

HOMELANDS. Kate Genever

*The following text formed the basis of a showcasing and discussion at Metal on May 11<sup>th</sup> 2022. An event that brought over 30 people together from distinct and diverse disciplines, over food, to consider work to date and explore themes that have emerged.*

*The event, was the final element of Kate's residency, while also being part of her ongoing research.*

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Formed during an [extended Metal residency](#) HOMELANDS began with research into farming/rural practices in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire. But in particular a consideration on how farmers and countryside specialists work in, on and with the land. And how we imaginatively transfer, draw up, celebrate, distil and repurpose it for the healing and nourishment of ourselves and others. To date this work has involved 15 interviews (see list below), 5 gallery and museum visits, 3 workshops with local potter Rob Bibby and now this evenings discussion (which builds on extensive research for the [Peterborough Cultural Strategy](#)). From which has come photography, print and pottery... All combining to form a reflection on making, embedded lives and how identities and values form in complex and layered ways as a result.

Through this work, which began in October 2021, I have come to understand how many of the elegant practices I've explored including tree grafting, butchery and the breeding of South Down sheep..... are not just representations of a bond with the land but rather representative demonstrations of courage, radical-hope and humility - ways of being that embrace attention, generosity and acceptance.

*To be a Crow subject and warrior was more than a mere psychological matter of identifying oneself in a particular way. It required steadfast commitment - more than inhabiting a social role, being excellent in that role and even identifying oneself in those terms. It required all those things, but in addition it required a lifelong commitment to shaping oneself to be this kind of person. A person willing to work hard for wisdom.*

Jonathon Lear. Radical Hope.

Alongside this study into personal values and identity, I've also looked at the land, natural forces and the contested political, spiritual and economic frameworks surrounding it. I've seen how these are harnessed in the formation of powerful potent or problematic practices which reveal 'surface' as nothing more than fertile ground. Extremes which can be illustrated by Reiki and foraging where energies are channelled in the support of others, Or Bowman's Pumpkins, where migrants work rich Fenland soils to grow 5 million 'Halloween units' per year. A practice it seems that utilises natural and human resources to intentionally grow waste. And yes I'm being provocative.

*And yet each of us - the farmer, the beurocrat, the tourist, the campaigner, the tenant, the estate agent, the agronomist - saw the same physical facts cropped to fit ort own focus. All of saw it [the land] through our own frames of purpose or imagination., and all of us required this land to be a part of what it was not. Maybe it was dreary walks, nesting sites, full of old white folks. Maybe it as the potential of next year's harvest or the challenge of better grass, Maybe it was the future, a proof of a life meaningfully spent and a future well prepared. All of us wanted something from it, even if that thing was only a dream. None of us would let it be.*

Bella Bathhurst. Field Work

Juxtapose this approach with the domestic 'labours of love' manifesting as hand-made dyes created from foraged plants and family heirloom Indian Bagh's and Moroccan rugs. Works that offer an international viewpoint on familial, historic and current relationships with place, with home, with ourselves. Revealing what could be considered meditations, demonstrations of faith or self-portraits. Where form, material and aesthetics are influenced by the natural and cultural world, to culminate in sophisticated work born of repetition, feel and tacit knowledges.

*I hold my father's story, I hold my mother's story. It's coming out of the ground here. My way is different is come from the inside out.* Aboriginal artist Tiunkara Jken.

The research for HOMELANDS has reinforced the importance of gifts and gifting. Reciprocity is complicit in our relationships with land, people and objects made - where the transfer of love and skills pass to and fro, across generations and keep families and businesses going. Its evidenced in: a giving up/over of oneself to the 'betterment' of land, be that through work or burial; a receiving of "spiritual powers" to help us heal or transcend; how the subconscious distils reality to provide imaginative ideas and solutions and how we are freely given means to 'survive' by witnessing a hovering Kestrel for example.

*One gives away what is in reality a part of one's nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence. The thing given then is not inert. It is alive and often strives to bring to its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place.*

Marcel Mauss. The Gift

Determination alongside love and loss continues to ring loud through them there lands. Be it in spite of, or insight of, hard lives and failure. Determination is there, keeping us going, helping us improvise in the face of changing times, disappointment and bad weather. I can see it the moulded landscape, the cultural artefacts and personal drive. It's there in the openness to let synchronicity guide. Many people I

met live within limited means, and are mostly marginalised, but continue to create despite fear, using found-close-at-hand-materials with a confidence that demonstrates an embodied self-belief and trust in ones abilities.

*We might see how his response to the challenging circumstances of his time, could be seen as courage. An ability to live well with the risks that inevitably attend human existence.... To be human is necessarily to be a vulnerable risk taker. In such a way radical hope might be not only compatible with courage: in times of radical change, it might function as a necessary constituent.*

Jonathon Lear. Radical Hope

Inter-twinned with this work is my ongoing consideration on the concept of drawing as disposition. Whereby I take drawing to be more than a technique – rather a way of being that reveals our connections with the world of materials and each other. A drawing from, with and together. This... and process led working...which to me means letting answers come, letting the right idea rise to the top.

Which has meant I spent a long time wondering what to make in response to all these findings. How could I make something that distilled all that I'd heard and seen. I questioned if a response even necessary? How could I celebrate those people who had given me their time and opened their lives to me?

To begin I started to consider the photographs taken during site visits, often snapped through feel rather than deep consideration. Which means they are neither documentary nor a complete set. They are ideas – made manifest. I like how in combination they could be read as a diagram, where links could be drawn to make visible the obvious and obtuse connections.

But then three quotes emerged.... The first from Bella Bathurst's Field Work book: *All of us wanted something from it [the land], even if that thing was only a dream. None of us would let it be.*

The second *Our origins are of the earth* by Rachel Carson the marine biologist. And the third by anthropologist, philosopher, poet, and natural history writer Loren Eiseley: *There is a sense in which we can say that the planet, with its strange freight of life, is always just passing from the unnatural to the natural, from that Unseen which man has always revered to the small reality of the day. If all life were to be swept from the world, leaving only its chemical constituents, no visitor from another star would be able to establish the reality of such a phantom. The dust would lie without visible protest, as it does now in the moon's airless craters, or in the road before our door. Yet this is the same dust which, dead, quiescent and unmoving, when taken up in the process known as life, hears music and responds to it, weeps bitterly over time and loss, or is oppressed by the looming future that is, on any materialist terms, the veriest shadow of nothing*

Which led to a feeling about using the land itself.

- I had already been thinking about Scholars Rocks and how Chinese specialists convert these naturally occurring mineral finds into contemplative objects through the addition of a specially made bases.
- I had been drawn to the west African cooking pots at the Fitzwilliam Cambridge which were formed over the fist and how they spoke of sustaining life.
- I am fascinated by transubstantiation and how chalices and ciborium resonate as they hold those transformed everyday food stuffs.
- I always look at the different bowls animals use and wonder what they think?
- And then Dad and I dug out from a ditch bottom known for 'good sticky stuff' a large bucket of Uffington clay. A clay that in the 17 and 18 centuries was extracted to make 10000s of brick and build our village.

A clay that I riddled and let dry enough to create 18 large thumb pots. Titled: *It's easier to believe that there was nothing before there was something, than there was something before there was nothing*. Raw clay, unfired and dried hard with scratched in overheard, found and bastardised quotes, they sit on Hawthorn rings cut from the hedges at home. And importantly these are held currently in stasis, shared before change comes. After tonight they will be offered to various people to bury with a sweet pea seedling. Returning earth to the earth.

Why? I guess I am interested in a carefully calibrated tension between will and natural growth. But also more and more I'm into making work that disappears or results in no physical outcome. A kind of making of nothing, a making of experience. My dad speaks of our job as farmers as *a killing of everything we grow – even grass*. My friend Phil a dancer says of performance... *Dance really is nothing... where does it come from, where does it go? It's made and then gone. In dance there is a sense that we observe something beginning and unfolding and completing.... Things happening side by side, coincidences and synchronicities. The beauty of it is that it is so fleeting...it takes your breath away because of the surprise... you turn to your friend and say, 'did you see that?'*. I'm interested in how I could bring this sensibility to the visual arts. As a comment on the artworld perhaps, but more to emphasise the natural truths of longing, forgetting, remembering and I guess ultimately life and death.

I am inviting you to become complicit as the work also includes an unlimited edition of a double-sided screen print. This newsprint work features one of the pots and its associated Hawthorn ring. In these drawings I see anatomical hearts and crowns of thorns or looking eyes. They are a gift, they will age and change fast as newsprint does when exposed to light, they will live or die with you. You may compost them, make planting pots, light the fire or just hang them on your wall. But for now may enjoy them letting them provoke further thoughts and contemplation. Reminding you of this time.

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Following this talk Kate offered the following text as provocation and opened the floor for discussion.

Micheal McCarthy considered the role of the transcendent feelings nature can stir in us in a secular world when he said: *They are surely very old, these feelings. They are lodged deep in our tissues and emerge to surprise us. For we forget our origins; in our towns and cities, staring into our screens, we need constantly reminding that we have been operators of computers for a single generation and workers in neon-lit offices for three or four, but we were farmers for five hundred generations, and before that hunter-gatherers for perhaps fifty thousand or more, living with the natural world as part of it as we evolved, and the legacy cannot be done away with.*

People Interviewed during residency.

Bowman Pumpkins  
Georgina Barney – Artist  
Eric Freeman – Butcher  
Rachel Shoon – Farmer/Reiki master  
Tim Cousins – Forester  
Patrick Ryan - Woodturner  
Genever family – Farmers  
Patrick Goldsworthy – Farmer  
Rose Sawkins – Writer/ Theatre maker  
Liz Genever – Consultant and Farmer  
Jane Naylor – self-taught Florist  
Denis Smith – apple grafter  
Peter Pope – Caretaker /self-taught Artist  
Tony Shepard – Builder/Artist  
Patrick Joseph Ryan – Wood turner

Reading list includes:

Field Work: Bella Bathurst  
The Gift: Marcel Mauss.  
Radical Hope: Jonathon Lear  
The Artists Way: Julia Cameron  
Songlines Exhibition catalogue. The Box Plymouth  
Letters to Camondo: Edmund de Waal  
Clay Contemporary Ceramic Artisans: Amber Creswell Bell

Exhibitions visited

The Potteries Museum. Stoke on Trent  
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge: Marlina Odundo  
Whitechapel Gallery. London: Theaster Gates  
Brunei Gallery. SOAS at University London: Bagh's - Abstract Gardens  
Photographer Gallery. London: Paul Cupido

Phrases on pots:

1. I am all these things and nothing at all
2. I am here, for you
3. Look into me and find something of yourself
4. Here I push the mud apart and lay thy fingers on thy heart.
5. We are here only to keep watch not keep
6. As hard as I can I can't escape you.
7. We are all afraid of our greatness
8. I know earth without heart but brightness came because of you
9. On+on+on+on+on+on+on+on+on
10. If I lose myself I gain it all
11. All truth's waits in all things
12. Your presence here will make everything complete
13. My heart keeps ghosts
14. Everything I am is yours
15. I've always loved you, you just didn't see it
16. I am of this place
17. A beloved beauty grows over me
18. I am you, you are me