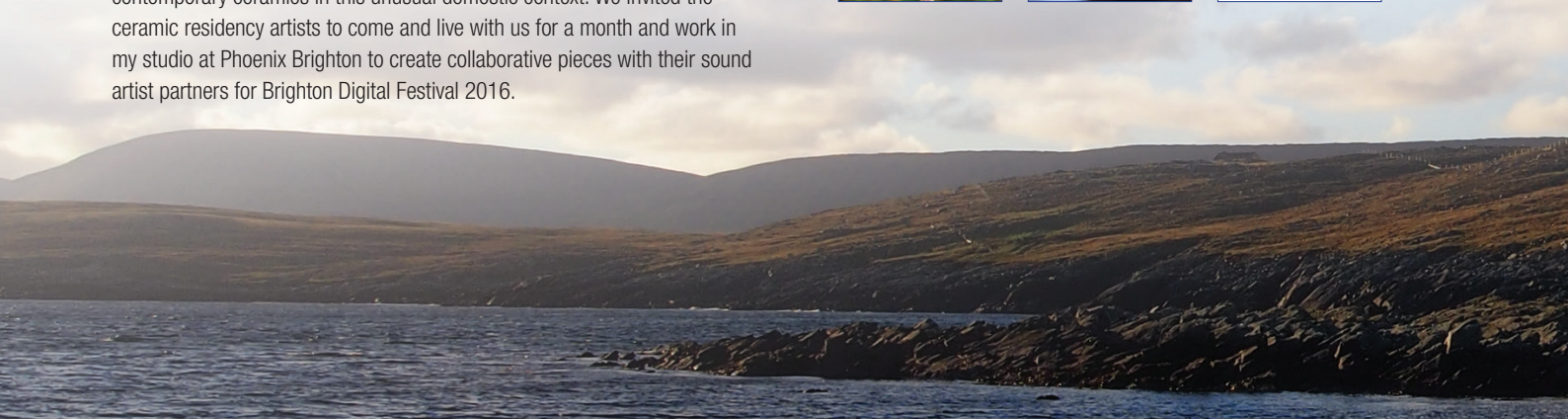
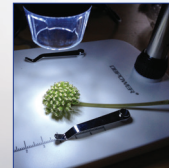
September 2016 *In A Shetland Landscape*, In Camera at The Ceramic House

October 2016 Tour Rochester Museum & Dover Arts Development (DAD)

Kay Aplin (Lead Artist, Ceramics)

The project stems from my collaboration with sound artist Joseph Young for our exhibition *In a Shetland Landscape* (2016). My personal relationship with Shetland dates back to 2010, when I was commissioned to create a public artwork for Shetland Islands Council. Over six months, living and working in Shetland, the islands began to captivate me, and five years later, I returned with Joseph for a joint residency at Scalloway Booth. We spent a month going for daily walks, immersing ourselves in the landscape and gathering the inspiration and documentation needed to create our resulting exhibition at Shetland Museum and Archives.

The idea to extend our collaboration through a residency programme for artists working across the disciplines of ceramics and sound evolved as a natural step in the evolution of my home and gallery space, The Ceramic House. Since 2011, when I began transforming the house into a showcase of my architectural ceramics practice, I have been curating exhibitions of contemporary ceramics in this unusual domestic context. We invited the ceramic residency artists to come and live with us for a month and work in my studio at Phoenix Brighton to create collaborative pieces with their sound artist partners for Brighton Digital Festival 2016.



Joseph Young (Lead Artist, Sound)

Kay and I first worked together on a project in 2010 as part of her public art commission for British Waterways in Stoke on Trent and then again the following year on a commission for House Festival in Brighton. It is appropriate then that we have continued this artistic partnership through the making of our latest piece and the formation of a new micro-gallery space to provide a context for an emerging field of artistic practice - ceramic & sound collaborations.

Displaying art against the highly colourful backdrop of The Ceramic House can be challenging, with the viewer's eye sometimes distracted by the complexity of colour and texture, hence the creation of a self-contained 'white cube' set apart from the main body of the house.

Our programme of work includes exhibitions, performances and residencies alongside publications and digital media.



Sound and the role of chance



My sonic portrait of Shetland is a personal reflection on what I heard as I walked the landscape following pre-selected routes, informed by the vagaries of the weather and the particular sounds encountered each day. The seasons are only partly represented, with most of the recordings made in August 2015 and a few made during our initial research trip in November 2014.

Chance therefore plays a big element in the making of the work. The use of chance has been embraced throughout the project with particular reference to the practice of composer John Cage, whose work on silence and the use of everyday noises in composition has been a significant influence on my work. His famous 1948 piano piece

In A Landscape was also a reference point in the title of our exhibition. What I have tried to capture is the feeling of immersion that comes from being in the landscape, whereby the senses are overwhelmed and all other considerations and thoughts disappear in a moment of intense concentration and contemplation.

The sounds were recorded using Soundman OKMII binaural microphones and then composed and layered for the four-channel installation utilising a structure of four distinct movements, based on a variation of the classical sonata form.

Joseph Young

Shetland's biodiversity through ceramics



We selected the month of August for our residency at Scalloway Booth to maximize the potential for collecting the plentiful micro-flora blooming on the islands at that time of year. Every day, walking the landscape, I collected specimens I found growing underfoot. I had to train my eye to look out for tiny plants containing interesting forms and patterns that could be translated into clay.

I used a digital microscope to capture the initial images, allowing me to view plants, or sections of plants, no bigger than a finger nail and to magnify them to larger-than-life scale; to enter inside the structure of the plant and to see what the human eye cannot see.



This way of working echoes the method used to produce the immersive soundscapes, resulting in 'hyper-real' images that encourage sustained observation and a heightened appreciation of colour and texture.

Back in the studio, I created prototypes in clay, from which I made plaster moulds. I then made multiples by slip-casting porcelain, which was fired to 1280 degrees. I developed a range of glazes especially for this project that reflect the colour palette of the plants I collected.

Kay Aplin

Kay Aplin, Joseph Young

In A Shetland Landscape (2016)

Oxidised porcelain, 4 channel sound



Contemporary ceramics about landscape

The Ceramic House

Ten ceramic artists were selected on the basis that they live on or come from islands and that their work responds to the landscape around them. Direct representations of the landscape can be seen in Patricia Shone's response to the powerful scenery on the Isle of Skye and Delfina Emmanuel's delicate vessels that are inspired by Sardinia's rich marine life. Anne-Marie Jacobs's sculptural ceramics communicate an experience of the landscape of Mersea Island, which she maps through taking aerial photographs of the wilderness of the Essex salt marshes. Carolyn Genders interprets the local Sussex landscape, evoking the changing seasons through surface decoration.

Owen Quinlan and Ingibjörg Guðmundsdóttir both respond to the geological properties of the ceramic medium, referencing the rocky, molten and primal forces that are central to creation itself; whilst Andrew Appleby represents the archeological history of the Orkney Isles through his interest and understanding of Neolithic pre-history. John Jacobs distills an emotional response to the Shetland landscape with his use of glazes, colours and oxides and locally sourced clay. Charlotte Thorup is fascinated with recurring patterns she sees in the landscape around her. Paul Scott's work is ceramics with a social conscience, concerned with landscape, pattern and a sense of place, which he combines with an exacting and critical response to world events.



The Artists

Paul Scott (UK)

Delfina Emmanuel (Sardinia)

Carolyn Genders (UK)

Charlotte Thorup (Denmark)

Owen Quinlan (Ireland)

Patricia Shone (Isle of Skye)

Anne-Marie Jacobs (UK)

John Jacobs (Shetland Isles)

Andrew Appleby (Orkney Isles)

Ingibjörg Guðmundsdóttir (Iceland)

Kay Aplin (UK)





In Camera was inaugurated for our first exhibition in the *Landscape : Islands* series in May 2016. A programme of sound art performances was co-curated with the Aural Detritus Concert Series with two pairs of sound artists performing improvised sets over the course of the exhibition.

Joseph introduced the evenings with his own Sonic Baton performances of Shetland soundscapes performed outdoors in the garden, creating unexpected and delightful duets with the local bird population.







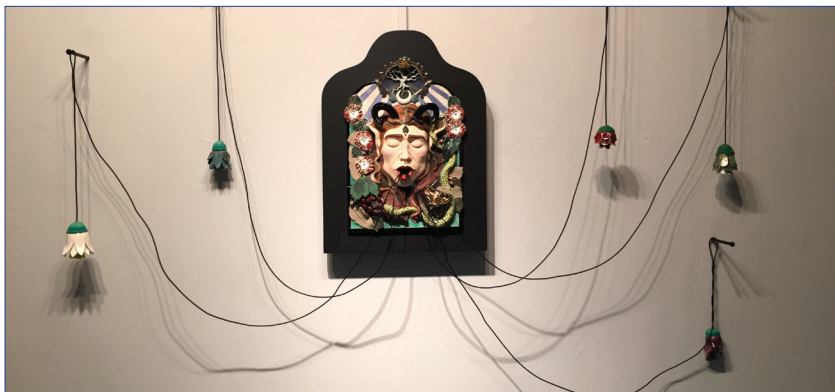
Littoral Assembly

Ingibjörg Guðmundsdóttir
& Iris Garrelfs

Ceramics, 4-channel sound

2016





Lifting The Veil

Anne Lykke & Mike Blow

Ceramics and embedded sound

2016



LANDSCAPE: ISLANDS

Kay Aplin and Joseph Young discuss *Landscape: Islands* with arts writer Dany Louise.

Dany Louise: In your introduction you note that ceramics and sound are “twin themes that are rarely associated”: What sparked the idea of *Landscape: Islands*?

Kay Aplin: I first did a public art commission in Shetland in 2010, which is when I found out about the Scalloway Booth residency opportunity which I applied for. My residency application was accepted two years before it started, which gave me a lot of planning time.

Joseph Young: We first proposed making a series of sculptural seating hidden deep in the landscape. You would find the seating by going on walks guided by an audio application that I would make. So we were already thinking about mixing the digital and the craft elements together.

KA: As my practice evolved over the intervening years, the project morphed into a gallery-based collaboration. I was continuing to make architectural ceramics but I wanted to find ways of exhibiting my work in a gallery context. This led us to think that we would be making more of a gallery piece, so we put a proposal to Shetland Museum & Archives. One of their conditions was that we had to make a piece actually in Shetland, and so the idea that has become *Landscape: Islands* was born.

JY: We went to Shetland, and bought a lot of maps! We met with a ranger who helped us choose walks. I was looking for opportunities to record “everyday sound” - which of course is a very different thing from everyday sounds in London or Brighton!

KA: There are very few trees in Shetland as it so buffeted by the wind, so a lot of the plant-life tends to be tiny. I was interested in studying the micro-flora of the Shetland landscape.

JY: I was listening to the voices of the landscape and trying to find ways of evoking that through sonic portraits. I tried to mirror the experience of the walks that we did in some very remote landscapes. So the titles of the four movements I made are Birds/Water: Wind/Rain: Humans/Animals; then the final movement returns to the initial theme with a greater emphasis on water.

DL: How did you bring your work together to become one project, rather than two individual practices showing at the same time?

KA: We know each other's work very well and we spent a lot of time talking about the project, so we had confidence in each other.

JY: I describe the way we collaborated with each other as ‘parallel lines’. We both have our individual processes, but we were conscious that we wanted our work to meet at a single destination, which was the theme

and title *In a Shetland Landscape*. It's worked well for us to carry out our normal working process and then put them together. That's where the John Cage connection comes in, in his use of chance and silence. Cage and his partner Merce Cunningham famously used to create work together and the two elements wouldn't come together till the first night performance. That's pretty much what we did. We didn't know what the conversation would be until it happened!

DL: How do you want the audience to experience your work?

JY: Kay knew she wanted to make larger-than-life ceramic pieces of micro-flora for display in a gallery setting, and I knew I wanted to make a four-channel piece that would give the audience a sense of what it was like to be immersed in the landscape, rather than simply observing it.

KA: In the gallery, you are looking at the ceramic pieces that are evocative of the landscape, and simultaneously you are hearing the landscape. That works to sharpen the sense of actually being there. It figuratively places you in the landscape.

DL: There are two other pairs of sound-ceramic collaborations. How did they approach the project?

JY: With the international residencies I wanted to explore how other artists in a similar position would approach this same question. How do

you put ceramics and sound together and make it into a single work? I wondered if they would be more embedded or intertwined.

KA: It's been very interesting to see how different all the collaborations are. Ingibjörg Guðmundsdóttir and Iris Garrelfs started the process by going for a walk along Brighton beach. Ingibjörg gathered pebbles and presented these and her ceramics to Iris. And Iris used these objects as instruments, playing the sculptures with her violin bow! It's a beautiful thing to watch these artists working together. They've both used the word "alchemy" to describe their work.

JY: The other pairing is Mike Blow and Anne Lykke. Mike is a specialist in making interactive sound objects and I was interested in what would happen if you had a sculptural ceramic and embedded sound within it. Anne led on that piece, with Mike responding to her work.

DL: The natural world always provides rich subject matter, but what is the significance of islands as source and inspiration?

KA: The Shetland Isles serendipitously provided such a beautiful theme! This meant that I was tasked with finding many artists who live on, or come from islands, and whose work responds to the landscape around them, which was a challenge, especially for the exhibition in May. I discovered many artists who are inspired by their island and who are making extremely accomplished work.

JY: In the broad form we are interested in landscape and cultural identity. Small islands are very isolated. That is very different from say, a continental identity where borders and landscapes are shared.

DL: What insights have you gained from working on this project?

KA: It's been an incredibly rich and inspiring experience merging the ceramics with the sound, both for my own collaboration with Joseph, and to be so intimately involved with the other artists' collaborations. I have particularly enjoyed running the residencies. We have used my studio as the base during the residencies, which means we have all been working alongside each other. I am always amazed by how much I learn about my own medium when I am with my peers. When everyone gets together it's so buzzy and exciting. I love being able to offer these types of opportunities to artists.

JY: I think there is a false dichotomy between craft and digital practice. This is the first part of a conversation between two very distinct mediums. The question is, how can we extend that conversation even further?

KA: I'd like to think we could broaden our horizons and turn this into something notable and of worth that people know about, and are interested in.

Dany Louise August 2016

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