

The Value of Art for Non-Art Contexts

AUGUST art

13 April 2011

A talk for AUGUST art by given by Jeni Walwin, 13 April 2011

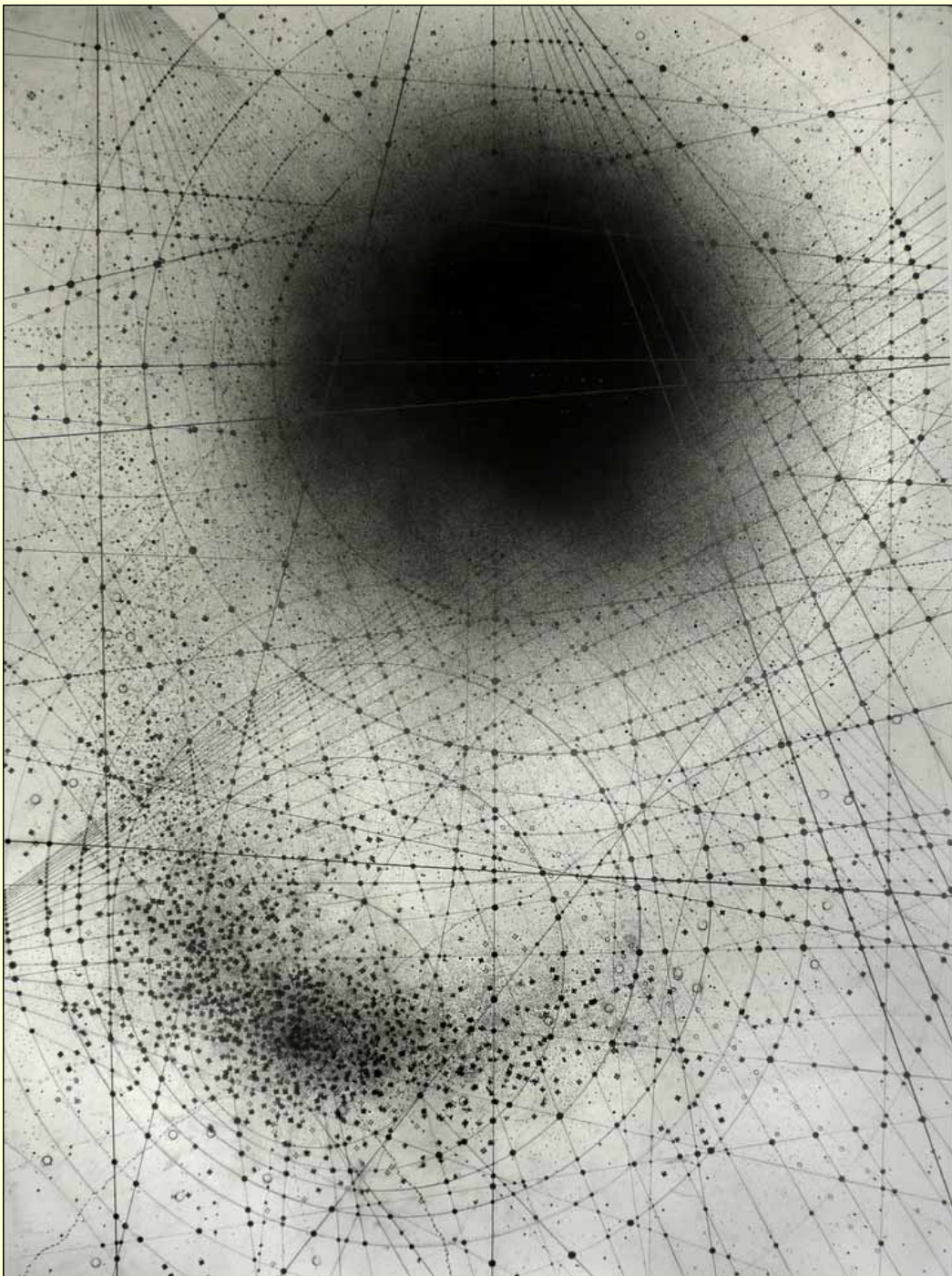
- I'm going to look at the ways in which value is established for works by contemporary artists that are commissioned or placed, temporarily or permanently, in contexts that are outside the art gallery or the museum. These works are generally the result of an invitation from an individual or organisation that has nothing to do with the contemporary art world, and who may never have worked with artists until this moment, but where each has recognised, often with the help of an art consultant, the potential for an engagement with art and have articulated a role for an artist within their particular context.
- I'm going to talk about the place of art within 5 very different organisations – a Swiss bank, a community college, a summer music festival, a palliative care centre and a library. In these 4 case studies and one ongoing commission I have acted as an art consultant to the project. I will begin by outlining the reasons why the art was commissioned in the first instance. I have then attempted to compare the original aims and objectives of the project with the response from the client and their audience once the work has been installed, to see whether it has brought any added value beyond their original expectations.
- I'm not going to dwell on the financial value of these projects. Once the budgets are confirmed early on in the project schedule, and assuming that the commission is delivered on time and within budget then the monetary value is rarely discussed. Other means of assessing (and therefore valuing) a project become more crucial and it is these which I'm going to explore.
- The value-for-money case has usually been made long in advance of the commission or purchase budget being finalised – usually by an art strategy being agreed within which funding proposals are firmly rooted. Where budgets are set in advance, then I will advise the clients as to what could be achieved with the available funds. In other cases where the art strategy is part of an exercise to attract or release funds, then the case for art has to be made loud and clear – suggesting the many ways in which the involvement of an artist can help fulfil the aims of other non-art ambitions within the overall project.

Pictet & Cie, The London Collection

works by 19 British and International artists
purchased between 2007 and 2010

Pictet Asset Management

- What: A Collection of Contemporary Art from British and International Artists
- Initial Aim: "I consider artworks in the office not as a 'nice to have' but as absolutely essential to the creation of a stimulating - and humane - working environment. However, art for the office must be acquired intelligently, over time, and not in haste - otherwise it will fail to achieve its purpose. My experience of building a collection - under the expert guidance of Jeni Walwin - is that few staff are indifferent to the art and many have strong feelings either way. This is exactly what artworks in the office should achieve. I also believe it is important to inform and educate staff about the works themselves and the guiding principles of the collection. It is striking how few office workers have ever properly engaged in a work of art, yet how many are thrilled once they begin to understand the experience. So, the office becomes a life-enhancing place as well as a place of work, but of course the two positively influence each other, and that can only be a good thing." *Stephen Barber, Group Managing Director, Pictet & Cie*
- How: The Collection has established a broad interest in landscape in its widest sense, and in formal terms there is a focus on line and surface. 45 works by 19 artists have been acquired during the three years since the collection was established. These are installed in meeting rooms, reception areas, break out spaces and stairwells. (There follows a description of a selection of works from the Collection).
- Follow up Evaluation: A questionnaire to all staff was circulated in the autumn of last year. The results proved that the most successful works were those that generated debate and discussion, not necessarily those that were universally admired or liked. The least favourite works in some people's lists appeared as the favourites in others. Responses revealed that a small amount of information, on the text panels close to the art works, generated an interest in finding out more – for example, staff followed up with research about individual artists on the internet.



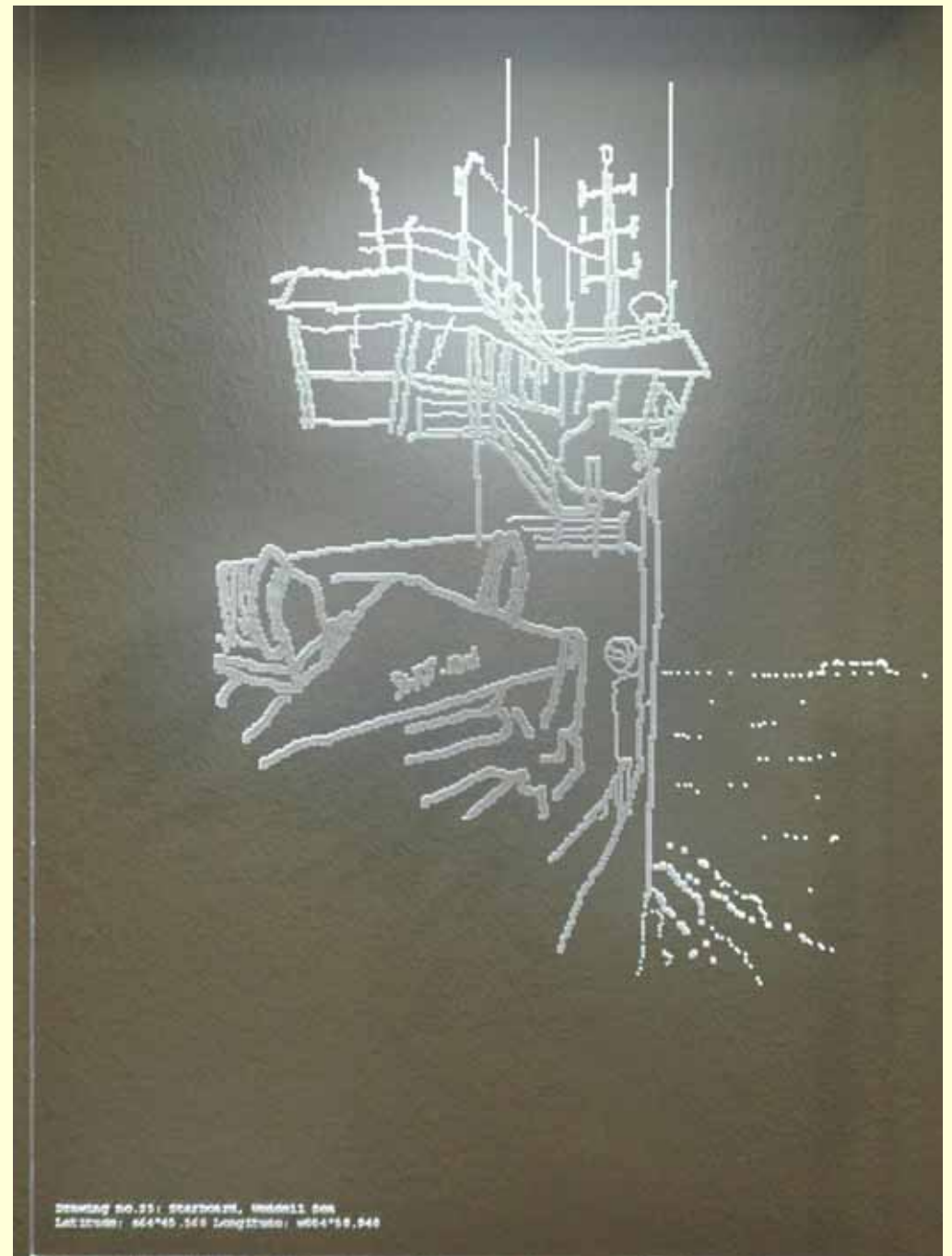
Charles Avery, A View of the Northern Steppe, pencil and Gouache on paper, 2008

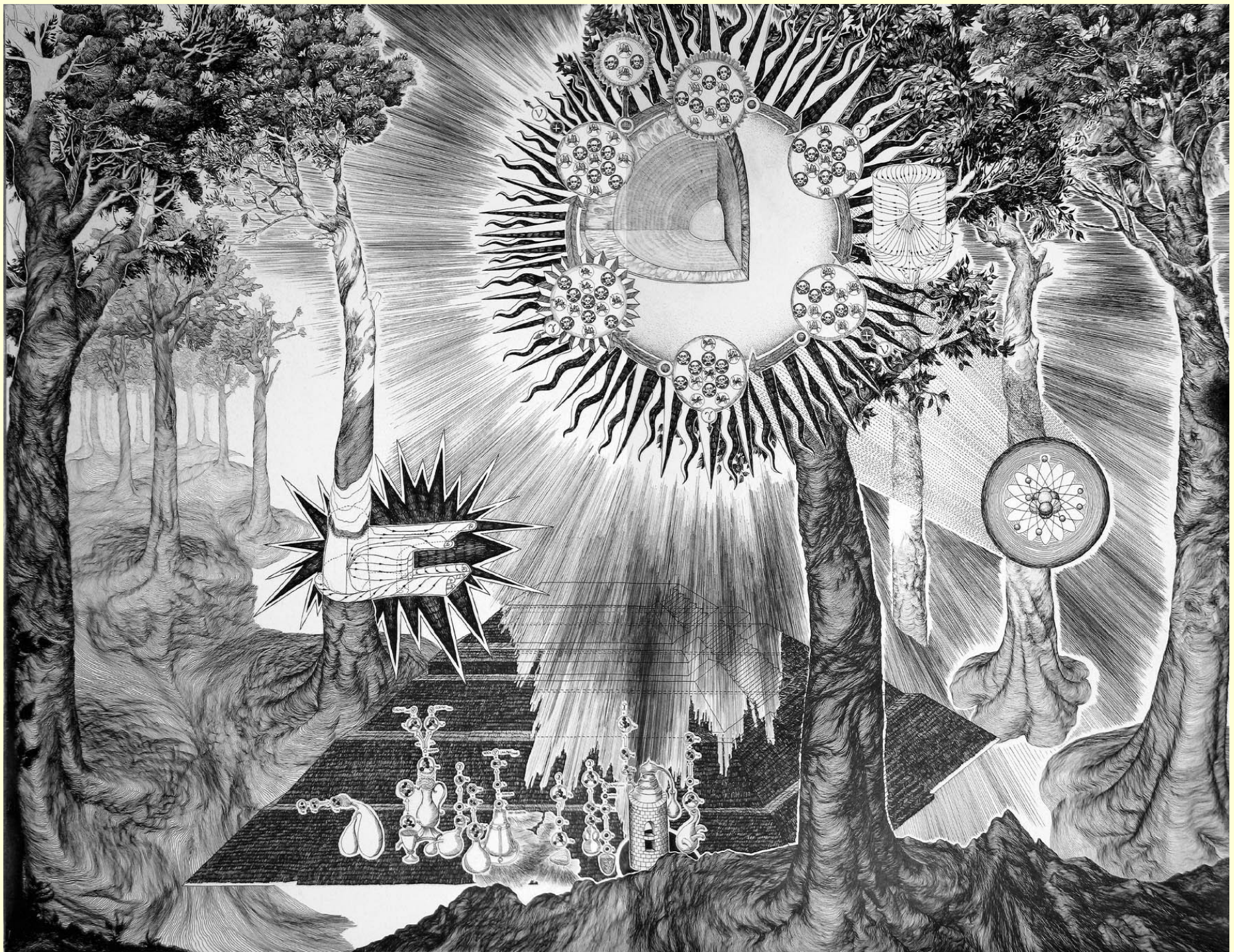
Emma McNally, S21, graphite on paper, 2010



Paul McDevitt, Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, from the Scarehouse series
colour pencil and ink on paper, 2007

Simon Faithfull, digital drawing, laser etched perspex, from the Antarctic series, 2005





Heiko Blankenstein, Helioland, 2005, ink on paper



Diann Bauer
Sabine Descent, 2009, installation view
graphite, gouache and aquarelle on paper
380 x 900cm in 6 parts



Bracknell & Wokingham College

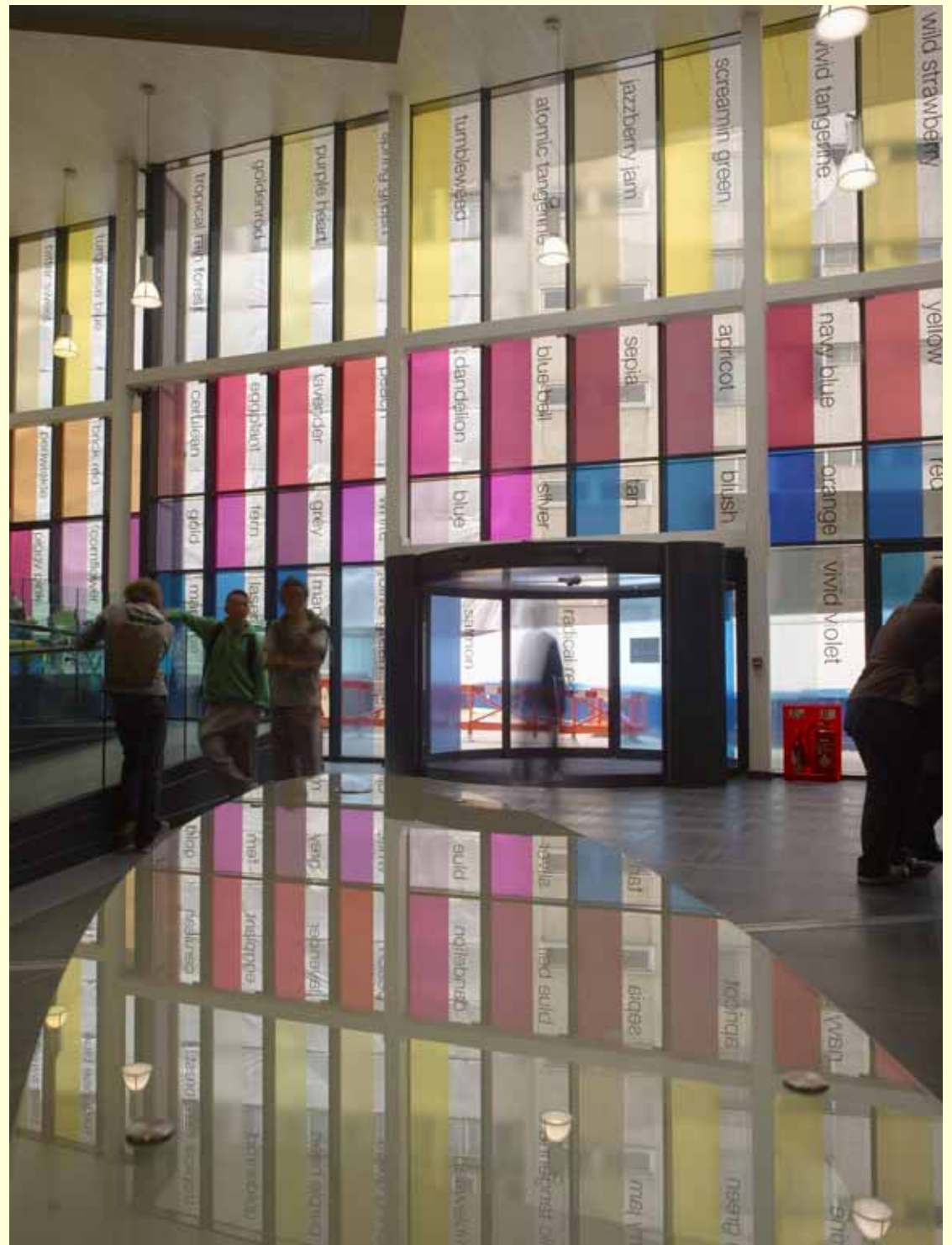
Wild Blue Yonder by Nicky Hirst

Bracknell & Wokingham College

- What: *Wild Blue Yonder* – a commission for the entrance of the new building by artist Nicky Hirst
- Initial Aim: a) to announce to the town and to the region the arrival of a new purpose-built community college with state of the art facilities, catering for a wide cross section of the local populous and b) in view of the highly visible and public service nature of the College, and its location within a few minutes' walking distance from the town centre, this work should contribute to the town's refreshed cultural strategy and the regeneration of the town centre.
- How: *Wild Blue Yonder* is 25 metres long and 8 metres high and uses the RAL colour chart and Crayola crayon names to create a brightly coloured piece of visual poetry for the building's entrance. The glass curtain wall is a literal threshold for the work – on the outside the visitors are challenged by the text, and once inside all is revealed. During the day the work acts much as a stained glass window filtering coloured light into the café, reception and entrance areas, and at night it beams out its presence across the town. This is main element of a three part work. In addition the project comprised a limited edition artwork of 2000 'postcard notebooks' circulated to every new student registering in September 2009 and a series of unique A1 posters illustrating elements of the work, in Bracknell town centre sites in advance of the opening. With only the college website indicating the source of these subliminal works, the bold colours and unrelated text generated intrigue in the build up to the larger manifestation of the piece, creating a physical link between the College and the town centre.
- Follow up Evaluation: “The College values the artwork hugely because it has changed the feel of our main public eating/relaxation area, giving it interest and filtered, coloured lighting. It works at both a conscious and sub-conscious level and encourages users to relax and linger. Our “Star Café” now seems a special place to be”.
Howard O’Keeffe, Principal, Bracknell & Wokingham College



Nicky Hirst, *Wild Blue Yonder*, 2010, installation view
commissioned by Bracknell & Wokingham College



WOMAD FESTIVAL 2010

Moving Portraits – People and Place

film installations by
Jananne Al-Ani
Dryden Goodwin
Melanie Manchot
Rosalind Nashashibi
Imogen Stidworthy
Matt Stokes

WOMAD Festival 2010

- What: *Moving Portraits – People and Place: film installations by 6 contemporary artists*
- Initial Aims: a) to reflect the original aims of the WOMAD Festival (world of music arts and dance), which over the 29 years of its existence has foregrounded music at the expense of the other two and b) most importantly to enhance and expand the offer to festival goers. The Big Chill and Latitude festivals have already made significant inroads into the contemporary art element of their programmes, WOMAD sensed that it needed to remain competitive within the already crowded summer festivals market.
- How: Looking at portraiture in film in its broadest sense, six artists were invited to present film installations in each of 6 sea containers. This arrangement offered an intimate experience whereby at 6 or 10 people could view each film at a time, and acted as the perfect foil to the main stages programmes where large crowds gather at the outdoor sites.
- Follow up Evaluation: We set up a comments book and were delighted with the unanimously positive response this project received. Many visitors returned two or three times during the festival, to sit through each film. Others asked for a bigger presence for contemporary art within the festival, especially as it usefully filled the morning slot before the main stage programmes got going. Two favourite films were Melanie Manchot's '*Celebration Cyprus Street*' and Imogen Stidworthy's '*7am*' (The latter I'm going to show you now.) Visitors particularly responded to this intimate sonic portrait of the Chinese doing their early morning exercises in a Beijing park. WOMAD too felt that the project fulfilled all expectations and have asked us to programme another event for this year's festival.
- <Curator's note: Jeni Walwin showed a clip from Imogen Stidworthy's *7am*>

Cicely Saunders Institute

Birch by Tania Kovats

Light for Cicely by Caroline McCarthy

Cicely Saunders Institute, Kings College Hospital, London

- What: Two artist commissions for The Cicely Saunders Institute. The CSI is a purpose built research and information centre for palliative care at King's College London.
- Initial Aims: The Cicely Saunders Foundation was largely responsible for the funding of the new building and was keen to incorporate art as CS had always felt it played an important role within palliative care. A small steering group of academics, clinicians and patients had identified two key themes for the building – reflecting the natural world, and acting as a symbolic beacon of light for the institute's work. The art commissions were expected to reflect these aims.
- How: After an art strategy was agreed, two separate commissions were initiated – one for the atrium space and a second in response to the CS archive.
- Tania Kovats' *Birch* for the atrium space is made of jesmonite and hand painted in the studio. The exquisitely crafted trunks of slender birch trees extending through three floors of the building are accompanied by the recording of blackbird song, played quietly at dawn and dusk every day in the space. The work symbolises the reality of being at the point of life where the small details of living come into sharp focus, where the call of a bird or the surface of tree bark is something precious enough to be noticed or cherished.



Tania Kovats, *Birch*, commission for the Cicely Saunders Institute, Kings College, London, 2010



Tania Kovats, *Birch*, detail

- Caroline McCarthy's, *Light for Cicely* was a direct response to the legacy of Dame Cicely Saunders, founder of the modern hospice movement. Individuals connected to Cicely Saunders were invited to send by email a photograph of a lamp turned on in their home. Family, friends, colleagues and supporters - from Poland, Italy, Norway, Uganda, Pakistan, Ireland, India, the USA and Canada, as well as from the UK - contributed to the project. Displayed throughout the new building and on a dedicated website, www.light-for-cicely.net, the photographs (68 in total) bring something of every contributor's home into the building. The notion of 'home' as an antidote to 'the institution' was central to Saunders' concept of a suitable environment for those living with terminal illness - a radical idea in her time. A book containing all photographs and accompanying texts by each contributor is available at the Cicely Saunders Institute.
- Follow up Evaluation: The Foundation, the Institute, the people who work there, and the visitors to it have responded positively to this project. The tone of the Kovats' work creates a very particular atmosphere throughout the building – its quiet and careful attention to minute detail is exactly in keeping with the work undertaken there. And the way that McCarthy's piece brings responses from over 60 individuals into the heart of the building has been warmly and often very emotionally received – her research process meant that many people connected with Cicely have now been represented within the building and their contributions combine personal memories of this important woman with a comment on the light and its place in their own home.
- The value that the Institute subsequently placed on these works can be measured by the fact that some way into the project the Foundation found extra funding to support the Kovats sound element, and the McCarthy book.



Caroline McCarthy, *Light for Cicely*, 2010
Commissioned by the Cicely Saunders Institute



Caroline McCarthy, *Light for Cicely*, installation view

Battle Library, Reading, Berkshire

Open by Dryden Goodwin
work in progress

Battle Library, Reading, Berkshire

- What: A new commission from artist Dryden Goodwin entitled '*Open*'.
- Initial Aims: This project is intended to celebrate the rich cultural mix of the Battle Ward in Reading. A key aspect of the commission brief was that the work should engage with current and potential users of the library to celebrate, both its loyal local support and its wide range of provision (from mother and baby clinics to East European story telling), and in so doing ultimately draw new users to its service.
- How: A series of 30 filmed portraits of library users and local people will appear in three ways within the library facility: as framed drawings, as films streamed onto the library computer stations, and as postcard bookmarks to be given away with library loans.
- Follow up Evaluation: As this project is ongoing and cannot therefore be subjected to evaluation, I thought it might be fitting to end with a quote from an officer at another local authority where they are about to embark on a commission from a contemporary artist. His words seem to summarize most astutely the value of involving artists within public contexts.
- "Within a local government perspective it is essential that communities are able to benefit from all the resources that the Council has at its disposal. This means more than making sure that best value is achieved from financial investment and that staff are efficient and effective. Council's are charged with improving the quality of life for their citizens and this means making sure that every opportunity is grasped to engage people in activities and experiences that are uplifting, challenging and exciting. Artworks and in particular artworks animated through local projects are the ideal method for engaging communities in a stimulating and dynamic way that asks questions and presents ideas. We are living through a time of huge transformation with an ever increasing acceleration of change within communities and local government; within this environment I think that it is essential that there is a place for artists to make statements about the transformation and to present those changes in a way that invites people to stop and think and hopefully to respond and locate themselves both within the artwork and within the dialogue of change." *Peter Tyas, Manager, Arts and Archives, Wiltshire Council*

Jeni Walwin's biography

- **Jeni Walwin** is an independent curator, writer and public art consultant. She is currently working on a number of commissions for artists within regeneration, festivals and local authority contexts. She is the project director of the public art programme *Artists in the City* and for many years has worked on a project basis for the Contemporary Art Society, most notably as the lead curator for the annual ARTfutures show,. With Graham Devlin she devised a contemporary art strategy for British Waterways, and for WOMAD festival 2010 she curated *Moving Portraits: Artists' Films – People and Place*. With the artist Henry Krokatsis she conceived and selected the exhibition *You'll Never Know: Drawing and Random Interference* for the Hayward Gallery's National Touring Programme. Her writings have appeared in books and magazines, and for Intellect Books she edited *Searching for Art's New Publics*, exploring ways in which artists embrace people as an integral element of their work. She is a member of the Advisory Board of the Drawing Room and is a trustee of the performance theatre company Crying Out Loud.