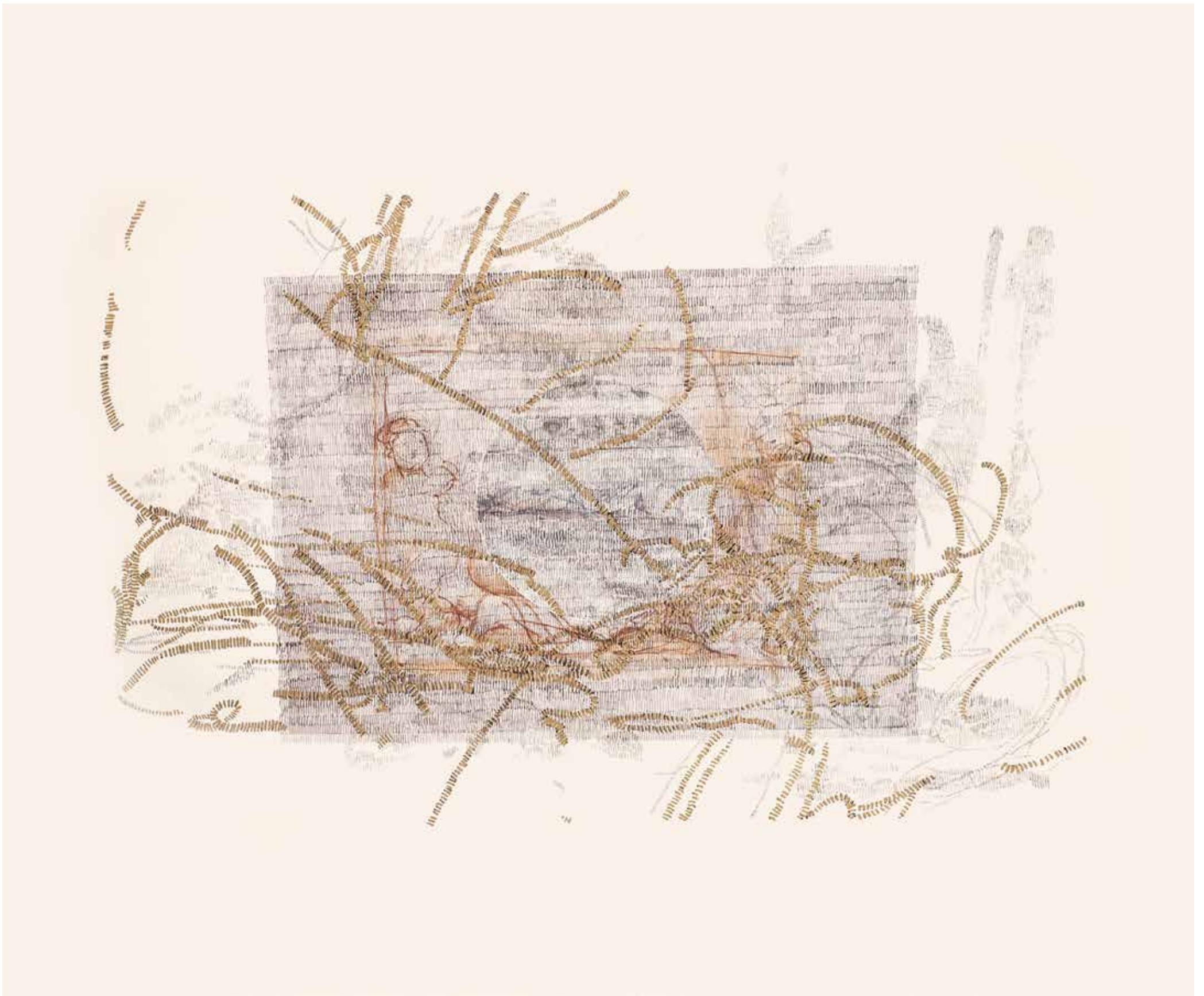


Five Years On





Caroline Ali

carolineali.co.uk

Investigating how conservation processes for historic works on paper might inform models for contemporary drawing practices

Caroline Ali obtained an MA in Fine Art from the University of Wolverhampton in 2013, and exhibited in New Art West Midlands 2014. Currently a Post Graduate Researcher at Northumbria University, she has presented papers on her research there, as well as at Nottingham Trent University, the University of Wolverhampton, Northumbria University and the University of York. She is based near Ironbridge.

Her research centres upon the investigation of ways in which processes and protocols for conservation of works on paper might inform models for contemporary fine art drawing practices. Parallels and similarities between methods of conservation retouching and artist transcription have emerged as a specific focus of enquiry.

The source from which these concerns are investigated is the archive

of Charles Sims R.A. (1873-1928) at Northumbria University. Studying and drawing in the archive has highlighted Sims' custom of manipulating his earlier drawings by means of tracing, retouching, repeating, and re-sizing, all pointing to observation and transcription at the core of an inventive visual practice.

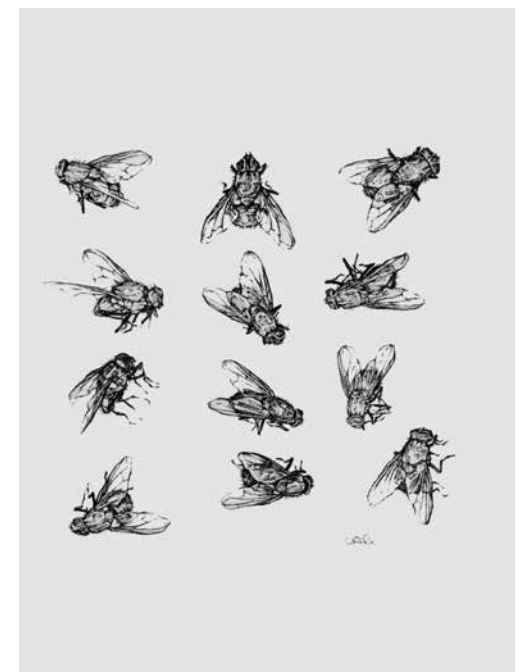
This is the current focus of Ali's activity for a series of works investigating transcription, substitution, and repetition. On display in this exhibition is a small selection from two linked series' *Altered Territories* and *Interpolated Drawings*.

Ali has had solo shows at Burt Hall, Northumbria University 2017, and the RBSA Gallery, Birmingham 2012, amongst others. She has exhibited in group shows including *Drawn*, Royal West of England Academy, Bristol 2017, *Paper, Table, Wall and After*, National Taiwan University of Arts, Taipei

2015, *Be Our Guest*, Oriel Davies, Wales 2013, and *Medals: Surprise Sculpture*, Goldsmiths Centre, London 2013.

Above
Altered Territories 7, 2017
 38 x 28cm
 Zerkall Hot Pressed 100gsm Book Paper with metal pigmented ink (copper alloy), bistre, and watercolour (black) over cut sections of multi-spectral images of Charles Sims R.A. sketchbook page (c.1915) behind cut ink-jet printed image of transcription by Caroline Ali.
 Photograph by Haris Ali

Right
Fly Montage (positive), 2013
 Graphite on paper
 10 x 10 cm



Exploring the instability of self-identity; that indeterminate place somewhere between personal intention and social dictation

Lorna Brown obtained her BA Photography from Hereford College of Arts in 2015, and exhibited in New Art West Midlands 2017. She is based in Hereford, and is currently completing a commission for the National Trust at Berrington Hall, near Leominster.

Although working predominantly with a camera, Brown doesn't consider herself a photographer as such; rather experimenting with photography as a medium that affords the opportunity for fluidity in visual expression. She explores racial, cultural, female and social identity, especially the instability of self-identity; that indeterminate place somewhere between personal intention and social dictation. She often works with self-portraiture and role play, aiming to transfer the nebulous and contemplative to the material and frameable.

For this exhibition, Brown will be

showing a series of works for the first time, *Poly ur a Thane*. This piece is evolving out of contemplation of the reality of womanhood, that a woman throughout her lifetime must be very flexible, assuming both feminine and masculine roles, both hard and soft. Polyurethane can be either flexible or rigid and the material of choice for a broad range of uses. The name has echoes in the name of Poly Styrene, lead of 1970's punk band X-Ray Spex. 'Thane' is probably most familiar to us as Macbeth's title, and indicates the chief of a clan. But the full etymology of the word goes back through Middle and Old English, Old Norse, German and Greek, indicating a hero or warrior. In her expression of this, Brown shows a woman with curves but muscles, looking strong but feminine. Her title says "Woman, you're a warrior".

Below
Detail of *Polly ur a Thane #3*, 2015 – 2017
Perspex reverse mount print
76 x 51 cm

Right
Nice Middle Class white girl, 2015
Pinholed pigment print
102 x 73 cm



Building materials salvaged from skips, the street or the sea; rescuing unloved objects that have no purpose

Abigail Day exhibited in New Art West Midlands 2017 and is now based in Portsmouth. She obtained her BA in Fine Art from the University of Worcester in 2015, and she has exhibited in shows at Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum and the ArtistsWorkhouse in Studley, Warwickshire, and recently had her first solo exhibition *Regeneration*, at Stryx in Birmingham.

She achieved an MA in Contemporary Curation from Winchester School of Art in 2017, and volunteers at the Cass Sculpture Foundation, near Chichester. She will shortly be starting an internship at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice.

Day is showing work from her ongoing series *Untitled*, which uses discarded road curb and building material she has dredged from the sea and salvaged from various locations, such as skips and masonry yards. She has added

bright, playful wax to create objects that blur the line between sculpture, artefact and artwork, in the process 'rescuing' an unloved object that had no purpose. Leaning against the wall, these objects seem somewhat precarious at the same as being evidently solid. In this way, she is continuing her investigations into Brutalist architecture – sculptural buildings that have often generated strong opposing feelings of distain or delight from urban residents. The nearby old Birmingham Central Library looked eternal but was not even 45 years old before it was demolished. It's architect, local John Madin, had at least three of his major Modernist projects demolished during his lifetime. Day experiments with demolishing and re-building, breaking existing pieces and fixing them with wax.

Below
Untitled series, 2017 – present
Salvaged stone, pigmented paraffin wax
Ranging from 53 – 128 cm high

Right
Planes, 2016
Maltese limestone, pink pigment
11 x 7 x 5 cm





Theo Ellison

theoellison.com

Scenarios that blur the line between attraction and repulsion, deconstructing our relationship to the image

Theo Ellison received a BA in Photography from Coventry University in 2014, and an MA in Photography from the Royal College of Art in 2017. He exhibited in New Art West Midlands 2016, and is currently based in London.

His work is in the Saatchi Gallery collection and in private collections in the UK and Europe. He has exhibited in shows including *Offprint*, Tate Modern 2016, *Telling Tales*, Liverpool Biennial Fringe, in association with Open Eye Gallery 2016 and *Artificial Things*, Cambridge University 2017.

His work is born out of his attraction to, but distrust of, seductive imagery. Playing with the allure of visual representation, Ellison's imagery works to seduce the viewer into enjoying openly manipulative constructions where the distinction between observation and voyeurism is no longer apparent. Using

references to art history as recognisable points of contact, his work looks to construct scenarios that blur the line between attraction and repulsion in order to deconstruct our relationship to the image.

Ellison is showing four of his recent photographs, their blue tints forming a visual link with the similarly seductive Edward Burne-Jones paintings in the adjoining room. In *Ascending Descension* he elevates a pigeon to a dove, the prosaic becomes celebrated, and its iridescent plumage comes to the fore. *Entombment* shows the commonly despised urban bird as a beatified lifeless figure.

Baby draws on his research into the morbid curiosity of the Paris Morgue of the 19th century, where displayed cadavers drew large crowds of visitors. The combination of female beauty and death proved a particularly alluring voyeuristic spectacle.

Decomposing bodies were replaced after a few days with a photograph or wax cast. Ellison plays with this transformation of representation, photographing sculptures to represent these figures; his images oscillate between life and death, melancholy and serenity, reality and artifice.

Above
Naturalistic Fallacy 3, 2017
C-type photograph
120 x 95 cm

Right
Heavy Lies the Crown, 2014
Photograph
44 x 60 cm





Matt Parker

earthkeptwarm.com

Working with archives to expose the infrastructural connections between everyday technology and the environment

Matt Parker is an audiovisual artist and field recordist who works with archives to amplify and expose infrastructural connections between everyday technology and the environment. He is currently based in London.

He graduated with a MMus in Music Technology at Birmingham City University in 2014, and exhibited in New Art West Midlands 2016. He is currently working towards a PhD at the London College of Communication.

He has been artist in residence at The National Museum of Computing, Bletchley Park in 2015, at AER in Almeria, Spain in 2016, and a MEAD Resident with the British School at Rome in 2017. Prizes include the Deutsche Bank Creative Prize in Music 2014, The Without Words Film Festival Grand Prize, Marseille, France 2015, and the New Art West Midlands Prize 2016.

He has exhibited internationally, including the Brighton International Festival and the European Media Arts Festival in Osnabrück both in 2016, *Future Proof*, The LAB, Dublin, Ireland, 2017 and Kochi Muziris Biennale, Kochi, India, also in 2017. His work has been screened widely, in Melbourne, Venice, Lyon, Belfast, London and many other places.

He is exhibiting *Fields of Athenry*, which juxtaposes found footage of football fans chanting the popular political Irish song “The Fields of Athenry”, a digitally shared, collective experience, with environmental field recordings at the site of Apple’s proposed new data centre in the actual Athenry, in Ireland. The work acts as a metaphor for what Athenry might become, as the small rural town prepares to allow one of the largest data complexes in the world to be built nearby.

Above
Fields of Athenry, 2016
 16 Apple iPod Touches, Apple iPhone 4, Apple AirPort Extreme A1408, newspaper prints, 12 min synchronised loop with variable dimensions. Commissioned by Brighton Digital Festival 2016

Right
The Imitation Archive (video still), 2015
 Audio-visual, MP3 player with headphones



Chris Wright graduated with an MA in Fine Art from Staffordshire University in 2007 and a PhD in Fine Art and Philosophy from Staffordshire University in 2013. She exhibited in New Art West Midlands 2014, and is now based in Loughborough.

Her solo shows include *Anywhere is Everywhere is a Circular Tale* at tAd gallery, Texas, USA 2014 and *Exchange*, Vault Gallery, Lancaster 2010. She has exhibited extensively in group shows, including in *Drift* and *Unbroken* at The Alternative Art Fair, HMS, Athens 2017, *Grass is Greener*, at ZOOart, Cuneo, Italy 2010 and *Constellation* at the Media and Interdisciplinary Centre, Auckland, New Zealand 2009.

Her residencies have included the In The Hole Residency, Canada 2017, Harrington Mill Residency, Nottingham 2014, and the TAOH Residency, Stavanger, Norway 2010. She has presented conference

papers in Sardinia, Italy, New Zealand and around the UK.

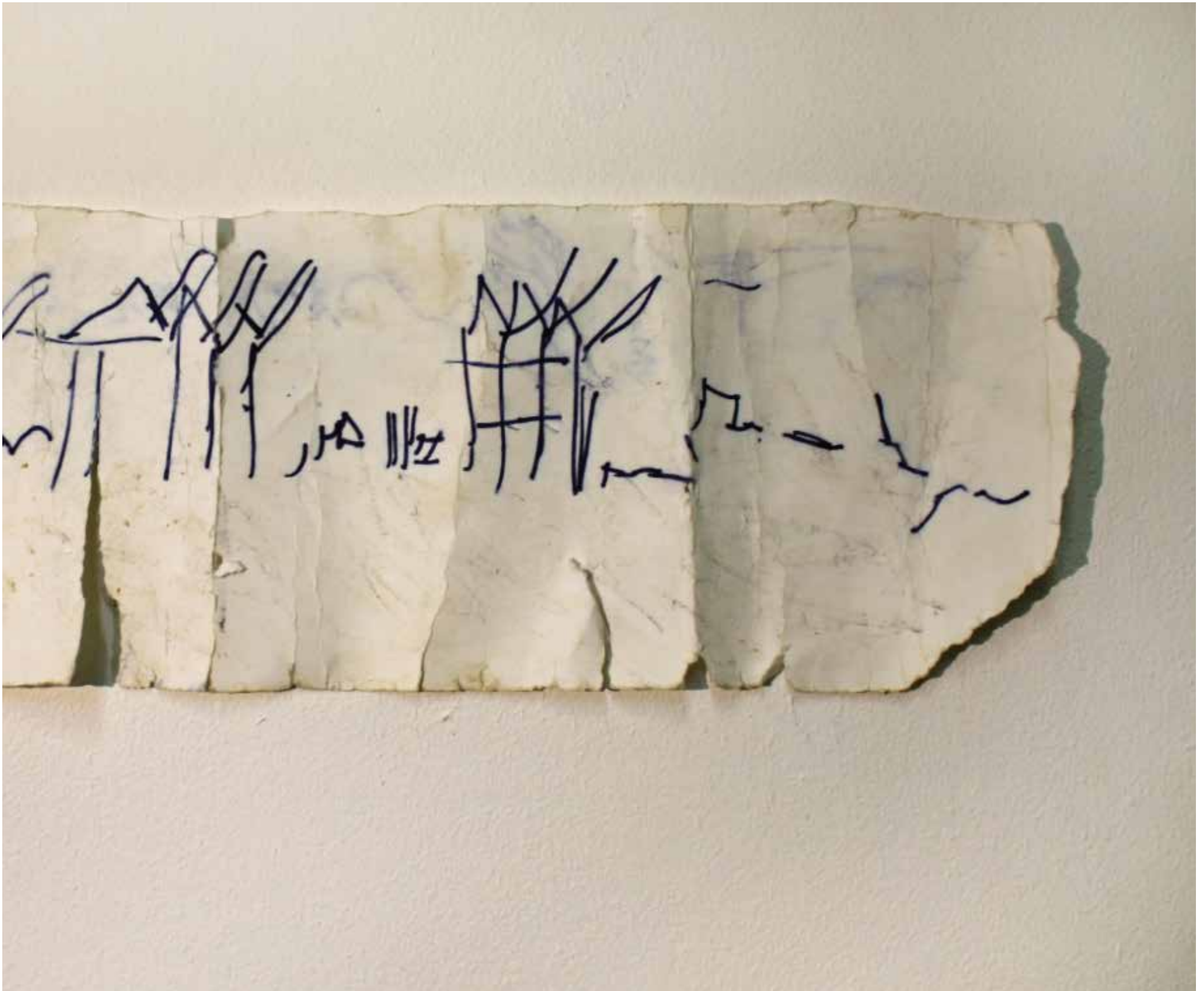
Wright is a multidisciplinary artist, writer and researcher who investigates, develops and promotes the practice and theory of fine art and philosophy. She is especially interested in borders and transitory spaces, as well as ideas and what-ifs that are often generated by found 'objects' such as snippets of overheard conversation, a lost bus ticket, a door left ajar with light and voices creeping out. To her, these represent the 'absolute now' that peers through the cracks of everyday life. In the studio, these fractures of the everyday are dissected, amalgamated and investigated.

Wright, a sailor herself, is sharing two pieces of work created in characteristically transitory spaces whilst undertaking the East Coast Stories

Residency in 2016. *Ergh mmm (Translating the Wind)* was created on board a rocking boat as she attempted to make a transcription of the sound of the wind whipping around the harbour. Later, this notation was translated back to sound using voices, overlaid and edited. A humorous reflection, perhaps, on the inadequacy of words in describing sound, or indeed artwork. *Estuary English* is a drawing made on a shore walk that depicts the skyline from the mouth of an estuary back to a point close to where she began.

Below
Detail of *Estuary English*, 2016
Permanent marker on Fabriano paper,
salt water, estuary mud
12.5 x 350 cm

Right
Things Happen, 2009 – 2011
Postcard photograph series



Producing a residency was a way to get to know other artists beyond just their arts practice

I was excited to have been selected for New Art West Midlands, having just finished my MA in Fine Art in 2014. It was good for my confidence and an opportunity to showcase a new performance piece titled *The Lives of Others* at The Barber Institute of Fine Arts. This piece was an attempt to see if I could disrupt a private view but was also a durational physical and mental challenge, an opportunity to seek feedback from others, and to challenge myself with a performance. It was great subsequently to be asked to make another performance at mac birmingham for the exhibition *Disrupted*.

The exposure online, being part of a catalogue, and local press coverage was helpful but I am not sure I used the momentum of this to really develop. I wonder if it would have been more valuable at this stage to have access to a mentor.

Since New Art West Midlands 2015 I have continued as an artist/curator producing an outdoor residency space for artists GRASSLANDS in 2015 and an online audio-visual platform FEATURE in 2016, both ways of producing collaborative and hybrid works and also as a way to get to know other artists beyond just their arts practice. These self-initiated projects have led me to a couple of more residencies and an expanded network of artist collaborators

and friends. A recent collaborative performance at a PhD conference has made me reconsider further performance works and potential PhD research.

Last year I was offered a six-week residency at Birmingham arts space Failbetter, which allowed me to test out video, sound and performance with various other artists. More recently I was offered a video commission for the Black Country Living Museum, looking at the wonders and horrors of the Black Country, which launched in November. This residency has re-awakened my excitement in film making and I am currently working on short film ideas that explore viewpoints in relation to time, rehearsal and performance. I have also become a member of Black Hole Club at Vivid Projects which is a great way to meet others who are into film, video, sound and performance.

2018 is going to be very exciting in terms of art venues that have been funded. I'm hoping this will bring in even more diversity to our region, perhaps in terms of hybrid works that may develop potentially in relation to spaces outside the current arts ecology. One way forward could be to develop sustainable funding for a New Art West Midlands Biennial or Triennial, allowing recent graduates, mid-career,

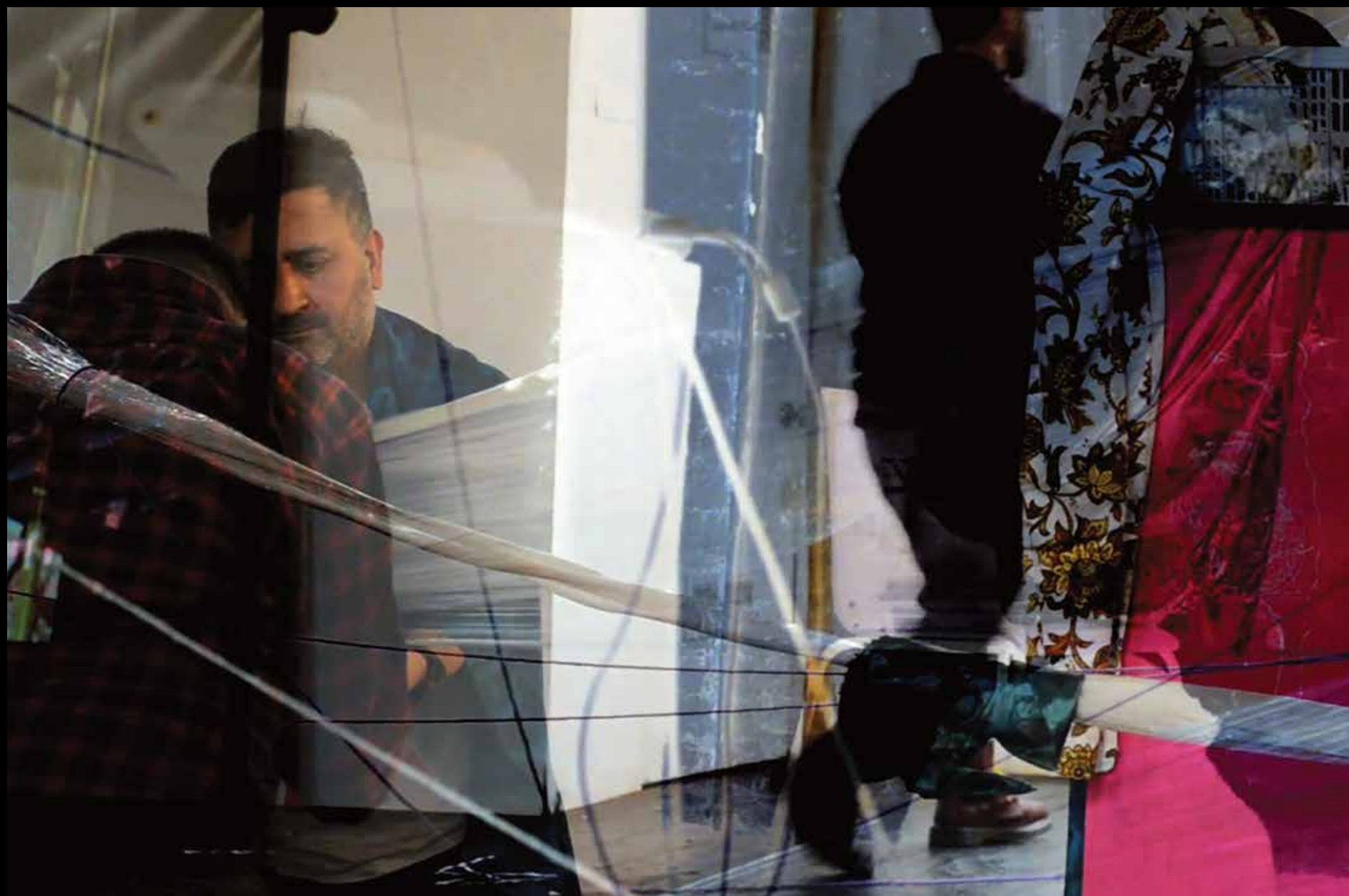
and returning artists to develop something that looks out beyond the West Midlands. Perhaps an exciting Fringe element of this could be spearheaded by our educational institutions? Possibly a way of retaining West Midlands talent before it flies the nest.

I have had opportunities to live and work outside the West Midlands but there is so much happening locally that I still don't feel confident doing so. I'm wondering whether one needs to move; developing as an artist may not be defined by where we live but where the next artwork or project takes us.

Dan Auluk studied at Birmingham City University, and exhibited in New Art West Midlands 2015. He is currently based in Birmingham.

Bottom
... we don't talk anymore, 2017
Performed at Failbetter, Birmingham
3 hours duration

Below
The Lives of Others (detail), 2015
Performed at The Barber Institute of Fine Art, Birmingham
3 hours duration
Photograph by Emily Warner





Natalie Ramus

nalieramus.com

I have lots of space to explore and experiment but I feel the need to share it

I suppose my art career has slowed down somewhat since New Art West Midlands. During the previous year whilst studying for my Master of Arts in Cardiff, not only did I do several very challenging performances, but I was working so hard and full on that it took its toll on me.

Since then I've exhibited in a few places, including in *The Female Gaze* in The Depot, London, and performed *Mothers Pride*, a durational work lasting nine hours at Buzzcut Festival, Glasgow. I performed *Gwaith (Work)* in collaboration with Lisa Evans as part of Cardiff Contemporary Festival 2016. This work explored the place of the artist leaving the institution, the value of the community of art school and how it feeds into your practice. We were faced with the questions of what will we now do? What is the next step in our career path? What jobs do art qualifications entitle us to?

I decided to take a step back from publicly working. I had been so intensely public-facing that my practice had started to become led by application proposals, as opposed to genuine research based enquiry. I needed to regroup and give myself some time to digest what I had done over the past year, whilst making and exploring without any real pressure - all in the hopes of reconnecting with my practice conceptually.

I believe that you need

conversation, critical dialogue and support from others to maintain a practice - and those are all things that I am struggling with the loss of. My network had developed during college in the West Midlands, Cardiff and London but now that I am out of university and juggling work and home life, I have struggled to travel as regularly as I had previously, and so that support hasn't been there in quite the same way.

My children are the priority when deciding where I am located. Living on the Welsh borders, I don't feel a concrete connection to surrounding geographical networks. I am not quite part of the Wales art network, and I'm not really part of the Midlands network. Rural life is problematic. I am lucky in that I have lots of space to explore and experiment but I feel the need to share it. Also, if I am experimenting with my body in the landscape then I am unable to really document it; if I lived in the city I know those skills and support would be more available and collaboration a possibility.

From what I hear the cultural community is rich in the West Midlands - and I think that the fact artists are being priced out of London is a contributing factor. I wish that during my involvement with New Art West Midlands I'd had the chance to be introduced and involved more deeply

with the other artists and venues. Maybe that would have helped me to develop connections with and dialogues surrounding my art practice.

I am told that these sorts of wobbles post study are very common (a rite of passage even), and so I am just allowing myself to go through the process of trying to keep my practice alive.

Natalie Ramus studied at Hereford College of Arts, and exhibited in New Art West Midlands 2017. She is currently based in Hay-on-Wye.



Above
Mothers Pride
Performed at Buzzcut Festival, Glasgow 2017
350 loaves Mothers Pride bread, 120 litres milk, 10 metres red shibari rope, mop, five buckets.
9 hours duration. Photograph by Beth Chalmers

Right
Hand Stitched, 2015
Photographic prints on aluminium dibond
110 x 73.5 cm

The Escalator Effect

Last year I was asked to curate a small exhibition of work by alumni of previous New Arts West Midlands exhibitions, as a means to check back in with selected artists and show what happened next. The broad aim of the exhibition is to prompt discussions about how, or if, the exhibitions have functioned to support recent art graduates.

Choosing one artist from each of the six contributing art schools, I have assembled a varied show. The hope is to open a conversation about not just about the work on display, but also about the different ways artists practically continue their art practice after graduating.

I am not offering advice to artists on how to 'succeed'. The aim is to reflect on the arts ecology in the West Midlands, and speculate on how greater numbers of young artists could be persuaded to stay and thrive in the region.

Having grown up in the market town of Shifnal in Shropshire, I have a personal history and continued interest in the region. However, as I don't live in the Midlands currently, I am perhaps not the best person to delineate the specific arts ecology.

Instead, for the alumni exhibition, I asked two artists to write about their personal experiences. Dan Auluk bases himself in urban Birmingham, and writes about his need to build a personal network of artist peers and collaborators. Natalie Ramus lives on the rural borderlands of Hay-on-Wye and writes about her thirst for dialogue, but also about the value of quiet time and open space to reflect, regroup and experiment. To compliment these letters from the trenches, I thought I would take a sideways view, reminding us of the larger societal, political and economic pressures which bear down on artists, shaping their opportunities and experiences.

Many years ago I heard an interview with a Managing Director talking about how they coped with getting hundreds of applications for every job vacancy. He said: "I take the pile of application forms and throw 50% of them in the bin, unread. You have to be lucky to succeed in this business". You need good fortune to succeed in the art world too. But apart from luck, what are some of the other forces that, like gravity, work from afar invisibly but inexorably on any artist?

A decade ago I moderated a panel discussion in Bristol during which a panel member stated that any artist who didn't move to London wasn't serious about their career. You can imagine how this went down with the artists in the audience; but the panellist was stating his honest opinion, drawn from his professional experiences. Is this statement true today? Do ambitious artists need to leave the West Midlands to develop their career?

Looking after children, aging parents¹, and earning a living are pressures that impact on where graduates live and work, arguably more so than their own drive, talent and ambition. A fifth of 25-29 year olds now live with their parents. This growing circumstance is bound to bind more artists locally.

But does it matter now where an artist lives and works? I am often in contact with artists or curators electronically without knowing where on the planet they stand. Skype can largely take the place of face-to-face meetings. Some artists build a career and sales without a physical place to display work (traditionally provided by a gallery or agent), utilising Instagram (D*Face), Facebook (Jean Smith) or their websites (Tom Kemp). Perhaps the modern equivalent of an artists' colony, providing support and mental stimulation, is a Facebook group such as the Political Artists Group or the Glitch Artists Collective.

In the past, artists sometimes came together and formed so-called artists' colonies, often in rural situations such as Shoreham in the 1820s, Ditchling, or St Ives. There doesn't seem to be a contemporary equivalent of this model, by which I mean a place for artists to work physically close to each other, meeting and supporting each other based on a pre-existing group dynamic and over-arching philosophy. Today the usual group-studio set-up consists of disparate artists who coagulate in order to leverage their financial

clout with landlords, and to cross-promote around studio open days.

In the 1980s and 90s, artists all over the country grouped together to squat unused buildings for living and working. If these were council-owned properties, a blind eye was often turned, as artists helped keep the buildings in some sort of repair and protected them from scavengers. Artists such as Yinka Shonibare and Jeremy Deller got their start in artists' squats, but recent changes in the law has suppressed much squatting².

Unprofitable and unimproved industrial buildings were happily rented cheaply to studio organisations. Organisations such as the Association of Artists and Designers in Wales grew to several hundred members with eleven studio branches around the whole of Wales. Artists fresh from college, or who had never been to college, worked alongside established artists such as Harry Holland and Terry Setch.

These types of incubators have disappeared as the booming property market, fuelled by overseas investment from Russia or the Far East, has turned moribund buildings into development opportunities. At the same time local councils struggling with Austerity, originating in the US global banking recession, divest and sell as much of their property they can.

With Brexit, it will not be so easy for impecunious artists to decamp to cities with cheaper accommodation such as Berlin or Lisbon – in fact some artists already there may be looking to return to the UK. It is hard to see how this number of free and cheap studios can ever be replaced, even if organisations such as Coventry Art Space, Airspace in Stoke and Grand Union in Birmingham were to develop to the size of charitable studio organisations such as ACME or East Street Arts. This lack of space has had a direct effect on the actual type of work that artists are producing. Technical advances in computing allow certain types of work to be made on a laptop, and performative or collaborative works can also be organised with no need for a studio.

There are solid figures we can look at, to help inform our discussion.

The think tank Centre for Cities reported on the movements of 2014 graduates in all subjects in the 6 months after they left college³.

- 76% of students who came from elsewhere to Birmingham to study had left after 6 months. This is not bad - as a university city, Birmingham is one of the places most able to hang onto its graduates.
- Nationally, 46% of employed graduates are home grown. That is, they grew up, studied and worked in one region.
- 53% of students who left Birmingham to study returned there to work.

The West Midlands region as a whole is one of the most successful in attracting its' home-grown students back. But the authors highlight the importance of career progression opportunities – the 'escalator' effect – on keeping or attracting graduates.

A recent report surveyed the activities of Fine Art graduates specifically⁴. Career entry into the creative industries is not clearly structured, and many Fine Art graduates take time to establish themselves, with only about

a sixth describing their job as artist after 6 months.

With artists there is a high prevalence of portfolio careers. In another survey of recent Fine Art graduates⁵

- 30% were working part time.
- Teaching, art therapy and working in community arts, offered other career paths. Of those that went on to further study, 21% studied for qualifications in education.
- 37% were working full time.
- 25% worked in the arts or media.
- 28% worked in retail and hospitality.

The escalator for artists is most visible in London, but not because it is the capital of our nation. More because it is a truly global centre of finance (with a broad collecting base), a world capital of the art-trade, and a past capital of Empire containing World Museums and galleries.

How have other towns improved their ability to keep or even attract new artists?

Folkestone Triennial was set up by local millionaire Roger De Haan in 2008 with the specific aim of using contemporary art to revitalise the economy of his ailing home town for every resident. Local artists have benefited from opportunities for exposure, and cheap commercial rent in premises he has developed. Artists, writers and curators from the rest of the UK and abroad have been attracted to live there by the affordable housing and studio space, improving the year-round economy. Margate seems also set to attract further support from influential individuals and developers with personal ties to their town. The idea of the Turner Contemporary gallery (the largest exhibition space in the South East outside London) originated with the Chairman of the Margate Civic Society and was funded significantly by Kent County Council and the South East England Development Agency. Artist Tracey Emin, Carl Freedman Gallery, Counter Editions and probably Jonathan Viner Galleries are moving into a single development there⁶. Are there similar seers, developers or philanthropists in the West Midlands?

By contrast Glasgow built its own sustained art-world caché, kick started by it's being the European City of Culture in 1990. Curator Sarah McCrory cites attractions such as available studio space, affordability, and a pace of life that allows "more time to develop ideas", as well as the fact that there is "still a culture of government funding"⁷. Others point to how the visual artists cross-pollinate with other practitioners, such as via the Counterflows experimental music festival or the indie-band scene. Commercial galleries can base themselves there despite the fact there is no collector base as such. Galleries are near the artists and can inject money into the arts community by, for example, employing artists in different roles. Taking part in art fairs is a way they connect with collectors further afield.

Raised in Shropshire, now based in London, Indra Khanna was a practising fine artist, community artist and art teacher for 15 years before becoming an independent curator in 2003. Early undertakings included a project in an outdoor market and a local park. These led on to the curation of group shows, and then solo shows at venues such as Deptford X Festival, the New Art Exchange in Nottingham and mac birmingham. She worked concurrently at Autograph ABP from 2003 – 2010, eventually becoming curator there. Since 2010 she has also acted as studio curator and administrator for an internationally recognised sculptor.

Recent projects have included editing, and contributing text to, sculptor Tim Shaw's first monograph; organising and moderating a panel discussion with Shaw, Michael Sandle and Hew Locke entitled *War in 3 Dimensions*; and chairing the symposium *Transcending the Signified* on the work of Quilla Constance.

She continues to work with artists on commissions, mentoring, writing texts, publications, fundraising and exhibitions.

indrakhanna.com

Hettie Judah points to the vital importance of Glasgow's educational establishments. "By and large, the city's gallerists and organisers are GSA (Glasgow School of Art) graduates; the first artists they show and represent are their peers, and the subsequent renovators of their spaces and designers of their exhibition posters are contemporaries drawn from sibling departments. The GSA has produced a prodigious number of Turner prize nominees – 30 per cent this past decade have come from the school." This leads to a tight, possibly incestuous scene. More importantly is the way Glaswegians have themselves given birth to "the sheer lustiness of the city's art scene, its self-sufficiency and its inventive, ongoing territorialisation of derelict post-industrial spaces".

In the 1960's the average life span in the UK was the early seventies. Now it is the early eighties. Recently some older artists previously overlooked have become celebrated, Phyllida Barlow, Carolee Schneemann or Frank Bowling are three examples. Although I wouldn't wish long obscurity on any artist, this does demonstrate that artists may pass through many roles and phases in their lives, including periods where they are not making any art at all. This does not preclude a return to creation later, perhaps when finances or family situations finally allow.

On the one hand a longer-lived population means a longer window of opportunity for longer-lived artists to work and attract success; on the other hand it creates an obstacle to making art. Already, 0.7 million older people with disabilities living at home are cared for by an adult child⁸. Carers UK report that in 2017 one in five people aged 50 or over care for an older family member. Two thirds of these carers are female, adding to the gender discrimination in child rearing and domestic labour.

Coupled with our longer lives is the growing tendency of people after the age of 50 to leave the big smoke, often returning to the neighbourhoods of their birth. A report by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs found that in 2012, there was a net migration of 40,000 people from urban to rural areas in England.

All these demographic changes seem set to increase the number of artists in the West Midlands in coming years. To capitalise on this could benefit many other citizens as, for example, the hospitality sector in towns like

Kassel has from the five-yearly exhibition documenta. That would require local and metropolitan councils to take an imaginative leap and, truthfully, a serious application of money.

Multi-occupancy, permanent, warm, secure, affordable studios are available in larger numbers in other British cities. Can the charitable organisations that run and build those be encouraged to expand into this region, or mentor and partner home grown artists' organisations? It's a case of 'build it, and they will come'.

Encouraging links between older and younger artists can promote the growth and survival of all. Creative ways of bringing artists of all ages together encourages practical support, cross-disciplinary friendships, mentoring relationships and an exchange of skills. More established artists serve as an example of how a practice can be sustained, and could impact on the retention and development of recent graduates.

Decisions that arts organisations and individual artists make, or their ability to progress, are substantially shaped by an environment outside their influence. I hope it's been useful to lay out a few elements of this environment. We don't always acknowledge this when we are disappointed by arts organisations, arts professionals, or we turn harsh criticism inwards. We should perhaps to be kinder to ourselves.

1. Office for National Statistics 2015
2. Section 144 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act, 2012
3. *The Great British Brain Drain*, Paul Swinney and Maire Williams, 21st November 2016
4. *What do Graduates Do?*, produced by Prospects and AGCAS Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services on behalf of HESCU Higher Education Careers Services Unit
5. *ArtWorks Evaluation Survey of Artists'*, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, June 2014
6. *Tracey Emin, Carl Freedman and Jonathan Viner establish Margate 'arts district'*, Anny Shaw, 13th October 2017, theartsnewspaper.com
7. *How Glasgow became an art capital*, Hettie Judah, 20th March 2016. The Independent
8. Centre for Policy on Aging Review, May 2014, Commission by Age UK

**New Art West Midlands:
Five Years On
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
15 February – 13 May 2018**

For the last five years the annual New Art West Midlands exhibition has presented the best of new work emerging from the region's art schools. Between 2013 and 2017 over 150 artists have featured. Collectively, the exhibitions have been seen by over 500,000 visitors, and demonstrated an appetite for the support of new talent in the West Midlands.

Five years on, independent curator Indra Khanna brings together a collection of recent works by six New Art West Midlands alumni, one from each of the participating art colleges. The exhibition and this accompanying free newspaper considers what happened next in their careers, giving a valuable update on both their work and, more broadly, their journey after art school.

NEW

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New Art West Midlands is the contemporary visual arts network for the region. Creating defining opportunities for West Midlands' artists and curators. Working collectively to safeguard the future of artists and our sector as a whole.

The New Art West Midlands network is hosted by Birmingham School of Art, part of Birmingham City University, and financially supported by Arts Council England, Birmingham City University, Coventry University, the University of Wolverhampton and the University of Worcester. In addition, *New Art West Midlands: Five Years On* is generously supported by sponsors Cass Art and Reuben Colley Fine Art, and by Hereford College of Arts and Staffordshire University.