

ARE YOU LOCATIONALIZED





Type of output:
Exhibition

by
Tom O'Sullivan

Left: *Are you
LOCATIONALIZED*
(installation view)

CONTENTS



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

SUMMARY	4
TIMELINE	5
RESEARCH CHALLENGE	6
CONTEXT	7
METHODS AND PROCESSES	8-12
DISSEMINATION	13-14
REFERENCES	15

SUMMARY

Are you LOCALIZED was developed in response to ideas around location and audience that come into play when contemporary art is commissioned in places that are perceived as geographically remote. The project is a development in the collaborative contemporary art practice of Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan (Tatham is a Reader at The Royal College of Art).

The research aimed: to challenge conventions and disrupt expectations surrounding art produced in purportedly remote locations; to challenge and critique notions of specialness that can attach themselves to particular locations; and to produce a singular artwork that incorporated a number of disparate strategies and forms over geographically separated locations.

The project is framed by current critiques of site-specificity and the practice of context-specific contemporary art (MacKay, 2020 and Fisher, 2015). It engages with recent debates around curatorial practice and exhibition interpretation (Phillips, 2015 and Wade, 2017).

The project utilised a number of strategies and forms that together explored the research questions. Two outdoor painted structures (one with an audio element) were positioned against existing architecture on the islands of Skye and North Uist, interrupting their contexts and positing fugitive and alternative possibilities. A text and a sequence of photo-works were positioned as an antagonistic archive within Taigh Chearsabagh Museum and Art Gallery on North Uist. A further series of texts explored ways in which a viewer might navigate around, and think about, these elements.

It was commissioned by ATLAS Arts for GENERATION: 25 years of Contemporary Art, a nationwide survey convened by the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh and Glasgow Life. GENERATION was an engagement with the recent history of contemporary Scottish art, identifying key works and artists from 1989 onwards. In 2016 the work won the inaugural Saltire Temporary Art in Public Places award.

TIMELINE

Are you LOCATIONALIZED took place on the Islands of Skye and North Uist from 1st August to the 30th September 2014. The commission included a sequence of visits to Skye and North Uist between August 2013 and July 2014, during which a number of research strategies and approaches were devised and developed.

The project was awarded £70,000 by Creative Scotland with a further award from Outset, Scotland.



Above and Left:
Are you LOCATIONALIZED
(installation view)

RESEARCH CHALLENGE

ATLAS Arts approached Tatham and O'Sullivan to undertake this commission after having seen an earlier proposal the artists had made for the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. The curator of ATLAS Arts, Emma Nicholson, responded to the context-specific and potentially satirical aspect of this proposal, and how aspects of it might be developed in the Hebrides. The initial commission brief was to develop the artwork in relation to the annual Highland Games in Portree, Isle of Skye. The context of these games was taken as a starting point and then developed further when Taigh Chearsabagh, Arts Centre on North Uist, became partners in the project.

The context of the commission therefore provided an opportunity to produce a complex, multi-faceted artwork that could challenge conventions around site-specific art, and ideas around location and audience that such conventions can sometimes presume.



Right: *Are you LOCATIONALIZED*
(installation view)

CONTEXT

The collaborative practice of Tatham and O'Sullivan was instigated in 1995 and has been on-going for the last 25 years. The project also developed the use of existing outdoor architectural features into the structure of the artwork and developed further how models of interpretative material could be built within the work. A central and on-going concern within the collaboration is how such a practice can question notions of individual authorship. All elements of the conceptualisation, production and negotiation of the project are co-authored. Such collaborative and collective practice is becoming increasingly relevant as an antidote to hierarchical structures within contemporary art (De Watcher, 2017 and Burrows, 2010).

Are you LOCALIZED took place during a research sabbatical, which allowed for an intensive period of research development. Both *Are you LOCALIZED* and *DOES THE IT STICK* (also submitted as a REF output) were produced in the same year with the former project developing some ideas from the latter. *Are you LOCALIZED* developed the model of a complex composite artwork by including two geographically remote contexts/sites within the same work. The project also developed the use of existing outdoor architectural features into the structure of the artwork, and developed further how models of interpretative material could be built within the work.

The project is situated in the field of site/context specific contemporary art practice. The work posits a model of antagonism, dis-location and fiction-making as strategies for engagement, drawing on practitioners such as Hirshhorn and Fusco, and theorists such as Burrows & O'Sullivan and Fisher (Hirshhorn, 2011, Fusco, 2015, Burrows and O'Sullivan, 2019, Fisher, 2015). This approach builds on histories of critical practice that includes institutional critique and conceptual art, together with narrative devices and strategies of figuration. This is then brought to bear on a context often deemed to be outside of such debates.

The repetition and particular development of certain forms across both *Are you LOCALIZED* and *DOES THE IT STICK* is a deliberate strategy from within the collaborative practice. This reiterative process foregrounds a model of contemporary art practice that is in dialogue with its own structures for making meanings, as well as the meanings made within the particular project context. As such, as well as being relevant within debates around site and context specific contemporary art, the project – and model of practice – is relevant within wider debates in relation to post-conceptual art. As a public exhibition the project was also developed to be relevant to the community of visitors on Skye and North Uist.

METHODS AND PROCESSES

The project employed a number of methods, processes and strategies to undertake its research aims. These included:

- The positioning of two highly decorative painted structures as temporary disruptions/re-imaginings of two existing historic buildings. Both disruptions/re-imaginings were specific to the context of each of these buildings, and both were attempts to posit new, or uncover existing, fugitive contexts.

The C19th Apothecary Tower was built on ‘The Lump’ the grassy headland above Portree on the Isle of Skye. The Tower is perceived as a local heritage landmark despite its neglect and obvious focus for vandalism and as a site for nocturnal juvenile activities. The painted decorative structure alluded to this fugitive context whilst also re-investing the Tower as the folly it was originally built as.

The Dairy is adjacent to Taigh Chearsabagh Art Gallery and Museum in Lochmaddy on North Uist. Taigh Chearsabagh was established as an Art Centre in 1993 and exemplifies the tensions between inhabitants native to North Uist and those who have come to the island seeking a more creative or connected lifestyle. The decorative scheme alluded to such desires whilst simultaneously positing an aesthetic that was in confrontation to the representational conventions evident in the Art Centre.



Above and below:
Are you LOCATIONALIZED
(installation view)

- A sequence of seventeen photo-works were positioned within Taigh Chearsabagh Museum and Art Gallery. These photo-works depicted existing outdoor artworks in two distinct locations – the Uists and Loughborough University Campus. The conflation of these two particular archives was a strategy to undermine the sense of specialness that can attach itself to art in a Hebridean context. A further strategy was to exhibit the photo-works not only in the gallery spaces, but throughout the Art Centre – including café and corridor spaces. This was a device to situate the entirety of Taigh Chearsabagh as a site – rather than such works being contained only within the conventions of meaning set up by a gallery space.

The photo-works consisted of analogue printed silver-gelatin prints set within particular hand-made plywood box frames. These frames (utilised within previous research projects) are a strategy to foreground time and care in the production and display of an image. This allowed for a particular ethical dimension in this representation system, which balanced the more explicitly disruptive and antagonistic aspects of the artwork.



Above: *Are you LOCATIONALIZED*
(installation view)



Above: *Are you LOCATIONALIZED*
(detail of photo-work)



- The photo-works were accompanied by a text (as another one of the posters), which gave a caption and extended history for each public artwork depicted. This conflation allowed for each archive to further contextualise the other, in particular revealing the commonalities in the histories of commissioning such art.

The publicly sited sculptures
of Loughborough University
Campus and the Uists
(in reverse chronological order)

Right: *Are you LOCATIONALIZED*
(detail of poster)

The seven-foot sculpture of Hercules the grizzly bear was carved by **Ian Chalmers** and is sited within the Langass Woodland on North Uist. It was commissioned in 2013 by the Langass Community Woodland Project. In August 1980 Hercules captured the world's imagination when he escaped on Benbecula during filming for a television advert for Andrex. For 24 days the bear evaded the army, police and hundreds of volunteer searchers who scoured the hills and moors. Brothers Alasdair and Ronald Iain Maclean eventually spotted Hercules on Alasdair's croft in Balemartin, some 20 miles from where he escaped. Hercules died in February 2000. His owner, Mr Robin, said he was hugely impressed with the statue. He said: "It's brilliant. They've done a good job. It's bang on, it is just like Hercules and I am so happy." Ian Chalmers has been sculpting wood with a chainsaw for over 8 years. He is based near the village of Culbokic on the Black Isle in the Scottish Highlands and has produced carvings throughout Scotland, ranging from benches and custom carved signs to squirrels and sixteen-foot high wizards.

Christine Boshier's *High Tide, Low Tide* was commissioned in 2000 as part of Scotland's Year of the Artist and was one of a number of artworks produced to accompany the building extension at Lochmaddy's Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum and Arts Centre. High Tide, Low Tide reflects Taigh Chearsabhagh's closeness to the sea and the dramatic tidal surge of its position. Boshier's work also refers to the history of Taigh Chearsabhagh, which stands close to the site of a former salt factory for salting herrings. Originally the hollow interior of the sculpture was filled with salt and at very high tides the sea slowly drew the salt out from a small opening. The simple dome form is encrusted with particles of glass to resemble salt crystals and gives the sculpture a luminous quality in sunlight and moonlight. Boshier was a Lecturer in Fine Art at Newcastle University and spent a month on North Uist making the work whilst on research sabbatical. She received help from the pupils at Lochmaddy School in the design of the sculpture. Her original title for the piece, *Receptacle*, identifies her ongoing interest in sculptural form and the permanent and the ephemeral.

Valerie Pragnell's *The Listening Post* is one of four sculptures commissioned for the Uists' Roadends project. The Roadends commissions occurred during 1999-2000 and were funded by Western Isles Enterprise and the Scottish Arts Council National Lottery fund. Pragnell's work celebrates the history, the bays and the agricultural aspects of South Lochboisdale in South Uist and was designed and produced with help from the local community. The sculpture takes the form of a curved stone wall, rising in the middle and sheltering five replica cast tractor seats. The wall contains a number of objects and references to the history of the area, including cast iron wheels from agricultural machinery and verses from two poems inscribed on the stones, *Gleann na Coolraidh* by Donald MacDonald from South Lochboisdale, and *Taigh a' Bhaind* by Donald J MacDonald from Peninveric. During the 17th century Russian ships used to land nearby at Tigh a Rubha, leaving their ballast soil behind, and a sealed glass box of this soil was inserted into the wall. Pragnell was born in the West Sussex seaside town of Worthing and studied in the Mural & Stained Glass Department at Glasgow School of Art. She is perhaps best known for her work of woven natural materials that allude to fertility and birth.

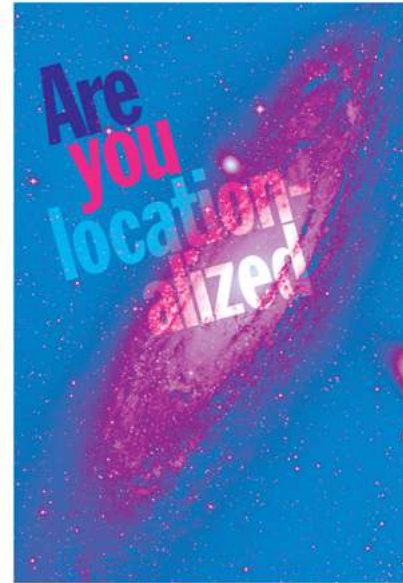
Reflections, a work by ceramic artist **Colin MacKenzie**, was another Roadends commission. Roadends encouraged communities to celebrate their identities, history and spirit by working with an artist to create an artwork set in the landscape. MacKenzie's ceramic tiled seat was designed to echo the shapes and colours of the surroundings and marks the old crossing place to Baleshare before the causeway was built. The concrete structure is covered in specially made tiles, glazed to reflect the surrounding colours. MacKenzie assisted local children and adults in making their own relief tiles during a workshop connected with the project. A number of tiles were made incorporating the words "Dol Seachad air Fadhail Caorach" (crossing at the ford of the sheep) from a song by Illeray bard Ruairidh MacKay. Two other works commissioned for the Roadends project were Sanctuary, a cast bronze by Roddy Mathieson sited at the end of the road in Lochport and Stones Swim to the Islands by Ian Stephen. There are only a few traces left of Stones Swim to the Islands; the work was damaged beyond repair during a winter storm and the site of the work, within the grounds of Benbecula's Balivanich School, has since been re-landscaped to allow for new access roads and car parking.

Emlyn Budds was commissioned to produce *Truth, Labour and Knowledge* for Loughborough University campus in 1998. The commission was to commemorate the integration of Loughborough College of Art with the University and to celebrate the University's achievements in science and engineering. The commission was awarded through a competition for second and third year students at the College of Art and was paid for by the University alumni fund. Budds completed his degree in Fine Art Sculpture at Loughborough University and has gone on to work in woodcarving, furniture-making and commissioned sculptures. *Truth, Labour and Knowledge* is sited opposite the University's Stewart Mason Building. The building was opened in 2005 and is named after the influential former Director of Education at Leicestershire Education Authority.

Chris Drury's 1997 work *Hut of the Shadows* is sited on a peninsula in Spanish near Lochmaddy on North Uist. The space was designed to function as a camera obscura with a mirror and lens projecting a moving image of the outside coastal scene onto the back wall of the chamber. The walls are made from reclaimed stone with a turf roof set over wooden beams. The project was funded by The Scottish Arts Council Lottery fund and The Eamé Fairbairn Charitable Trust as part of The Land, a thematic programme at Taigh Chearsabhagh. *Hut of the Shadows* recalls stone building forms found throughout the Western Isles, from Neolithic chambered cairns to Iron Age brochs and the ubiquitous blackhouses. From the mid-1970s Drury has made works in the landscape from the materials he gathers himself, often during long walks in remote areas across the world. *Land Water Vessel* produced by Drury for a 2010 solo show at Taigh Chearsabhagh, titled *Land Water and Language*, currently hangs in the art centre's café. The canoe was woven on site from willow, hazel, heather and salmon skins, which were then wrapped around the gunwales, struts and keel. The canoe was made after a two-day canoe journey across North Uist in 2009. Chris Drury lives in Lewes, Sussex and was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1948.

- Four posters were produced for a visitor to take away, either from the exhibition in Taigh Chearsabagh or from the ATLAS office in Portree. These were designed and printed in such a way as to aesthetically disrupt the normal conventions of interpretation printed material in this context. Two of the posters included texts already mentioned – the spoken-word poem and the extended photo-works captions.

A further poster included a fictional conversation as a device to help visitors to navigate, and think around, the different elements of the artwork. The final poster was a colophon which represented all these elements together and so foregrounded the composite nature of the artwork.



Above left and right:
Are you LOCALIZED
(detail of poster)

Below:
Are you LOCALIZED
(installation view)

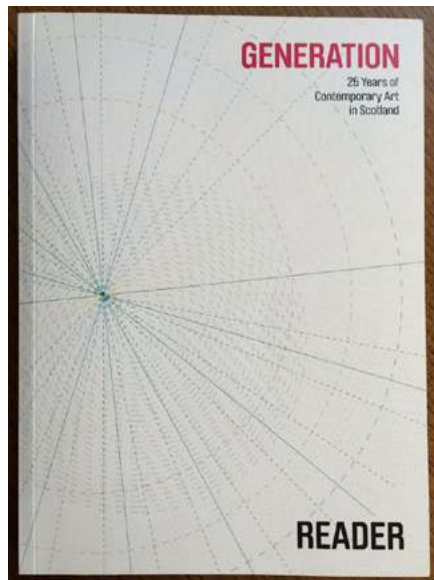


DISSEMINATION

As a public exhibition the project was disseminated to the visitors on both the Isle of Skye and North Uist. A two-volume catalogue was produced for GENERATION: 25 years of Contemporary Art in Scotland, which provided wider historical context and individual essays on the selected artists.

The project received media coverage in both local and National press including *The Guardian* ('Europe's best outside art this Summer' *The Guardian*, 14/08/14) and BBC news sites (BBC News Highlands and Islands, 14/08/14). Local press, in particular *The West Highland Free Press News*, captured something of the controversy and ensuing discussion the artwork initiated in relation to its treatment of a perceived heritage site. ('Potree landmark "desecrated" by pink art installation', *The West Highland Free Press*, 08/08/14).

Below: Generation Reader



Below, middle and right: Local Media Coverage



As well as the posters, the project was further disseminated through a programme of events and talks, curated by ATLAS arts that introduced and accompanied the artwork.

Are you LOCALIZED has also been the focus of study days for postgraduate curatorial students at Glasgow University/ Glasgow School of Art (21-22/10/14) and Edinburgh University (26/10/15).

In 2016 the work won the inaugural Saltire Temporary Art in Public Places award.

In 2017 the work was further contextualised within the publication 'Towards a City Observatory: Constellations of art, collaboration and locality' (Collective, Edinburgh, ISBN 978-1-873653-18-0).

In 2018 the strategies and methods from *Are you LOCALIZED* were developed for a project at MIMA, Middlesbrough, *A Proposal To Ask Where Does A Threshold Begin & End*, including the development of a large temporary outdoor figurative structure positioned against existing architecture; the production of a number of fictional texts as interpretative material within the structure of the artwork; and the positioning of photo-works as exploratory and provocative within the context.

<https://visitmima.com/whats-on/single/joanne-tatham-and-tom-osullivan-a-proposal-to-ask-where-does-a-threshold-begin-end/>



Above right: Dissemination event
Right: Saltire Award Certificate

Project on ATLAS Arts website:
<https://atlasarts.org.uk/projects/generation-25-years-of-contemporary-art-in-scotland/>

Project on Taigh-chearsabhaigh website:
<https://www.taigh-chearsabhaigh.org/events/generation/>

Project on Outset website (funder):
<https://outset.org.uk/supported-projects/joanne-tatham-tom-osullivan-atlas-arts-generation-2014/>

Saltire Temporary Art in Public Places award:
<https://www.saltiresociety.org.uk/awards/arts/>

REFERENCES

MacKay, R. (2020). *Hydroplutonic Kernow*. Falmouth: Urbanomic.

Fisher, M. and Barton, J. (2015). On Vanishing Land. In: MacKay, R, ed., *When Site Lost the Plot*. Falmouth: Urbanomic, pages 271 – 281.

Phillips, A. (2015). Making the Public. In: MacKay, R, ed., *When Site Lost the Plot*. Falmouth: Urbanomic, pages 77 – 85.

Wade, G. (2017). *Upcycle this book*. London: Book Works.

De Watcher, E. (2017). *Co-Art: Artists on Creative Collaboration*. London:Phaidon.

Burrows, D. (2010). An Art Scene as Big as the Ritz: The Logic of Scenes. In: Zepke, S. and O’Sullivan, S, ed., *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pages 157 – 176.

Hirschhorn, T. (2011). *Establishing a Critical Corpus*. Zurich: JRP/ Ringier.

Fusco, M. (2015). *Master Rock*. London: Book Works

Burrows, D. and O’Sullivan, S. (2019) *Fictioning: the myth-functions of contemporary art and philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

All Images courtesy
of Ruth Clark unless
otherwise stated.

