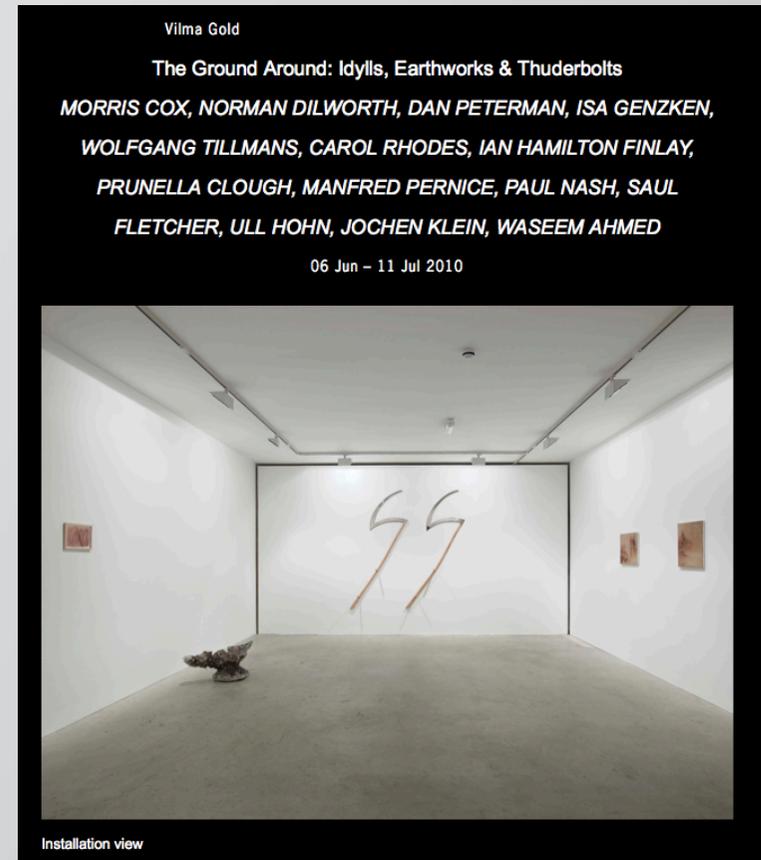


## The Ground Around: Idylls, Earthworks and Thunderbolts

*The Ground Around, (June 6 – July 11, 2010) was a collective cross media and cross generational exhibition at Vilma Gold exploring themes of environment, psychology and the land*

Carol Rhodes



THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART  
RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

SUBMISSION

*The Ground Around* group exhibition contribution

Author/Creator Carol Rhodes (Painting/Printmaking)

*The Ground Around*, June 6 to July 11, 2010, a collective, cross-media and cross-generational exhibition at Vilma Gold gallery, London, curated by Charles Asprey, exploring themes of environment, psychology and the land.

OUTPUT



Carol Rhodes, *Pond Area*, 2009, oil on board, 50 x 57 cm (exh. Vilma Gold, London, 2010)



Carol Rhodes, *Hillside*, 2009, oil on board, 28 x 42 cm (exh. Vilma Gold, London, 2010)

Rhodes showed two paintings in the context of a multi-media, cross-generational exhibition (<http://www.vilmagold.com/newpages/previous/groundaround.htm>). Themes were engaged in various ways across the artists' works: ground, depicted literally in the gritty surface of 'Slag Heap' by Prunella Clough and the 'avalanche' of Wolfgang Tillmans, reminds viewers of the energy and beauty contained within the Earth; Dan Peterman and Isa Genzken choose to examine this area more intimately by focusing on the nature of the material both under and on the surface of their respective studio floors, while the experience of the muddy intractability of trench warfare provides the starting point for Paul Nash's pastel of 1917. Waseem Ahmed's contemplative suicide bomber and Ian Hamilton Finlay's use of Nazi-era iconography, equate illusions of paradise and gardening with terror and blitzkrieg, while Manfred Pernice's ocean-going buoy seems to have been just dumped onto land after a mythical storm, a beachcomber's trophy. The selection of these works for an exhibition is in no way an attempt to represent a movement or style or suggest an inter-generational pattern spanning almost 100 years. The curious theme that flows through the show however, is that of an on-going fascination amongst certain artists with trying to tackle the complexities and elusive nature of the space directly below and immediately around our feet. These are not simply downward glances, earthscapes or 'Land Art' as such, but works which continue an inquisitive exploration into this most psychologically charged of spaces, unique for each of us, a spatial zone that can only be felt and most likely never grasped.



Vilma Gold Gallery, installation view, *The Ground Around*, 2010



Mummy+Schnelle Gallery, installation view, *Carol Rhodes*, 2009

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## CONTEXT

Rhodes's work can be related to fields of interest in psychology, human geography and sociology reflected in many media across contemporary culture, as explored for example in: Marc Augé *Oblivion* (2004) and *Non-Places* (1992); Jennifer Jenkins (ed.) *Remaking the Landscape* (2002); Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands* (2011). Including Ian Hamilton Finlay, Prunella Clough, Wolfgang Tillmans, Paul Nash, Isa Genzken and others, the exhibition was especially useful in allowing Rhodes's work to be compared and contextualised with that of other artists, across a range of gender, background and historical period, who explored similar or related areas through various media and in various degrees of abstraction. Importantly the exhibition straddled Modernism and Post-Modernism, allowing an examination of how Rhodes's negotiation of that art-historical/cultural transition. The works shown by Rhodes had been selected by the curator from her solo show at Mummery+Schnelle, London, 11 September - 10 October 2009 (<http://www.mummeryschnelle.com/pastpages/rhodes1.htm>). The curator has frequently engaged with a group of galleries – including this and others such as Cabinet, London, Bortolami, New York, and Vilma Gold – as arena for particular critically aware art practice, often exploring the relationship of art to the social and physical global environment.



Vilma Gold Gallery, installation view, *The Ground Around*, 2010

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## METHODOLOGY

Rhodes's research investigated the form and material of the land at literal and metaphorical levels – its undulations and morphology, and the ways human-made surfaces (tarmac, concrete, paving) mimic, diverge from or modify what is beneath. Research methods involve the 'soft collaging' of photography, digital imaging from satellite ("Google Earth" and similar), and some 3-d modelling, to create paintings that distort and playing with scale, layering, accretion and abrasion, simultaneously in the substance of the work and the motif depicted. Her research concerns the definition of the post-modern and post-industrial landscape in psychological, socio-geographic and broadly philosophical terms, asking what is the 'countryside' now, including what role nostalgia still plays in association with ideas of land. The research takes into account the developments in the treatment of these issues in art (specifically painting, but also photography and other media) over the last 10 or 15 years, during which time ideas of land use, psycho-geography, surveillance and other aspects of geo/topography (reconsideration of the 'land art' movement etc.) have grown highly sophisticated. Methodology involves making oil paintings, a form synonymous with the evolution of thinking about landscape, via a process that uses photographic sources (web based, found in print media and taken by myself) and adapts these, through drawing (the solo exhibition included a small number of the artist's rarely shown working drawings), and through materially modelled or digital distortion, into images of semi-fictive sites, using shifts of scale, register and reference that are not clearly 'impossible' or 'surreal' but that at the same time are not naturalistic or simply documentary. Her works depict a semi industrial topography of buildings, roads and canals – 'edgelands' of human enterprise mixing with nature. At first sight softer and more harmonious than some of her past paintings, the recent pictures nevertheless explore inventiveness, ambiguity and metaphoric charge. Reflecting yet transforming our contemporary, technologised view of the world, Rhodes' work exploits painting's unique amalgam of depiction and physical 'objectness' to suggest new realities. She achieves variety within the format of the aerial view, and discovers surprising new fields of exploration and expression.



Carol Rhodes, *Surface Mine*, 2009, pencil and ink on paper, 49.5 x 56.5 cm



Carol Rhodes, *Open Ground and Mudflats*, 2009, oil on board, 57 x 45 cms

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#### DISSEMINATION

The *Ground Around* was widely seen by artists, critics and curators, as was Rhodes's 2009 solo show, the first since her major museum survey at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh in 2007-8. The exhibitions led to the acquisition and subsequent display of works by the Flemming Collection of Scottish Art (London), and were a factor in the selection of her work for other group shows, including *Bacon to Rego* (June - September 2012) at Abbott Hall, Kendall, and *Looking at the View*, Tate Britain (12 February – 2 June 2013). Rhodes conducted a public interview at the Mummery+Schnelle show, hosted by the Flemming Collection, and the exhibition was reviewed by Sherman Sam in *Brooklyn Rail*, October 2009 <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2009/10/artseen/letter-from-london-oct-09>. An interview with the artist by Paul Cary-Kent was published in association with the exhibition, in *Art World* magazine, issue 12, August/September 2009. *The Ground Around* was reviewed online by *ArtRabbit* and *ARTSlant* <http://www.artslant.com/lon/articles/show/17208>. A painting from the exhibition was shown again at *Studio 58: Women Artists in Glasgow since World War Two*, curated by Sarah Lowndes at Glasgow School of Art, 7 July - 30 September 2012.