



Cicatrix: Call and Response

Town Hall Arts

23 February-14 April 2018

CICATRIX: CALL AND RESPONSE

Art and conflict have gone hand-in-hand for centuries. The power of visual imagery to communicate with such immediacy makes it the perfect cultural platform through which we remember and acknowledge the impact of conflict. As such, images of violence, destruction, remembrance and commemoration dominate our historical and contemporary reality. Less frequent, however, are artworks considering the legacy of conflict, and the ongoing scarring that shapes our existence.

Cicatrix: Call and Response is thus a truly significant and powerful exhibition, which brings together work by four artists, who are responding to the legacy of the Great War through the wounded landscape of Salisbury Plain. The project, which began with a collective of three Wiltshire based artists, Henny Burnett, Susan Francis and Prudence Maltby, is in its first phase of collaborating with artists from Commonwealth countries and touring internationally. The exhibition presents new work by Burnett, Francis and Maltby, and a sound installation by the group's first Commonwealth guest; New Zealand artist Caro Williams.

Town Hall Arts is pleased to welcome *Cicatrix* as it tours around the South West of England, and prepares for the next phase of its journey. As a growing arts organisation, we aim to bring interesting and meaningful visual art to the public through our exhibition programming, and support artists as they develop their practice. *Cicatrix: Call and Response* is an exciting opportunity for us to engage with a living, growing project with local roots and international aspirations.

The artists' desire to embrace the building in the installation of the artwork made working with them an enjoyable process. In responding to its unique spaces and eccentricities they have created visually interesting and meaningful experiences. At Town Hall Arts, *Cicatrix: Call and Response* is not only to be encountered within the Art Gallery, but also in the Basement Cells, with their own physical scarring and history of conflict adding yet another layer of meaning to the thought-provoking work.

In the Art Gallery itself, the visitor is confronted by a minimalist but impactful exhibition. Prudence Maltby's work uses mark making to map the geographical and psychological scars that result from encounters with conflict. Through *Cicatrix* we are offered images which respond directly to the land where battle took place; where a fight for survival left souls physically and internally scarred.

Down in the Cells, the usual eerie silence is filled by the bird song of Caro Williams' *Call and Response*. This immersive sound installation, which inspired the title of the exhibition, links the landscape of Salisbury Plain to a vast area of historic land in New Zealand. Birdsong recorded in both landscapes is punctuated by a Morse code transmission of one of Isaac Rosenberg's most popular war poems *Returning, We Hear the Larks*. Williams' piece represents an important development in *Cicatrix*'s endeavour to look at the legacy of the Great War on an international level, and considers the collective history and scarring shared by distant lands.

It is not only the international reach that gives this exhibition so much meaning, but also the acknowledgement of both individual and collective histories associated with the conflict. As well as the larger physical and psychological impact of the war, personal remnants play an important part in the project.

Henny Burnett's work has its roots in the gathering and documenting of artifacts given up by the land. The sinister camera sculptures of her piece *Surveillance* almost appear as living, alien-like beings, trapped within the confines of the holding cells. On closer inspection, this interactive installation reveals images relating to the presence of New Zealand troops on Salisbury Plain.

Also in the Cells, Susan Francis presents *What The Trees Saw*; a series of films revealing the hidden images and messages within the silently watchful trees of Salisbury Plain. Projected onto the crumbling walls of the interrogation rooms, fragments of memories are compiled to create an intense experience of what was previously overlooked and unseen in the cordoned off area previously known as 'Experimental Ground'. Francis' powerful work is continued in the main gallery, alongside Maltby's installation.

These diverse responses to the scarred landscape of Salisbury Plain come together in an exhibition which is enlightening, haunting, and utterly immersive. Through collecting, documenting, story-telling and mark-making, the artists reveal scars left behind on Salisbury Plain, acknowledging the lasting impact of the Great War on physical landscapes, as well as personal and collective psyches.

Cicatrix: Call and Response is a testament to the ability of contemporary art to command our attention and make us see what we otherwise would not. Town Hall Arts thanks them for sharing their important work and wishes them the greatest success with the project going forward.

Katie Ackrill
Curator, Town Hall Arts



Cicatrix (detail) by Prudence Maltby



Call and Response (detail) by Caro Williams





Experimental Ground (detail) by Susan Francis

Text: Katie Ackrill

Booklet Design: Katie Ackrill

Image Credits:

Cover Image: *Mask* by Henny Burnett

Cicatrix by Prudence Maltby (image: Susan Francis)

Call and Response (detail) by Caro Williams (image: Laura Peters)

Surveillance by Henny Burnett (image: Martin Urmson)

Experimental Ground by Susan Francis

© Town Hall Arts Market Street Trowbridge BA14 8EQ



**Town Hall Arts
Market Street
Trowbridge
SN14 8EQ**

**Tel: 01225 774306
www.trowbridgearts.com**