

Shona Illingworth

Balnakiel



film and video umbrella

The film at the centre of the exhibition is one of a series of evocative video and sound installations by the artist which explore the experience of memory and the formation of identity in situations of social tension and trauma.

A vivid portrait of this remarkable location, situated at the furthest edge of Britain, *Balnakiel* portrays this extraordinary setting, continually exposed to, and under siege from, a hostile and threatening environment, in which the extremes and vicissitudes of weather are echoed by the intermittent thunder of RAF and Royal Navy manoeuvres around this still-active bombing range.

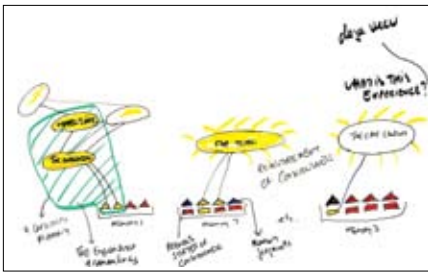
As well as a study of this brooding, melancholy landscape, the work focuses on the lives and recollections of contemporary residents of Balnakiel and the nearby, older village of Durness, highlighting a split between the original inhabitants of several generations standing and a newer influx of arrivals from four decades ago.

Within this patchwork of overlapping impressions and stories, *Balnakiel* considers underlying complexities in the interaction between individual and collective memory.

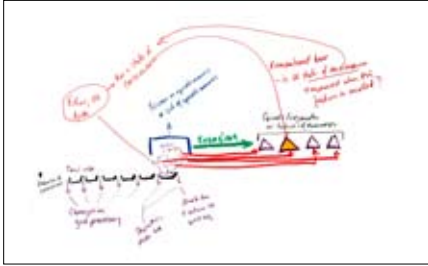
Informed by a series of exchanges with cognitive psychologist Martin A. Conway, the work draws attention to the strategies the human memory employs to attempt to either articulate or suppress strong undercurrents of experience when a sense of self and community identity is under threat.

The complex structure and layered narratives within the film reflect Conway and Illingworth's explorations into the behaviour of the memory in the face of trauma.





A drawing depicting the experience of remembering shows ideas about the re-instatement of consciousness and the experience of déjà vu (the feeling of already having lived through something).



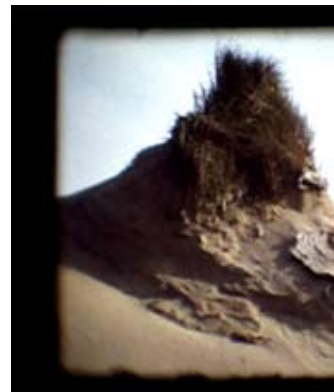
A drawing portraying the role of event boundaries in the process of encoding features of memory.

Illingworth and Conway's ideas on memory mapping are demonstrated in their collaborative drawings that suggest new models for memory formation. These drawings, derived from scientific diagrams, visualise and explore aspects of individual human memory such as confabulation and false memory, déjà vu and amnesia.

The drawings provide insight into spatial and time-based understandings of memory encoding and retrieval: namely the way in which memories are constructed and consolidated in long-term memory and later reconstructed in the present through acts of remembering.

“THE COMMUNITY AT BALNAKIEL BY VIRTUE OF ITS ISOLATION IS IN SOME RESPECTS ISOMORPHIC TO AN INDIVIDUAL’S HUMAN MEMORY. MEMORY IS IN ITSELF ISOLATED TO ONE INDIVIDUAL’S MIND WHERE IT IS EXPERIENCED AND FELT. THIS RATHER ABSTRACT PARALLEL PROVIDES A PARTICULARLY POTENT LINK BETWEEN AN INDIVIDUAL MIND AND AN INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY.”

Martin A. Conway





The exhibition also features a collection of photographs of the Balnakiel community and its surrounding landscapes. Illingworth's photography, intimate in scale and evocative of early forms of photographic records, celebrates the resilience of these isolated communities, whilst noting the slow and progressive depopulation that haunts this landscape.

Shona Illingworth

has shown her work extensively in Europe, Canada and the UK. Major commissions and exhibitions include Turnaround for the Hayward Gallery in 2001, commissions for FABRICA and Channel 4 Television in 2001, IP, London in 2003, Rideout in 2006 and more recently The British Council, SPACE, London, and Cornerhouse, Manchester in 2007. During 2008, her film work *The Watchman* was presented at Dilston Grove and The Wellcome Trust, London. She lives and works in London.

Professor Martin A Conway

is a cognitive neuropsychologist and one of the foremost international experts in the field of Autobiographical Memory. His work explores the centrality of memory to our sense of self. He became Chair of the Research Board of the British Psychological Society in 2006, and holds a prestigious ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) Professorial Fellowship at Leeds University. Conway has written several publications on human memory and regularly publishes in international journals. As part of BBC Radio Four's Memory Survey 2006 (www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/memory), Conway and the Leeds Memory Group helped gather over 12,000 personal memories collected from throughout the UK, constituting the largest archive of memories to date.

Images: Shona Illingworth, Balnakiel, 2008. Courtesy the artist

Balnakiel is an exhibition of new work by Shona Illingworth and features a major new film commission alongside a collection of drawings and photographs.

Presenting a complex investigation of memory, history and spirit-of-place, this body of work is centred on the village (and former radar base) of Balnakiel in the far North West of Scotland, where the artist grew up.

BALNAKIEL GIVES VOICE TO CONTRASTING PERCEPTIONS AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE PAST, AND THE WAY IN WHICH THEY CONTINUE TO RESONATE IN A PLACE WHOSE GEOGRAPHICAL REMOTENESS BELIES ITS POSITION AT THE FOREFRONT OF CONSIDERABLE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE.



Balnakiel

is commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella in association with John Hansard Gallery and Wolverhampton Art Gallery. Funded by Arts Council England and an Arts Award from the Wellcome Trust.

Film and Video Umbrella

is the UK's leading agency for the commissioning and production of artists' film and video work. For over twenty years the organisation has presented an ambitious and engaging programme of contemporary moving image commissions, delivered in collaboration with galleries and venues across England. Projects of the last decade include commissions by Tacita Dean, Dryden Goodwin, Isaac Julien, Mark Leckey, Gillian Wearing and Jane & Louise Wilson. FVU is funded by Arts Council England.

www.fvu.co.uk

A large print version of this leaflet can be downloaded from www.fvu.co.uk and will also be available at exhibition venues upon request.

John Hansard Gallery

17 February – 4 April 2009
University of Southampton
Highfield
Southampton
SO17 1BJ
www.hansardgallery.org.uk

Wolverhampton Art Gallery

7 February – 1 May 2010
Lichfield Street
Wolverhampton
WV1 1DU
www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk