
Revisiting An Caisteal

A series of colour photographs made over a 6 year duration. Each image was made from the same position on the summit of the mountain "An Caisteal".

The work was first seen in a 2 person show at Glasgow International, 2012, and is reproduced in the monograph "Lesley Punton - mountains without end".

Submitted by Lesley Punton
Output No. 3



OUTPUT

Revisiting An Caisteal is a series of five colour photographs that document the summit view made after climbing the mountain An Caisteal on 5 separate occasions. In each image, the camera always points in a SSE direction (the direction of view which appears once at the top of the mountain).

In each image, despite the camera pointing in exactly the same direction and being made from the same viewpoint, the images are dramatically different due to the variations in climate and weather experienced.

These images were shown in their entirety in Glasgow International Festival of Visual Arts (GI) 2012, in a two person show (along with Judy Spark) in *Back to the things themselves* and have subsequently been reproduced in the monograph and artist book "*Lesley Punton – mountains without end*", ISBN 978-0-9549915-6-2, published by ROOMBOOKS, London.

Title

Revisiting An Caisteal,
5 framed colour photographs, each 14x10.5cm
2012

Submission No.

3

Authors/Creators

Lesley Punton



"Revisiting An Caisteal"
Installation detail at Glasgow International (GI), The Briggait, 2012



"Revisiting An Caisteal 27.11.05", Part 1 in series, Light-jet print, 14x10.5cm 2012



"Revisiting An Caisteal 04.03.06", Part 2 in series, Light-jet print, 14x10.5cm 2012



"Revisiting An Caisteal 03.04.07", Part 3 in series, Light-jet print, 14x10.5cm 2012



"Revisiting An Caisteal 24.03.08", Part 4 in series, Light-jet print, 14x10.5cm 2012



"Revisiting An Caisteal 13.11.11", Part 5 in series, Lightjet print, 14x10.5cm 2012

CONTEXT

These images were a pivotal series of works which, having been captured over an extended period of time, influenced a great many other works, sometimes directly, and sometimes obliquely.

As with other aspects of my practice, these works were made very much within a context of a wider history of landscape practice that concerns itself with ideas of a participatory engagement with place, experienced through a primary engagement with the landscape it. However, unlike some of my other works, this series and the works it influenced, deals more directly with the recording and process of experiencing landscape and place, in and of itself.

With a practice that straddles photography, drawing, painting and text, these photographic works were singular in their re-introduction of photographic media into my practice, whereby the artifacts and documentation gathered through the practice of walking were



"Fog I", Graphite on paper, 22x18cm 2009

CONTEXT

themselves used in their own right (rather than as mere records of walks, climbs, and other experiences that would otherwise be translated through other media in my studio based practice, which is, and remains, a dominant aspect of my work).

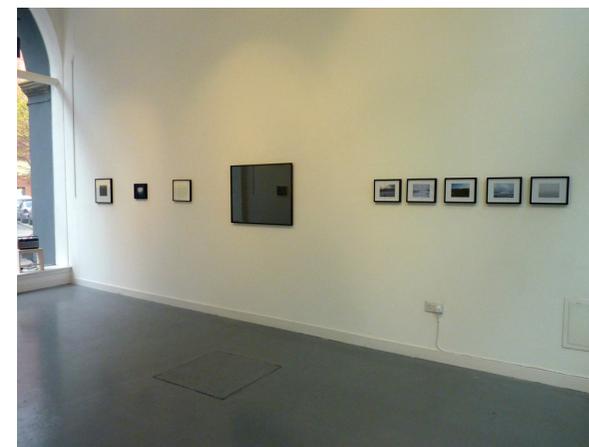
The critical context of new nature writing is a field of interest for me, and an area in which I see my work broadly being placed, culturally. I have been in contact with the writers Kathleen Jamie and Robert Macfarlane for instance, having an ongoing conversation with MacFarlane regarding our parallel “solstice walks”.

As a visual artist however, working with radically different media, this work could also initially be viewed in the context of Mark Klett’s re-photographic survey images. However, the scientific and historical nature Klett’s works is somewhat different from my own, less objectified approach. Alexander Maris, Ilana Halperin, and Alec Finlay are those I class as my contemporaries, and initiatives such as The

University of Sunderland’s Walking, Art, Landskip (sic), and research group are a similarly minded collective research cluster within the HE sector.

My work explores the relationship of the physical through direct, lived experience of place, with an emphasis upon walking in particular. It is this questioning of the experiential and it’s relationship with landscape, and in particular, “wilderness”, in the context of contemporary culture that I wish to explore.

“Conceptual Romanticism”, that term coined by Jörg Heiser in an attempt to find a counterpoint to the terse coolness of ‘pure’ first generation conceptualism, as developed in the exhibition of the same name, seems to me to be an apposite term in relation to my own creative aims. An attraction to the romantic notions of the sublime tempered by an inherent distrust in such notions, has resulted in a longstanding interest in the obscuring effects of mist and fog, as repeatedly experienced when climbing mountains. The (at present) final work in the



*Partial installation view of “back to the things themselves”
Glasgow International, 2012
The Briggait, Glasgow*

CONTEXT

series (the series is ongoing in that it will inevitably be extended with subsequent climbs of this mountain) is a literal depiction of the fog that engulfed the summit on that particular day.

Similarly, *White Out receding, Carn Dearg* 2012, plays with the objective and documentary nature of the images, gathered in the most prosaic and unromantic of circumstances, to record the moment when the void of a whiteout in winter mountains gave way to a slight revealing of the landscape previously hidden from view, almost a cliché of the romantic sublime.

The series of *dark mountain* drawings and *fog* drawings using graphite also emerged from this practice which Thomas A Clark (UK) has written about extensively in his essay on my work "*on looking at mountains*"

These works are all examined in a monograph and artist book published by ROOMBOOKS, an offshoot of the gallery, ROOM London, who represent me in the UK.



"White out receding – Carn Dearg"
Light-jet print from scanned analogue negative, 16.2x10.6cm 2012

CONTEXT

This new book, *Lesley Punton – mountains without end*, ISBN 978-0-9549915-6-2, borrows its title from Gary Snyder's epic poem, *Mountains and Rivers Without End* and in his essay on my work, Thomas A Clark raises the question, "How might one look at mountains?", in relation to both Snyder's and my own task of representing a reality that is based so physically within lived experience.

The book work, as a whole, tries to engage the viewer with the dichotomy of experience and its representation through art and weaves a narrative through a series of essays, a poem, illustrations of my work, and my own writings that recollect the experiences of making and thinking about work in remote places. Clark's essay attempts to articulate the modalities of my art practice, whereas Dr David Watson (Australia), drawing from a 2 year email conversation/collaboration which began with both of us considering the creative benefits of walking in our respective visual arts practices, dealt with the cultural associations, context, and incongruities of making landscape based work in the 21st Century, digital world.



"Mountains without end" – pages 46-47
"Dark Mountains – Ben Cruachan and Stob Coire Easain", 2010, Graphite on paper

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the creation of the photographic series *Revisiting An Caisteal* is deceptively simple. It is created by making a photograph on the summit of the mountain An Caisteal, a Munro (mountain over 300ft) in the Scottish Highlands, facing SSE, at the moment of reaching the top of the mountain, utilising a compact digital camera.

However, the journey towards making this work was far less prescribed, and in fact, almost accidental. I've long walked and climbed in the mountains, initially for recreation, then as a way to engage with space and land, in the knowledge that walking is conducive to thought for me, as it is for many. Throughout this time I regularly documented the places I visited, but, not being interested in depicting the reality of such a place, instead favouring the knowledge gained from experiencing a given location, discounted these images as mere, mimetic representations.

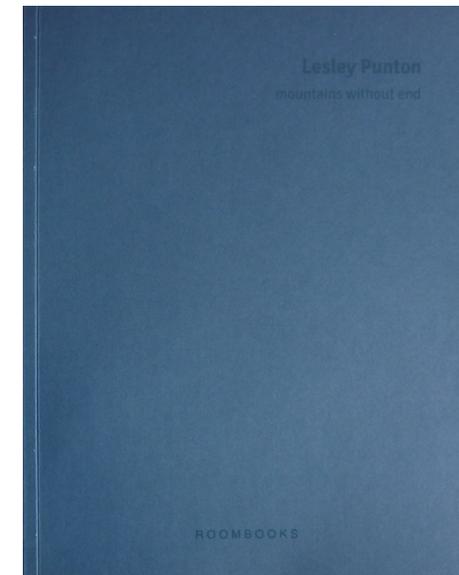
But with repeated trips, and certain favourite, or local mountains being climbed again and again,

I began to realise that on An Caisteal, I had made almost – not measurably so, but closely enough – images from almost exactly the same location, and pointing in the same direction.

Looking at my archive of images, I realised that this only ever occurred on An Caisteal, and with this realisation, I began to deliberately make repeat images upon reaching the summit.

The consequences of this were that I found myself making images where the journey itself became part of the work. The images themselves remain as snapshots, documents that record the moment of arrival beside the cairn, but the act of walking and of the endeavor to climb to the top are fore-grounded by drawing attention to this documentation, and the implied narrative of the traverse becomes more significant.

It became clear to me that I climbed it more often in winter, and I found the almost infinite variety of the images, because of the changing weather conditions, compelling.



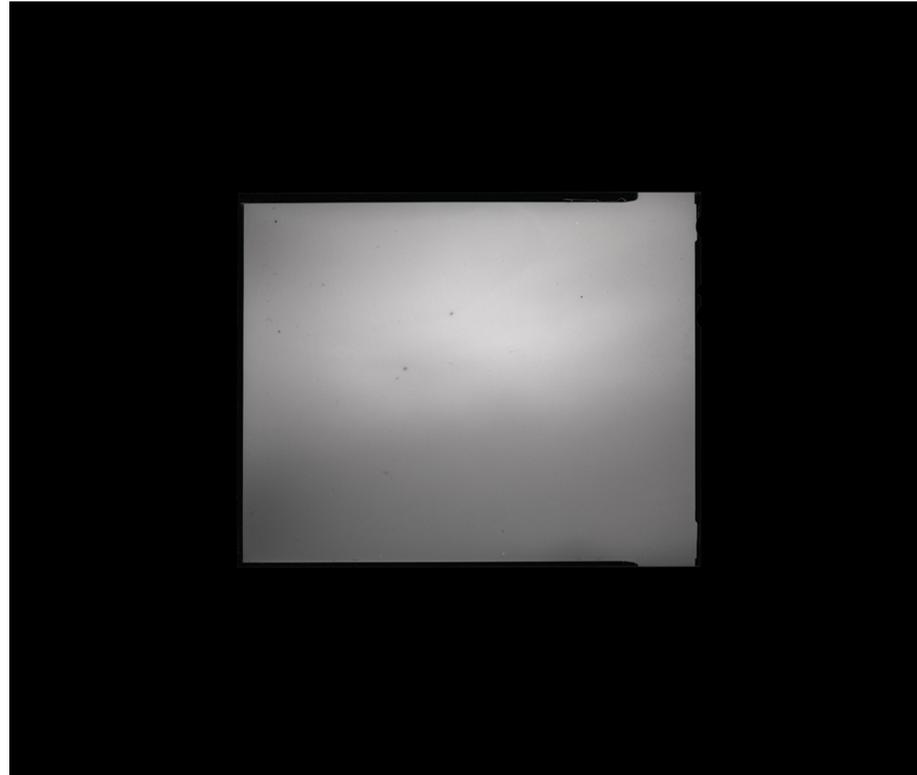
"Mountains without end"
Monograph & artist book,
published Sept 2013 by ROOMBOOKS

METHODOLOGY

In response to this, I began to quite consciously make works that depended upon actual encounters with places, such as *Schiehallion* (in collaboration with Jim Hamlyn), a work made where we documented the light of shortest night on the summit of the mountain via a 5 hour pinhole photographic exposure on 5"x4" analogue film. <http://vimeo.com/31454438>

The dark mountain series (which still continues to be made) came initially from the experience of looking at mountains in the dark of night. Much of the work I make deals with the limits of visibility and perception (and as such have often been very difficult to reproduce in print), so this new book represents a comprehensive exploration of the themes and ideas that I have been preoccupied with for the last 7 or 8 years.

The practice of walking and climbing in remote locations and the philosophical conversations around this in relation to visual art are explored metaphorically through the texts that recount experiences of place, with one text, also entitled *revisiting an caisteal* directly considering the



"Schiehallion – South image"
Pinhole photograph recording the hours of darkness on the summit of the shortest night,
with Jim Hamlyn
Silver gelatin print, 12.2 x 10.2cm, 2009-12

METHODOLOGY

production of the last image, in gale force winds and fog, crawling along the summit ridge in order to make a photograph – this time with the express desire to make a summit image that I knew fully was destined to have zero visibility - an act of romanticism in itself.

These texts originated from my blog “shoebox”, <http://lesleypunton.blogspot.co.uk/> (which I use as an online repository for ideas and research) and were subsequently re-edited and published in a section in the book entitled *notebook*. These texts give the viewer access to aspects of my process and experiences that would otherwise be unknowable, and I view these texts made for *mountains without end* as new textual art-works in themselves.



“Lesley Punton – mountains without end” pp12-13

DISSEMINATION

The major content of the monograph/artist book *Lesley Punton – mountains without end*, ISBN 978-0-9549915-6-2, published by ROOMBOOKS comprises the ideas and works described for this output.

The book features a critical essay collaboration regarding walking as an aesthetic practice between myself and Dr David Watson (Sydney, Australia), a critical text on my work by the poet Thomas A Clark. (UK), and a prose poem on walking, *pataphysical cuillin*, by poet Alec Finlay (UK), a work influenced by Rene Dumas's unfinished novel *Mount Analogue*. Sandie Macrae, Director of ROOM and ROOMBOOKS has written the foreword.

Earlier iterations of some of my text from *Mountains without end* appear in *Shoebox* <http://lesleypunton.blogspot.co.uk/>

The book is publicly available through Amazon, and at various art bookshops in the UK.

The primary public exhibition of this work and associated and related works, was in a two person show "*Back To The Things Themselves*" with Judy Spark commissioned by Glasgow International Festival of the Visual Arts at The Briggait, in April-May 2012.

<http://www.glasgowinternational.org/>
http://lesleypunton.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/back-to-things-themselves_24.html

I was interviewed in relation to this show by Magdalena Chau in *The Daily Serving*, 3 May 2012.

<http://dailyserving.com/2012/05/back-to-the-things-themselves/>

This article has also been published in San Francisco based arts organisation Art Practical <http://www.artpractical.com/feature/glasgow-international-festival-of-visual-arts/>

The work was also shown at *Learning to Draw/ Drawing to Learn*, The Fleming Collection, Mayfair, London, 3rd Sept - 9th Oct 2013 <http://gsapress.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/learning-to-drawdrawing-to-learn.html>

Acknowledgements

Thomas A Clark, UK

<http://thomasaclarkblog.blogspot.co.uk/>

Alec Finlay, UK

<http://alecfinlayblog.blogspot.co.uk/>

Dr David Watson, Sydney, Australia

Sandie Macrae, ROOMBOOKS, London, UK

Katrina Brown of Glasgow International
Festival of Visual Arts, Glasgow , UK

The Briggait, Glasgow, UK

Glasgow School of Art, UK

Magdalena Chau, The Daily Serving, UK/USA

Art Practical, San Fransisco, USA

For further general information, my website can
be viewed at: <http://lesleypunton.com/> and on
my blog at <http://lesleypunton.blogspot.co.uk/>