



PRESS RELEASE



X by Maggie Learmonth

Arcadia (revisited)

Exhibition

17 January - 20 April 2025

Free entry Friday 11-4pm, Saturday & Sunday 11-3pm

CA22 2NR @florencearts www.florenceartscentre.com

In this exhibition artists Irene Godfrey, Jenni Hodgson, Maggie Learmonth and guest artists from West Cumbria explore the experience of being in the landscape. They walk the paths recording their observations, sharing perceptions and raising questions. 'Arcadia

(revisited)' presents some of the outcomes as a sensorial expression of place and weather. It also invites visitors to walk, draw and contribute.

The artists have links with very different landscapes – Maggie grew up in Ennerdale, Jenni in the rural Eastern Cape in South Africa and Irene on the high North Pennines – but have come together in residencies in West Cumbria over the past couple of years to reflect on the West Cumbrian Landscape in their work. They invited 4 artists to join them on their recent weekend workshop – Clare Parker, Ian Hinde, Rob Mitchell and Alison McAdam – and their work will also be featured in the show.

The exhibition explores ideas about Arcadia as nostalgia for an idealised past and a perfect landscape. It asks how do we see a landscape? Is it simply a view? If so, whose view? Is it fixed or does it evolve?

18th century guidebooks gave precise instructions on exactly what you were supposed to see and exactly where from. To appreciate the 'picture' properly visitors even used a Claude glass, a small convex mirror used by landscape artists, with different coloured foils to provide varying moods. Absurdly you had to stand with your back to the view and look at the scene in the mirror.

In the 21st century the scene is often viewed on the screen of a mobile phone, either with your back to the view as a 'selfie' or presented as an idealised view on social media. What is the origin of this human desire to have the landscape framed by an expectation idealised by myth or romantic description or mediated through some technical device?

Does walking become a means to a certain kind of knowledge? What happens when you 'feel' the landscape? When you feel the ground with your feet, touch the lichen-covered wall with your fingers, smell the wind, hear the water in the beck rushing and clattering over the stones?

What happens when you walk silently, when you look up and examine the shapes, colours and light with your own eyes?

Robert MacFarlane, in 'Landmarks' (2015) talks about how words can shape how we perceive and value the landscape: 'Language does not just register experience, it produces it.' If a place is described as desolate, sheep wrecked, barren, empty, it is devalued and therefore can be treated carelessly. Our use of language can change how we see a place. So can our use of images.

Nancy Campbell, in her book 'Fifty words for snow' (2020) describes her experience in Greenland:

‘There is much poignant art and literature about polar purity and silence, but the longer I spent among the snow, the more I suspected such tropes are born of luxury and distance. It is a view that overwrites the peopled landscape, ignores the tracks of sled and snowmobiles that cross it, the busy burrows and root systems beneath it. As time passed and I looked more closely, I realised that snow does not always appear white. As I listened more carefully, I realised that snow was not silent.’

Landscape, then, is not a static diorama against which human action plays itself out, but rather an ever-evolving idea which seeks to enable humans, animals, and plants to co-habit in a way that creates a constantly changing dialogue. Could Arcadia (revisited) be a real place in which that interdependent relationship works?

Irene Godfrey grew up on the high fells of the North Pennines, where she felt embraced by the natural world around her. She now connects with the reclaimed marshland environment of her present home in North Kent. She holds a Grad. Cert. in Ecology and Environment (Birkbeck, 2010) and BA in Fine Art (London Metropolitan University, 2012). Her work is represented in the L. M. U. collection as well as private collections within the UK.

www.irenegodfrey.uk @irenegodfrey239

Jenni Hodgson grew up in the rural Eastern Cape in South Africa and currently lives and works as an artist in urban East London. She creates abstracted, painterly spaces that are informed by her duality of place. She has exhibited her work regularly since graduating in Fine Art from London Metropolitan University in 2012 and is currently studying for an MA Fine Art at City and Guilds London Art School. She has exhibited internationally, and her work is held in private collections nationally and internationally.

www.jennihodgson.com @jenniferhodgsonart

Maggie Learmonth grew up at the top of Ennerdale valley and now lives and works in London. She continues to ask questions about our relationship with our environment, be it the fells and valleys or front gardens and allotments. Since graduating in Fine Art from London Metropolitan University in 2011 she has exhibited throughout the UK and in Europe, including the Royal Scottish Academy, Creekside Open and Wells Contemporary. She has work in private collections nationally and internationally.

www.maggiellearmonth.net @maggiellearmonth

ENDS

For more information and images please contact Sue Mackay
director@florenceartscentre.com



Gone to Earth by Irene Godfrey



Crossing the Line by Jenni Hodgson



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

