



New GEO GRAPHIES

Press Release: 'The World After' David Blandy

26 October 2019 to

26 January 2020

Opening: Saturday 26 October

6.00pm to 8.00pm



Focal Point Gallery is pleased to present 'The World After', a newly commissioned work and exhibition by artist David Blandy. Comprised of a film, installation and game, 'The World After' is a fictional tale which imagines a world after the Anthropocene era, a time in which humanity's activities had detrimental effect on earth's climate and environment. In this future world, human influence on the planet has faded following a catastrophic man-made ecological crisis, with those who remain having to find new ways to survive and form kin.

The project emerges out of New Geographies, a three-year partnership across arts organisations in the East of England to commission site-specific work that responds to a series of publically nominated locations across the region. As one of nine commissioned artists, Blandy's project takes inspiration from the unique post-industrial setting of Canvey Wick on Canvey Island, Essex.

Formerly the site of an oil refinery that was only partially built in the early 1970s and never operational due to the oil crisis of 1973, Canvey Wick has for the past forty years been reclaimed by nature. Managed by nature conservation charities RSPB and Buglife, it is one of the most biodiverse areas of the UK with nearly 2,000 invertebrate species recorded on this quiet corner of the Thames Estuary.

In the film, the voiceover reimagines the Wick as a future space where flora and fauna have grown to monstrous size, the site for a future fantasy narrative. It uses poetry, myth, immersive video and a symphonic score, played by the Southend Symphony Orchestra, to create a bucolic yet melancholic meditation on who we are, and who we could be.

Filming the site over a year, Blandy returned every month to record the changes of the seasons. Using the technology emblematic of the Anthropocene era, the iPhone, the site was filmed in both macro and slow motion, revealing its rich yet hidden ecosystem. Through this magnification, minute scales of living communities are revealed as self-contained worlds, both sublime and horrifying in its detail.

The film depicts a microcosm uninterested in human concerns, despite our devastating impact on their environments. There is a joy and wonder in this examination, but also an existential dread, as we understand the incidental nature of humanity's role in the universe. The technology of the macro lens reveals this world of struggle; beetles wearing their shields on their backs, bees armed with poison, ants dismembering cadavers to feed their nest, flowers designed to trap and entice, to lure us and other species to do their bidding.

As well as presenting the film as part of an installation in Focal Point Gallery, Blandy saw the potential in table-top roleplay games for generating a space to reimagine interpersonal relations in a time when divisions in society have become so marked and opposing positions so ossified. In the game, Canvey Island has become the site of an entire alternate world, a 'World After' our current conception of humanity. Blandy imagines Canvey as the setting for a narrative of renewal and rebirth, of collaboration towards a world of harmony in diversity, both in nature and with each other.

Blandy has worked closely with gaming communities in Essex to create this future world, devising creatures based on local wildlife and myth, and imagining societies that have evolved separately in vast underground Havens. Together they have used the format of the roleplaying game to create a collective story that imagines new ways of living together. The launch of 'The World After' table-top roleplay game will coincide with the exhibition opening on Saturday 26 October, where a new gaming rulebook designed collaboratively with members of the Essex gaming community will be available for the first time.

The work reflects on the geopolitics of the "oil shocks" of the 1970's and the fall of the Shah in Iran alongside the Canvey Island protest against the refinery and planned airport; all events that have led to Canvey Wick's present state as a beacon of biodiversity. If this small site in the East of England can recover from the excesses of the industrial world, this could be a model for how to find a way to deal with the threat of climate change that impacts us all. Of course Canvey Island can only ever be a temporary haven with the increasing threat from rising sea levels.

The recent crises of economic and political systems has shown the urgency for a new paradigm that acknowledges humanity as subservient to our ecosystem. The example of Canvey Wick gives some hope that the effect of our worst excesses are reversible.

Inspired by Donna Haraway's concept of the Cthulucene and Ursula Le Guin's "Always Coming Home", the video work, role playing game and installation combine to link mythmaking with the creation of kinship, and geopolitics with interpersonal relationships, seeing potential answers through the collaborative use of play. Blandy hopes that through imagining alternate futures we can see ways to affect change in the present.

About David Blandy

David Blandy has established his terrain through a series of investigations into the cultural forces that inform and influence him, in recent works examining human consciousness within the digital world. His works slip between performance and video, reality and construct, using references sampled from the wide, disparate sources that provide his (and our own) individualist sense of self.

He has exhibited at venues nationally and worldwide such as Bloomberg Space, London, UK; Art Tower Mito, Tokyo, Japan; Kiasma Contemporary Art Museum, Helsinki, Finland; Tate Modern, London; The Baltic, Gateshead; Turner Contemporary, Margate; Spike Island, Bristol; Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Germany; MoMA PS1, New York, and Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai, China. He is represented by Seventeen Gallery, London.

About Focal Point Gallery

Focal Point Gallery (FPG) supports the production and presentation of new and recent contemporary art that challenges us to think and feel differently about locality, our sense of self and the importance of communities.

Our wide-ranging and pioneering artistic programme is relevant to local and national audiences alike, through exploring current concerns that also resonate internationally. Based in Southend-on-Sea, FPG's activities take place in locations across the region with our reach extended by working collaboratively with like-minded partners.

FPG is south Essex's only publicly funded gallery for contemporary visual art. It currently produces up to seven major gallery exhibitions and commissions a year.



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