

# Embellished Truth

This exhibition brings together the work of six visual artists to consider the forming of narratives both personal and communal, historic and present, and to explore the parallels of shaping landscapes and of stories.

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There is an old Yiddish proverb that poses the question: *What's truer than the truth?* To which the rhetorical reply is: *The Story.*

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Stories are what we form our lives around, they teach us when we are young, they frame our societal and cultural understandings (for better and for worse), and help us to make sense of our own experiences. A story is not always a fixed narrative, it is a fluid state of experience, perspective and imagination housed within a structure commonly described as an arc. This flex in a story enables re-tellings and re-forming overtime with different parts continuing to move in and out of prominence.

There is power in knowing our own stories. Being able to acknowledge and trace the past helps us to see the cyclical nature of our current circumstances and observe how our actions might play into a larger, not yet concrete narrative. The self-awareness that story-telling encourages makes space for reconsidering the past and present, that we might see things for what they really are.

Although varied in the way that artists in this exhibition engage with story-telling, there is a general harnessing of the heuristic nature of stories within their practices; this being an open-ended quality to the work that allows a 'way in' for the viewer, in order that they might locate themselves within the work and draw out from it what they need. Reflecting on what's around them, their circumstances and patterns of the past, these artists share something that paradoxically in its specificity becomes somewhat universal.

From a practice that explores 'wrongness' situated in various contexts, from socio-political situations to self-critique, the work of artist **Jamie Hammill** inspires a state of self-awareness, allowing for a consideration of the more awkward, imperfect, and uncomfortable things. Hammill's video work, *The Lonesome Violin* leads us through a forest from the perspective of a video-game-like-avatar, as the narrator shares a poetic recollection of the amorphous presence which has seeped into every aspect of their daily life. With the narrator hinting at the time in which this work was made - the pandemic of 2020 - the work's introspective nature chimes with the shared experience of an enforced period of isolation in which we were left with little to distract us from confronting and questioning the narratives we had been living by. With Hammill interested in craft processes executed in the 'wrong' way, *Loop in black (with claw)* with its wingnut, weaving and buckle is reminiscent of something that has been crafted for multipurpose like a pen-knife or spork, only to have its particular uses compromised by the amalgamation too many functions. This aesthetic embodiment of

the phrase 'jack-of-all-trades, master of none', speaks to a self-awareness that edges on self-deprecation which runs through Hamill's work, with *Loop* becoming an artefact of inadequacy, hindrance, and vulnerability.

It's this vulnerability in telling one's own story that **Courtney Snow's** work also offers up. As she describes her practice as an "Ongoing heart to heart with herself", this constant dialogue is maintained through a writing practice that spills out into drawing, ceramic work, and poetry. With an intrinsic need to process her encounters of both intimacy and spite, euphoria and turmoil, she turns to the immediacy of drawing on newsprint- a thin paper that takes on the drawing in a way that skin does a tattoo. These modest materials allow for an honest and open quality to Snow's work; with little space to hide slippages in amongst a build-up of tender marks. At times, these marks flow into cursive handwriting and then back out into a visual narration of the body, all coexisting on one plane as if on a torn-out page of a diary; an exposing but truthful way to tell her personal mythologies.

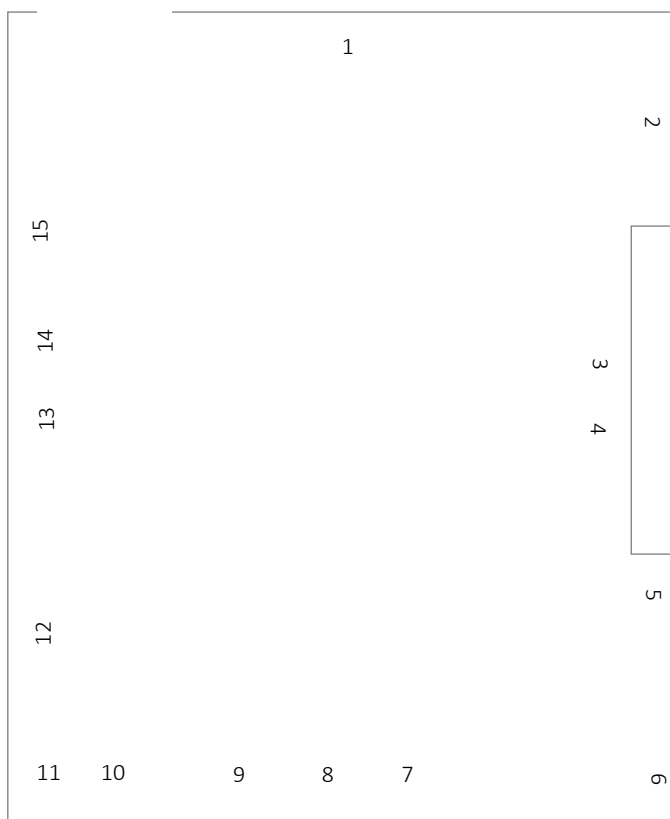
**Cosima Ross** works with an evolving, personal, symbolic language across large scale drawings, paintings and smaller iconographic works. Less akin to her longer theatrical paintings in which multiple figures jostle and interweave as if finding their place within the narrative, these two works: *To big for comfort* and *Untitled* act as private moments of self-reflection. In their fluidity they speak of a body dissipating, coming or going. Isolated from their surroundings these two bodies become free of time and place, in their exposed states they ask the viewer to consider their own unadorned selves.

**Julie Annis** has found herself drawn back to the land she grew up in, one rich in folklore and tradition. With a longstanding connection to the landscape of East Sussex, she looks at the ways in which the land has been formed and what is uncovered through the process of drawing directly from and within it. Taking these sketches into the studio to begin a process of both stripping back and of embellishing, Annis works into areas that hold some sort of intensity which she describes as 'thin places', whilst allowing other parts to fall away into singular lines and fields of colour in place of detail. In *Field Ache* there is a sense that these bleeding edges and attentive repetitive marks hold a lifetime of hushed conversations between Annis and the land, with the dry brush scumbling mimicking a well-loved felt tip pen from childhood, scrubbing into the surface until it finally runs dry.

Equally fascinated in the relationship between landscape formation and historic narratives of the local area, **Joe Charrington's** photographic series, *Asphalt Kingdom* is an investigation into the density of churches, ruins, and sites of ritual in East Sussex. By walking from his hometown out to these rural churches and ruins, and photographing enroute; this pilgrimage of sorts allows Charrington to capture and contemplate the ways in which Christianity has been embodied in ancient sites and settlements. Charrington reflects on how these places of faith have left a topographical impression on the English landscape - shaping kingdoms, leading them to war, and crafting ideologies which have blended into our society today. In this body of work that records the relationship between man-built structures and landforms, a secondary narrative appears: the landscape beginning to reclaim these sites. With shots of ruins degrading and imitating landforms like coastal stacks and boulders; this works asks

the questions will the faith once so present in this land be reclaimed or left to decompose?

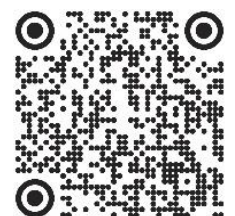
This idea of nature reclaiming the land from human intervention is further reflected in the work of **Leah Kristin Blake** who's practice plays with textual materials of urban and terrestrial landscapes. Working in unfixed assemblages that in themselves speak of a temporality, they bring together panels of copper and steel etched with text, rocks, printed shadows, and found objects. With an interest in the concept of collections and a practice that is formed out of an ongoing gathering of found objects, Kristin Blake also pulls from another archive: one of personal writing which fragment into etchings. Reminiscent of gravestones and commemorative plaques these panels play with the idea of permanence of the impermanent, challenged by the oxidation that degrades the text. When these fragments of print and text are assembled in conjunction with other fragments of archaic geology, they become somewhat of an alternative memento mori, a reminder not of a singular death, but an acknowledgement of our collective short existence in comparison to these geological components formed through deep time that will live on without us.



1. *Breaks in Sun Worship*, 2024, Acrylic paint on paper and hair extensions, approx. 240 x 100cm, Courtney Snow
2. *Precarity*, 2024, Glass, steel, variety of printed papers, ceramic tile, copper, selected found wood, stones and minerals. approx. 70 x 43cm (main section), Leah Kristin Blake
3. *The Lonesome Violin*, 2020/21, Film, 2:44 minutes, Jamie Hammill
4. *Never been there*, 2024, Acrylic and oil on stitched cotton, 47 x 30cm, Julie Annis
5. *The gaps between*, 2024, photographic print & light box, 47 x 15.5 cm, Leah Kristin Blake
6. *Untitled*, 2023, Watercolour on paper, 29.5 x 21 cm, Cosima Ross
7. Selected photographic print from *Asphalt Kingdom* series, 2024, 25.5 x 20.3 cm, Joe Charrington
8. *Loop in Black (with claw)*, 2024, Leather offcuts, seagrass, rattan, brass, nickel, copper plated crab claw, approx. 20 x 15cm, Jamie Hammill
9. *Field Ache*, 2023, Acrylic monotype and oil on cotton, 46 x 38.4cm, Julie Annis
10. *Memory wash*, 2024, Acrylic on linen, 25.5 x 30.5cm, 2023, Julie Annis
11. Selected photographic print from *Asphalt Kingdom* series, 2024, 25.5 x 20.3 cm, Joe Charrington
12. *The Golden Child*, 2023, Acrylic paint and graphite on paper, 50 x 230cm, Courtney Snow
13. Selected photographic print from *Asphalt Kingdom* series, 2024, 25.5 x 20.3 cm, Joe Charrington
14. Selected photographic print from *Asphalt Kingdom* series, 2024, 25.5 x 20.3 cm, Joe Charrington
15. *Too big for comfort*, 2023, Oil on paper, 65 x 80cm, Cosima Ross

@courtneysnowdrawings  
 @cosimaross  
 @hammillj  
 @joecharrington  
 @julesannis  
 @leahkristinart  
 @organprojects

Courtney Snow  
 Cosima Ross  
 Jamie Hammill  
 Joe Charrington  
 Julie Annis  
 Leah Kristin Blake  
 organprojects@gmail.com



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